Black Migrant Literature, New African Diasporas, and the Phenomenology of Movement

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Black Migrant Literature, New African Diasporas, and the Phenomenology of Movement

by

Christopher Ian Foster

A dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Abstract

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Christopher Ian Foster

Advisor: Robert F. Reid-Pharr

Black Migrant Literature, New African Diasporas, and the Phenomenology of Movement examines immigration, diaspora, and movement in late twentieth and twenty-first century African literature. I primarily focus on “migritude” literature which describes the work of a disparate yet distinct group of contemporary African authors who critically focus on migration within the context of globalization, emphasizing that the “past” of immigration is irreducibly entangled with colonial processes. These writers often refashion the politics or discourses of earlier movements within the black radical tradition, such as Négritude or pan-Africanism, as a way to engage immigration in the present. I argue that although immigration as a system developed as an imperial project in the late nineteenth century along with the modern nation-state, it evolved into the present era of global capitalism as an international assemblage of techniques of power. Checkpoints, passports, and even borders are symptoms of these global structures often operating by racializing and gendering migrant bodies. A careful analysis of migritude writing furthers our understanding of globality, movement, and the socio-economic processes of globalization.

Black Migrant Literature principally focuses on African women writers within new diasporas in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries such as Somali-British writer Nadifa Mohamed, Senegalese-French writer Fatou Diome, and Kenyan-born Shailja Patel, who now lives in the United States. Migrant women’s bodies are targeted and managed in ways that both overlap and yet diverge from their male counterparts, and their experiences
within various diasporas also differ. The migritude writers in this study therefore add to our understanding of the condition of immigration and the objects constellating it: borders, checkpoints, and passports, for example, while challenging gendered, racialized and often heteronormative anti-immigrant law and discourses that shape migrant being. Through close readings of five novels and one experimental prose-poem this dissertation engages the fields of black diaspora studies, African literature and globalization, postcolonial studies, theories of immigration and literature, and African women in/and migration. It assesses the work of Nadifa Mohamed, Fatou Diome, Shailja Patel, Cristina Ali Farah, Alain Mabanckou, Abdurahman Waberi, Paulette Nardal, Claude McKay, Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor, and others.
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“Roots stretch, tighten, and snap. The plane has lifted off.”

“Soomaali Baan Ahay [I am Somali], like my half is whole. I am the fine thread, so fine that it slips through and stretches, getting longer. So fine that it does not snap. And the tangled mass of threads widens and reveals the knots, clear and tight, that though far from each other, do not unravel.”

“Roots stretch, tighten, and snap. The plane has lifted off.” These lines opening Ivorian writer Bernard Binlin Dadié’s 1964 One Way: Bernard Dadie Observes America, evoke two important historical facts bearing upon African literary traditions. The first word Dadie uses, “roots,” gestures towards the founding vocabulary of Négritude, a black literary and activist movement that would have a profound impact not just in Africa or Paris, where it originated in the 1930s, but throughout the world and in many languages. Dadié’s roots are African: they are those affective and material threads that weave together his identity and sense of self, yet they are roots that “stretch, tighten, and snap,” as he leaves West Africa for the United States. Négritude is arguably predicated upon the affirmation of African roots in the face of colonial racism, but as Dadié’s lines appear to suggest, also upon uprooting, through movement, migration, or diaspora—of gaining insight precisely in

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3 Dadie, One Way: Bernard Dadie Observes America, 1.
leaving a colonized Africa for metropoles in the North. “The plane has lifted off.” Secondly, Dadié’s concise phrase is symbolic not simply of immigration, but a particularly modern and perhaps bourgeois mode of movement—air travel—indicating the economic class of many Négritude authors who, in Paris, combined to represent something of an African elite. Transcontinental air travel differs from the ways in which many migrants in the world emigrate, those of modest or no means who would travel by foot, truck, or boat, or refugees who must move quickly and without resources or the protections that citizenship and passports offer.

Contrast Dadié’s inaugural sentences with the first few lines of Somali-Italian writer Cristina Ali Farah’s 2007 novel Little Mother, another text about migration and roots, written almost fifty years after Dadié’s. “Soomaali Baan Ahay [I am Somali], like my half is whole. I am the fine thread, so fine that it slips through and stretches, getting longer. So fine that it does not snap. And the tangled mass of threads widens and reveals the knots, clear and tight, that though far from each other, do not unravel.” These hauntingly beautiful opening words imagine protagonist Domenica Axad’s identity as a Somali woman in Italy in the early twenty-first century. The tangled mass of fine threads represents the diasporic Somali community far from home, in which she, a single stretching thread, is interwoven. Although Farah does not mention African roots, her use of the metaphor of fine threads embedded in a “tangled mass” stretching, elongating, not snapping, simply getting finer, shares with Dadié a vision of home, elsewhere, and migrancy.

There is a key difference between the opening lines of these two texts, however. Dadié’s roots snap, while Farah’s threads, though elongating, do not. I offer the following

4 Farah, Little Mother, 1.
remarks not as a solution to this complication but as a way to begin thinking about breaks and linkages between historical and literary moments in black diasporic and African literature, past and present. Before Négritude the concept of African roots as such does not exist. It perhaps originates in Claude McKay’s 1929 novel *Banjo*, which would subsequently inspire the Négritude authors, particularly in his use of “roots” in terms of black culture.\(^5\)

Against the historical fact of European colonialism Négritude would invent African roots seemingly already snapped by imperial processes of racism relegating Africa to prehistory and black culture to nonbeing. It was only in Paris that roots would be constructed *after* leaving Africa for Léopold Sédar Senghor, and the Caribbean for Leon Damas and Aimé Césaire—the three most well-known Négritude poets. This invention, shaped by colonialism and immigration, was a reclamation of blackness, Africa, and history. Dadié’s roots then must snap because in his colonial context, it was *through* movement (including displacement) that reinvention becomes possible. Yet Cristina Farah’s *postcolonial* "threads," intact yet pulled thin, are quite different than Dadié’s "roots," much in the same way that conceptions of community, politics, and aesthetics differ from Négritude to migritude’s era of neoliberal global capitalism.

Farah traces the affective and material connections of Somali women in the diaspora, those tangled masses of threads that do not unravel. She designates not a masculine politics but a mode of relation that, paraphrasing Sonali Perera, could be called a non-revolutionary ethic of the everyday.\(^6\) Unlike Dadié’s *bourgeois* mode of travel, Farah’s


\(^6\) “Too often, in literature and criticism alike, the working class is seen and represented as masculine, metropolitan, and revolutionary. Women’s texts of nonrevolutionary socialism, however, present us with new figures and concepts for thinking unorganized resistance, everyday experience, and the shape of the ethical within globalization.” Sonali Perera, *No Country: Working-Class Writing in the Age of Globalization* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 80.
novel depicts far less elite modes of migration and community. In the following passage, Farah depicts economic migrants and refugees leaving the Horn of Africa for Europe via North Africa, crossing the Mediterranean by boat in the late twentieth century. Near the beginning of her novel she describes Roma Termini station in Italy as a diasporic nodal point for the Somali migrant community: “I don’t think one can write about the Somali community in Rome without starting from the Roma Termini train station, the crossroads, the scene of our longings.” She describes the immigrants constellating the terminal, “arriving on those illegal boats. They land along the Sicilian coast, they are crammed into temporary reception centers. A few are allowed in for humanitarian reasons, they are released with very little money and no place to go.” This stark passage embodies not an air of leisure but survival. It is suggestive of economic class, the production of refugees, and the historical context of the Civil War in Somalia in the 1990s, itself connected to a longer history of European presence in Africa.

Tidiane Kasse argues that, “the explosion of migration in recent years, despite the repressive policies in force in Europe, is explained largely by wars and civil conflicts increasing in Africa and in the Middle East. In Africa, it is the agricultural crises of the 1970s in the Sahel that generated a movement that has started to increase in the 1980s. Previously, migration responded more to a need for adventure or for political reasons, such as to escape repressive regimes (such as the Fulani of Guinea under Sékou Touré), than economic necessity.” This perhaps marks the difference between Dadié’s adventurous tone opening One Way and Farah’s description of the station in stark yet nostalgic language—

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7 Farah, Little Mother, 25/6
8 Ibid.
Roma Termini becomes a metonym for both home and a symbol of abject uprooting. What Kasse fails to mention is the devastating neoliberal economic policies imposed upon Africa by former colonial powers. Migritude writer Shailja Patel narrates this neocolonial narrative in her multimodal text *Migritude* with reference to post-independence Kenya. “The new Kenyan government was required to take loans of 12.5 million pounds from its ex-colonial master, the British government. To buy back stolen land from settlers who wished to leave.”¹⁰ Like Kenyan author Ngugi Wa Thiong’o’s novel *Matigari*, Patel uses the metaphor of the home to illustrate the shift from colonialism to neocolonialism: “Someone comes into your home. Evicts you at gunpoint. Occupies your property. Mortgages it three time over. To banks who know they’re lending to thieves. Should you repay the debt? With penalties, late charges, 14% interest?”¹¹ Usurious debt, neoliberal structural adjustment policies imposed by the World Bank, and corrupt native elites, all create destabilization, conflict, and thus out-migration—the kind of migration described by Cristina Farah, Shailja Patel and other twenty-first century migritude writers.

I evoke Dadié’s and Farah’s opening passages above, the former of the Négritude era and the latter of the “post” postcolonial moment, as emblematic of the construction of both difference and affiliation in the phase “from Négritude to migritude,” evoked by Congolese novelist, chemist, and Guggenheim recipient Emmanuel Dongala.¹² Dongala’s phrase represents an incisive hinge through which to analyze the contemporary phenomenon of migritude. Just as Dongala re-frames the analysis of Négritude and subsequent generations of African literature in terms of exile and immigration, so migritude literature reframes the

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¹¹ Ibid, 37.
aesthetic and cultural politics of blackness, anti-colonialism, and anti-racism of the Négritude era in terms of the contemporary conditions that “produce” and manage non-white migrant bodies in the era of globalization—immigration.

The term “migritude” comes to us independently from two sources: Francophone African literary studies, namely Jacques Chevrier in 2003, and from Anglophone migritude writer Shailja Patel, who publishes her multimodal text *Migritude*, based on her earlier performance piece of the same name, in 2010. Although there are no book-length studies of migritude fiction, Ayo Coly’s *Pull of Postcolonial Nationhood: Gender and Migration in Francophone African Literature* and Mahriana Rofheart’s *Shifting Perceptions of Migration in Senegalese Literature, Film, and Social Media* deftly analyze Senegalese migrant literature and film, and there are new and exciting discussions of migritude authors, their predecessors, and the themes subtending migritude embedded in recent studies of “Black France,” “Black Paris” or “Paris Noir,” by authors such as Michel Fabre, Bennetta Jules-Rosetta, Dominic Thomas, Tyler Stovall, Alec Hargreaves, Tricia Danielle Keaton, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, Pius Adesanmi, Brent Hayes Edwards, Gary Wilder and others.\(^\text{13}\)

*Migritude* describes the work of a disparate yet distinct group of younger African authors born after independence in the 1960s. Most often they have lived both in and outside Africa. These authors narrate the being-in-the-world\(^\text{14}\) of the migrant within the context of globalization, yet they emphasize that the “past” of immigration and conceptions

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of the immigrant are irreducibly entangled with the history of colonialism. They confront issues of migrancy (forced or not), diaspora (forced or not), errantry, departure, return, racism against immigrants, identity, gender, and postcoloniality. Going beyond narrativizing the individual lives of people who cross borders these writers consider the modes, structures, conditions, and subject-positions of being migrant. They inaugurate a phenomenology of borders, both material and imagined—and what it means to move across them by the majority of the world’s population, as well as checkpoints, passports, residence permits, all of which necessarily disclose larger apparatuses such as nation-states and the international system they are embedded in. This affords a critique not just of recent machinations of global capital and the abject inequity of people in the world but a re-thinking of colonialism and the ways in which its management of movement, predicated upon the construction of race and tribe, remains constitutive of modernity.  

Migritude authors often draw upon early and mid-twentieth century anti-colonialist thought and literature such as pan-Africanism, Négritude, the literature of the black diaspora, and African literature and history. They re-fashion and re-imagine political and literary moments within these paradigms into their own context of late twentieth and early twenty-first century global capitalism and “new” economic and cultural configurations ushered in by our age of asymmetrical flows of capital and people—globalization. The phrase “from Negritude to migritude” is suggestive of the acknowledgment of, and debt to, earlier international black radical writers by their migritude “children of the postcolony.” Yet migritude writers also challenge and re-fashion the texts of their forbearers. West

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African writers Fatou Diome and Alain Mabanckou, who now live in France for example, both acknowledge the promise of Négritude in their novels at the same time as they problematize its failure. Négritude emerges refashioned, in a sense, as twenty-first century writers take on the racialization of immigration.

In the broad and varying field making up twenty-first century African literature, the texts of migritude, for Jacques Chevrier, create “a new identitarian space,” and “designate both the thematic of immigration that is at the heart of contemporary African works, but also the expatriate status of most writers... [Migritude] is a third space, [a] simultaneous disengagement from both the culture of origin and the receiving culture.”

Cristina Ali Farah’s “tangled mass of threads” that widen and reveal the “knots, clear and tight, that though far from each other, do not unravel” are suggestive of Chevrier’s third space, a space connected to yet far from Somalia, interweaving economic migrants, mothers, refugees arriving by boat, and those who meet at “the crossroads” of Roma Termini station to feel closer to home elsewhere.

Considering these third spaces in contemporary African literature allows for an understanding of immigration in the era of global capitalism and Africa’s history and relationship to the world: these third spaces even reenergize the study of African literature itself, via diaspora, movement, and migration. The differences between Dadié’s and Farah’s beautiful opening lines perhaps do not mark an irreducible difference, his set of roots snapping while her thin threads do not, but a lens through which to view both what they share, and their very different historical, cultural, gendered, temporal, and geographical contexts. To fully unpack these texts and their regional and global contexts we must historicize immigration both in terms of the movements of people and the larger structures

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and conditions that shape or impinge upon movement such as the European nation-state, racism, and imperialism.

Immigration, Nation, Race
Leonora Miano, a contemporary Cameroonian-French writer, poetically suggests that racism, nationalism, and immigration are fundamental to the (European) Nation-State. In Ecrits pour la parole, an experimental migritude prose-poem, Miano writes, “The country says Black or French The Country says that one can only be black or French The thinking of the country in binary... the best Is to go beyond the limits of the Nation To see more largely.”

“The Country” here represents the French State while the word “French” in “black or French”—meaning “white”—represents racial nationalism or the idea that to be French is to be white which is, in turn, incommensurable with blackness. The Nation-State, which is premised on state-sponsored racism and nationalism thinks in binary, it includes and excludes. By this logic it follows that peoples from elsewhere are other than, and are constructed and shaped by the concept of “immigrant.” Miano speaks to the contemporary context in which black people are not included under the protective cover of “Frenchness,” which is perhaps why she makes the powerful argument that, “the best is to go beyond the limits of the Nation To see more largely.” Her irreverent unfaithfulness to formal grammatical structure parallels her challenge to the tacit racism and anti-immigrant nationalism of the French Nation-State. Structural processes like those Miano confronts are always already historically situated.

Immigration as a system (and I do not here mean the movement of individuals from one place to another, but rather, the network of national and international institutions that

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regulate and manage the movement of peoples), is an integral and originary component of the modern nation-state as it developed in the West. John Torpey’s immeasurably useful *The Invention of the Passport: Surveillance, Citizenship, and the State* argues that in the past century or so, modern nation-states and the international system of which they are apart, have “expropriated” the means of movement from individuals. For Torpey, “…the emergence of passport and related controls on movement is an essential aspect of the ‘state-ness’ of states... documentary controls on movement were decisively bound up with the rights and duties that would eventually come to be associated with membership—citizenship—in the nation-state.” In other words, just as Karl Marx argued that the central experience of the modern involved “the expropriation of the ‘means of production’ from workers by capitalists” and for Max Weber, “the successful expropriation by the state of the ‘means of violence’ from individuals,” Torpey’s project demonstrates that “modern states, and the international state system of which they are apart, have expropriated from individuals and private entities the legitimate ‘means of movement,’ particularly though by no means exclusively across international boundaries.” Immigration control, passports, borders, deportations, Identification Cards, Residence Permits, legal categories such as “illegal alien,” “undocumented,” or *sans-papier* and so on, have all become naturalized over the past century, just as their proliferation in the late twentieth and twenty-first century goes relatively unchallenged. Free movement has become alienated from individuals and communities just as institutions policing movement are perceived as natural or essential, even as Torpey and others in the social sciences as well as migritude writers at the level of

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20 Ibid, 4. My emphasis.  
21 Save for fringe migrant activist movements, theorists of immigration, and migritude literature itself.
literary production, show their pernicious, historical, and systemic national and international situatedness.

Paul Gilroy makes a parallel argument about the naturalization of race and racism in *There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack*: “The oscillation between black as a problem and black as a victim has become, today, the principle mechanism through which ‘race’ is pushed outside of history and into the realm of natural, inevitable events. This capacity to evacuate any historical dimension to black life remains a fundamental achievement of racist ideologies in this country.” Just as mechanisms of racism and nationalism present themselves as natural and ahistorical, so immigration as a system, bound up with racism, nationalism, colonialism, and capitalism, is construed as inevitable. Building upon the work of John Torpey, Étienne Balibar, Paul Gilroy, Eric J. Hobsbawm, and Cedric Robinson, I therefore analyze immigration regimes and their twin processes of exclusion and inclusion, as *fundamental* to the modern nation-state, not adjunct to it, ultimately introducing migritude literature and thought as an antidote.

For Cedric Robinson in *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, “the historical development of world capitalism was influenced in a most fundamental way by the particularistic forces of racism and nationalism,” that they both “anticipated capitalism in time.” For example, “the bourgeoisie that lead to the development of capitalism were drawn from particular ethnic and cultural groups: the European proletariats and the mercenaries of the leading states from others; its peasants from still other cultures; and its slaves from entirely different worlds.”

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R. James then seems to get it wrong when he states that modern “slavery was not born of racism: rather, racism was the consequence of slavery... the reason [of slavery] was economic, not racial.”\textsuperscript{25} If, for Eric J. Hobsbawm, the \textit{concept} of the nation, or nationalism, “comes before nations, [that] nations do not make states and nationalism but the other way around,” then there must, for Robinson, be a racial dimension to both the nation and its predecessors, nationalism and capitalism.\textsuperscript{26} In other words racial capitalism, its various nationalisms, as well as the contemporaneous management of movement, precedes \textit{chattel} slavery. Spain’s nationalism, for example, would then have to precede its imperial ventures in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and thus its status as an Empire. How, then, does immigration substantially enter into these histories?

Torpey’s study of the history of passport controls and more generally the regulation of movement by burgeoning nation-states illuminates the ways in which the movement of people and racialization were bound up in the origins of the modern nation and its imperial projects. For Torpey, “the institutionalization of the idea of the ‘nation-state’ as a prospectively homogenous ethnocultural unit [was] a project that necessarily entailed efforts to regulate people’s movements.”\textsuperscript{27} And later, “documents such as passports and identification cards that help determine ‘who is in’ and ‘who is out’ of the nation here took center stage, and thus became an enduring and omnipresent part of our world. These documents were an essential element of that burgeoning ‘infrastructural’ power to ‘grasp’ individuals that distinguish modern states from their predecessors.”\textsuperscript{28} However, nation-states did not distinguish between insiders and outsiders as a form of isolationism only, but

\textsuperscript{26} E. J. Hobsbawm, \textit{Nations and Nationalism since 1780} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 10.
\textsuperscript{27} Torpey, \textit{The Invention of the Passport}, 1.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid, 121.
as burgeoning colonial powers attempting to mobilize public support for conquest. It follows then that colonialism, in addition to immigration as a system and racialization within a capitalist economic system, was integral to the rise of the nation-state as well. Eric J. Hobsbawm finds in his study of the nation and nationalism, for example that, “In practice there were only three criteria which allowed a people to be firmly classed as a nation,” 1) “its historic association with a state,” 2) having a “long-established cultural elite, possessing a written national literary and administrative vernacular;” and, 3) “a proven capacity for conquest.” Immigration, the nation, racism, and nationalism, then cannot be thought apart from the historical processes of colonialism.

The word “nation” for example was not used in its modern sense until European colonialism was almost at its zenith. The year 1884 arbitrarily marks this date, which was, not coincidentally, the year of the Berlin conference, at which Europe carved up Africa like a cake. Hobsbawm notes that, “The Dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy, whose various editions have been scrutinized for this purpose does not use the terminology of state, nation and language in the modern manner before its edition of 1884... ‘a State or political body which recognizes a supreme center of common government’ and also ‘the territory constituted by that state and its individual inhabitants, considered as a whole’.”

The British New English Dictionary followed suit shortly thereafter. For Hobsbawm, nationalism, the management of movement, and racialization also helped mobilize public support for imperial ventures. “The period from 1880 to 1914 was also that of the greatest mass migrations yet known, within and between states, of imperialism and of growing

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29 Hobsbawm, Nations and Nationalism Since 1780, 37.
31 “…in its modern and basically political sense the concept nation is historically very young. Indeed, this is underlined by another linguistic monument the New English Dictionary which pointed out in 1908, that the old meaning of the word envisaged mainly the ethnic unit, but recent usage rather stressed ‘the notion of political unity and independence’.” Hobsbawm’s emphasis, 18.
international rivalries ending in world war. All these underlined the differences between ‘us’ and ‘them’. And there is no more effective way of bounding together the disparate sections of restless people than to unite them against outsiders.”\[32\] This line of thinking would then allow for Vijay Prashad in the introduction to Shailja Patel’s *Migritude* to quip that immigration has its origins in imperialism.

The point must be made that if immigration and the nation (in the European context), are contemporaneous and historical, then the nation itself (as well as immigration), cannot be understood nationally. The nation and its nationalists have a vested interest not in truth, but in the reproduction of the nation. Hobsbawm paraphrases this point in Ernest Renan’s “What is a Nation?” quite poignantly: “Nationalism requires too much belief in what is patently not so. As Renan said: ‘Getting its history wrong is part of being a nation’.”\[33\] Étienne Balibar would later describe a “fictive ethnicity,” a national mythology developed in the production of the citizen. In *Race, Nation, Class* Balibar considers the way in which “the people” are “produced” as such. For Balibar, “A social formation only reproduces itself as a nation to the extent that, through a network of apparatuses and daily practices, the individual is instituted as *homo nationalis* from cradle to grave, at the same time as he or she is instituted as *homo economicus, politicus, religious*... I apply the term ‘fictive ethnicity’ to the community instituted by the nation-state.”\[35\] Produced ethnicity is fictive in the sense that it imposes homogeneity upon a

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32 Ibid, 91.
33 Ernest Renan: “Forgetting, I would even say historical error, is an essential factor in the creation of a nation and it is for this reason that the progress of historical studies often poses a threat to nationality. Historical inquiry, in effect, throws light on the violent acts that have taken place at the origin of every political formation, even those that have been the most benevolent in their consequences. Unity is always brutally established.” - Ernest Renan “What is a Nation?”, text of a conference delivered at the Sorbonne on March 11th, 1882, in Ernest Renan, *Qu’est-ce qu’une nation?*, Paris, Presses-Pocket, 1992. (translated by Ethan Rundell).
34 Hobsbawm, 12. My emphasis.
heterogeneous group loosely bound by geography and a state and which has material effects, since one is compelled to act according to certain laws and norms, is protected and given access to resources, etc.; in the same way, one who arrives is immediately clothed in a sort of fictive otherness and produced as an “Immigrant” and is also compelled to act in other ways, is disafforded protection and access while being branded or reduced.

Balibar analyzes the French context of the 1980s:

Racist organizations most often refuse to be designated as such, laying claim instead to the title of nationalist and claiming that the two notions cannot be equated... In fact the discourses of race and nation are never very far apart, if only as a form of disavowal: thus the presence of ‘immigrants’ on French soil is referred to as the cause of ‘anti-French racism’. The oscillation of the vocabulary itself suggests to us then that, at least in already constituted national states, the organization of nationalism into individual political movements inevitably has racism underlying it.  

Similarly, Paul Gilroy, in There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack, describes a “new racism,” taking Britain in the 1980s as his case study. “It will be argued that its novelty lies in the capacity to link discourses of patriotism, nationalism, xenophobia, Englishness, Britishness, militarism and gender difference into a complex system which gives ‘race’ its contemporary meaning.” Gilroy analyzes the British Immigration Acts of 1968-1981 to suggest that immigration control and its attendant national ideologies, are inextricable from the racism-nationalism dyad which institutes a sort of racial governmentality. “The 1971 Immigration Act brought an end to primary immigration and instituted a new pattern of internal control and surveillance of black settlers. It was paralleled by a new vocabulary of ‘race’ and crime which grew in the aftermath of the first panic over ‘mugging.’” Although

36 Ibid, 37.
37 Gilroy, There Ain’t No Black in the Union Jack, 43.
38 Ibid, 117.
anti-immigrant racist rhetoric varies and shifts over time, the 1980s marked a more severe turn by France, the United States, Britain, (and later Italy). These discourses continue into the present day.

Migritude literature discloses the violence of systems of immigration and provides a challenging retort that, necessarily, cannot come from Western nations themselves. Gilroy analyzes the re-use of earlier moments in black radicalism by actors in black urban struggle in Britain.

Such conflicts are possible because black Britain’s repertoire of symbols is relatively unfixed and still evolving. It includes the language of Ethiopianism and Pan-Africanism and the heritage of anti-colonial resistances as well as the inputs from contemporary urban conflicts. These diverse elements combine syncretically in struggles to reconstruct a collective historical presence from the discontinuous, fractured histories of the African and Asian diasporas.39

Ultimately then, I will show not only that migritude is, in part, born of these urban struggles in Northern metropoles, but that its refashioning of the black radical tradition, from pan-Africanism and Négritude to postcolonial African literature, provides both a sophisticated understanding of immigration in the era of global-neoliberal capitalism, and resistance to it with reference to Africa and Africas in the global North. Migritude writer Leonora Miano’s poetic reflection upon what she calls the “Afropéan” opening this section wonderfully captures the above discussion. “The country says Black or French The Country says that one can only be black or French The thinking of the country in binary… the best Is to go beyond the limits of the Nation To see more largely. The best is merger: French Black The best thing is the addition: French and black which opens up a third term more than a third… Afropéans.”40 Chevrier’s “third space” in which he locates migritude, or

39 Ibid, 236.
Miano’s “the addition,” is both the “best thing,” arising from these tensions and histories but also and necessarily the best way in which to problematize the global imperial history of the Nation-State and the international system of immigration of which it is a part.

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Conditions of Migration/ Locating Migritude

Immigration is never solely an individual action, in which one moves from one place to another. It is always already mediated by systems or sets of conditions that shape or even interdicts one’s movements. For Saskia Sassen “…migrations do not simply happen. They are produced. And migrations do not involve just any possible combination of countries. They are patterned.”

Labor migrations, for example, “are embedded in larger social, economic, and political structures, and... they are consequently bounded in their geography, duration, and size. There is a geopolitics of migration and there is the fact that migrations are part of systems: both set parameters for migrations... [We should] accept the fact that migration is not simply an aggregation of individual decisions, but a process patterned and shaped by existing politico-economic systems.”

Migritude authors negotiate and challenge extant politico-economic systems wherein the movement of capital, information, and the elite are intensified, yet conversely, the movement of poor and working-class migrant bodies and refugees are more intensely managed. Under globalization, for Étienne Balibar, “what becomes intensified is not only the circulation of commodities, capital, and money but above all the circulation of information... On the other side, what becomes increasingly controlled, differentiated, and, for some categories, restricted, is the circulation of persons.”

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42 Ibid, 155/6.
the liberal/neoliberal lauding of globalization as creating a free and open world, it creates “a gigantic inequality with regard to the right of circulation and the mobility of persons.”

These contexts shape migritude fiction itself. Senegalese-Italian writer Pap Khouma, for example, in his 1990 *I Was an Elephant Salesman* states that “Africa is poorly governed. There are too many people making a profit at her expense... and so the people must leave.” Khouma goes on to reference colonial histories in Africa and migration as he narrates his experience as an African elephant salesman in Italy. Migritude writers therefore speak to the conditions of migration, or what Balibar calls above the “gigantic inequality” in regards to globalization and mobility. Balibar calls for a kind of counter-phenomenology. “What we need is a complete description of this inequality as a transnational social relationship. Its phenomenology includes dissymmetries (think of the access to passports and visas, the fact that certain strategic borderlines can easily be crossed one way but not the other way) and includes differential repression (from this point of view, the so-called undocumented migrant emerges as an economic institution of globalization in its own right, an essential element of global employment and wage labor).”

I hope that *Black Migrant Literature, New African Diasporas, and the Phenomenology of Movement* enacts a counter-phenomenology as it looks not only at the conditions and structures that shape and impinge upon the very being of the African migrant but also negotiates Balibar’s “differential repression” and the world of immigrant objects: passports, visas, borders, and even bodies that circulate as materialized labor under racial capitalism.

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44 Ibid, 217.


46 Balibar, “Toward a Diasporic Citizen?” 217.
A phenomenology in this sense would pay close attention to material changes under globalization.

Take labor itself as movement. For Leila Simona Talani, under globalization the labour structure... changes, with substantial reallocation of labour-intensive production [to] Third World countries... where it is possible to exploit the advantages of lower production costs and/or in the form of lower costs of primary resources... the populations of those marginalized zones of the globe, whose economic conditions are deemed to worsen as a consequence of the process of globalization, experience an increased incentive to leave their home countries and move to more developed regions of the world in search of better life standards. This produces the two interrelated phenomena of the ‘brain drain’, when highly skilled or highly educated labour flees the country of origin, and ‘mass migration’, when migratory flows interest unskilled labour. 47

Neoliberal economic policies such as structural adjustment programs, imposed on African nations by the International Monetary Fund also create gigantic inequalities and subsequent “interrelated phenomena.” In Gloria Emeagwali’s “The Neo-Liberal Agenda and the IMF/World Bank Structural Adjustment Programs with Reference to Africa” she analyzes the Nigerian situation. “In the case of Nigeria, the defining moment was the Babangida counter-coup of 1985, sometimes dubbed ‘the IMF coup’. Fluctuating interest rates, corruption and poor economic planning were at the root of the debt crisis in Nigeria, by the early 1980s... Despite numerous student protests and riots against the adoption of IMF programs, the new regime rapidly adopted such policies. Under the weight of IMF conditionalities the Nigerian economy was soon sapped. The removal of subsidies and on health and education took its toll on wide segments of the population.” 48 Italian digital

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artist Marco Di Prisco (discussed in chapter three) incisively shows the experience of Nigerian farm workers in Italy who, after having left a destabilized Nigeria, migrate to Italy to find work. These men, allowed in for their labor, are met with abject hatred for their blackness, and were physically attacked. Diaspora and immigration studies therefore must take into account not simply the journey and the destination, but the material conditions of reality in the home country, and further, the complex relationships between the three.

In *Critical Perspectives on Neoliberal Globalization* Sidonia Jessia Alenuma-Nimoh notes that subsidies in the global North undermine farmers and businesses in the global South. For example, “cotton is a key crop in central and western Africa, yet the global price of cotton is 20% lower than it could be without US cotton subsidies.” Governments in the global North are allowed to subsidize their industries while institutions like the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank forbid countries in the global South from implementing subsidies or tariffs that would help their industries. This leads Aviva Chomsky to note that, “Free-market policies may be associated with democracy in the United States and elsewhere in the industrialized world, but in the Third World, they more commonly come with the disappearance of democratic rights.”

Mass unemployment and cuts in social services can exacerbate intra-ethnic tensions in an already unstable environment due to colonial legacies and corruption and thus lead to conflicts, famine, war, and flight. Neocolonialism is not an abstraction.

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50 Aviva Chomsky, *“They Take Our Jobs!” and 20 Other Myths about Immigration* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007), 152.
Women are, perhaps most significantly, effected by these processes. In “Gendered Globalization: A Re-examination of the Changing Roles of Women in Africa” Alenuma-Nimoh continues,

In accordance with the philosophy of neoliberal globalization, state intervention in the economic life of the people, under all circumstances, is undesirable because it is considered unproductive. Globalization subsequently entails trade liberalization, the devaluation of national currencies against ‘major’ currencies (especially the U.S. dollar), and deregulation of the public sector, or simply, privatization of public utilities. These policies have resulted in retrenchment of workers and consequently, massive unemployment, reduction in government spending on social infrastructure, cuts in government subsidies for social services wherever they are available, and increased cost of these services. Women, especially those in Africa bear the brunt of these changes because of their already marginalized status.\(^{51}\)

There is a necessary burgeoning literature both in academia and in fiction on women’s experiences in the diaspora detailing, for example, increasing demand for domestic or care labor.\(^{52}\) The novels analyzed in *Black Migrant Literature* limn these experiences and the conditions that shape them. But it is important also to pay careful attention to conditions in the global South as well. This important fact is not lost upon Sonali Perera, who in *No Country*, presciently argues that “in the contemporary historical moment, the ‘new proletariat’ is best represented by the figure of the woman worker in the periphery. Separate from organized labor in industrialized countries of the North, the occluded agent of production in this ‘postindustrial’ age is the super-exploited worker in postcolonial, ‘developing’ countries with extraverted, rather than autocentric, economies.”\(^{53}\)


Furthermore, migrant women from “developing” countries such as those in Africa mentioned above, are targeted differentially within migration, that is, via locations in-between home- and host-land such as Immigration Control, checkpoints, airports, refugee half-way points like the Italian-run Island of Lampedusa—a kind of migrant purgatory—and various other spaces within movement. In chapter one I discuss protagonist Salie’s biopolitical and gendered examination at immigration control in France having come from Senegal, in Fatou Diome’s novel *The Belly of the Atlantic*. Shailja Patel’s mother, as we will see below, is treated differently than her father by American immigration control officers as they (almost) arrive from Kenya to America in *Migritude*. These instances and others in migritude literature reveal not only the racialization of non-white bodies in migration but the gendered and heteronormative techniques of power mobilized by international system(s) of immigration within globalization.

I locate migritude in the three general geographical locales or spaces: 1) the Global South (here specific to Africa, I analyze Senegal, Kenya, and Somalia), 2) The Global North (more specifically the Global South in the Global North or, for example, immigrant neighborhoods within Northern nation-states such as France, Britain, Italy (recall the Roma Termini train station in Farah’s *Little Mother* discussed above), and the United States, like “banlieues,” or “ghettos;” and finally, 3) the transnational in-between spaces such as Lampedusa, the Libyan coast, immigration centers, or refugee camps, airports, checkpoints and immigration control, each mediated by nation states or the international system of nation states, and that operate beneath or outside of them. Furthermore, migritude locates colonialism as a historical space that continues to impinge upon the present, since so much of what catalyzes and shapes immigration in the twenty-first
century has roots in colonialism. I locate migritude literature itself, and its politico-aesthetics, as a part of a larger African literary internationalism. Herein lies the spaces of migritude.

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**Internationalism and Cosmopolitanism**

Although migritude literature writes against variants of liberal-elite cosmopolitanism and similarly does not subscribe to the (white) working-class internationalism of the third-international, concepts and practices of internationalism and cosmopolitanism, and particularly their various reconfigurations, mark important fields for contemporary African and African diasporic writers. Just as generations of black writers from George Padmore to Richard Wright and beyond have engaged with and critiqued (eventually abandoning) communist internationalism, so recent struggles with cosmopolitanism, both aesthetically and politically, have become the purview of both scholars and writers. Migritude authors, for example, as the heirs of colonial-era black internationalist writers like Claude McKay and Paulette Nardal, converse with what has been called “black” or “concrete” cosmopolitanism; they therefore engage in what Rebecca Lettevall and Kristian Petrov call the “critique of cosmopolitan reason.”

In *Critique of Cosmopolitan Reason* Lettevall and Petrov argue that

> Historically, Europe has perhaps more than any other area in the world, internally as well as externally, been conceptualized as a universalistic civilization—the birthplace of Reason, Science, Democracy, Human Rights, and Economic Globalization. Paradoxically, however, it has all along been dependent upon archaic patterns of essentialist dichotomization. In the shadow of contemporary Europe’s

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search for a cosmopolitan identity, implicitly in contradistinction to anti-democratic and traditionalist ‘others’ in Europe near and far abroad, there reside neglected human rights’ problems, associated with marginalized groups, sans-papiers, national minorities, and even indigenous peoples, also within Europe. One is tempted to ask whether cosmopolitanism has turned out to be the ‘false consciousness’ of an essentially Eurocentric or neoliberal process of globalization, which, although formally pertaining to universality, contrary to its articulated ideals reproduces hierarchical structures of domination and segregation, disrespect for human rights and a modernity still essentially colonial.55

Or, they ask, is cosmopolitanism a “historically evolved possibility of ultimately recognizing all humans, including the in-between individuals... as well as actually overcoming xenophobia and antagonism...?”56 In lieu of an answer Lettevall and Petrov suggest accordingly that cosmopolitanism in the twenty-first century “may refer to several different, if not contradictory, notions.”57 The problem here is that the first question engages actually existing reality, while the second appears to represents an ideal. The first refers to actually existing marginalized groups, racism, the plight of un-documented people, segregation, and neocolonial structures of domination, all extant now. The second refers to an ideal that hopes for the recognition of all humans, the overcoming of racism, etc, in the future. This points to a double-bind, as actually existing cosmopolitan reality produced by neoliberal globalization and North-centric capitalism, is in direct contradistinction with cosmopolitanism as an ideal, promoting understanding, human rights, hospitality, and openness. For Timothy Brennan, “cosmopolitanism projects a theory of world government and corresponding citizenship. Here the structure of underlying unity conveyed by the

56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
cultural meaning of the term is carried over to the political.” Proponents of non-liberal cosmopolitanism mentioned above call for not only a politics but a critique of ideals such as freedom, humanity, or cosmopolitanism, as abstract notions.

Internationalism, by contrast, for Brennan “seeks to establish global relations of respect and cooperation, based on differences in polity as well as culture...Internationalism does not quarrel with the principle of national sovereignty, for there is no other way under modern conditions to secure respect for weaker societies or peoples.” In many cases it is important to work through the nation since one of the struggles central to immigrant dignity is to fight for rights and protections that would be accorded any national citizen. This engagement is taken up in, I would argue, all migritude cultural production, including literature, art, and film. Calling out liberal-elite-capitalist strains of cosmopolitanism, Brennan argues that, “If cosmopolitanism springs from a comfortable culture of middle-class travelers, intellectuals and businessmen, internationalism—although based no less on the realities of global interpenetration and homogenization, mass migration and mass culture, under the dominance of capital—is an ideology of the domestically restricted, the recently relocated, the provisionally exiled and temporarily weak. It is addressed to those who have an interest in transnational forms of solidarity, but whose capacities for doing so have not yet arrived.” Migritude literature indeed documents those who are restricted in their movements, the recently relocated, refugees, and those who are provisionally exiled. Migritude in the same moment rehumanizes those who, in the process of having their free means of movement expropriated from them, have become dehumanized, and thereby I

59 Ibid. Brennan’s emphasis.
60 Ibid.
argue, advocate transnational forms of solidarity. African literary internationalism is indeed internationalist in this sense, but is also not closed off to new democratic, anticapitalist, anti-racist, and anti-imperialist forms and practices of a cosmopolitanism yet to come.

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**Reading in Translation and Categories of World Literature**

In an interview with Emanuele Monegato appended to Shailja Patel’s multimodal text *Migritude*, Patel argues that “art is a migrant,” and that it “travels from the vision of the artist to the eye, ear, mind and heart of the listener.” Furthermore, she continues, “*translation* adds another layer to the migration, is another leg of the journey.” Migritude is not narrowly nation-based and thus not monolingual but international and cosmopolitan in the above senses, and in fact it comes to us in many languages. I therefore necessarily read some of the novels studied here in translation. Translation in general does not represent a loss, and does not suggest an abundant original enervated by the fact of its migration into another language ending up as a mere black-and-white facsimile of a colorful original. Conversely, monolingual literary analysis (i.e. only Anglophone, or only Francophone), seems nationalist at best and perhaps xenophobic at worst. Migration always already encapsulates linguistic, cultural, and geographical translation. For example, African literature itself, unless written in an African language, is always translated into or mediated by colonial languages. African literature actually already engages these problems (see Chinua Achebe’s debate with Ngugi Wa Thiong’o in 1961, his use of Igbo terms in his English novels, or Cristina Farah’s use of Somali in her novels, or many other examples).

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Clearly, reading in many languages is a good thing, while the dominance of the English language is problematic. Yet reading and teaching in translation, along with the requisite rigor in bringing to the fore issues of language and its inherent racial, gender, class, and value systems, is practical and useful. Reading in translation also immediately brings to bear questions of “world literature.”

In the most general sense world literature can refer to any text, or work of art for that matter, that migrates outside its geographical origin and often its original language. It is translated both linguistically and culturally and finds new homes elsewhere. David Damrosch states that,

> Whether considered as a set of texts or as a mode of circulation, world literature does have definable boundaries, but these boundaries cannot be sketched at only one level, on a single plane. Rather, world literature operates in a multi-dimensional space, in relationship to four frames of reference: the global, the regional, the national, and the individual... If we consider world literature as including works that achieve an effective life outside their country of origin, we have already begun to give definite boundaries to the concept.  

Yet, as Sonali Perera argues, “where world literature is defined primarily as literature that in original or translated form circulates outside the boundaries of the author’s country of origin, there its market-driven cosmopolitan character is the happy accident of capital movement guided by its cultural and economic custodians... [therefore] the concept of world literature cannot account for the forms and formations of [non-Western] working-class writing.”  

Theorizations of World Literature (by European and more recently postcolonial elites) elide their privileged subject positions by focusing on cosmopolitan or hybrid identities rather than the material conditions that produce these identities, discursive

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fields, and wordliness—none other than capitalism and Empire. World literature in this sense begs the question of which texts get picked up by publishing houses and thus are allowed to circulate in world literary markets, often consumed by the global North. The economics of globalization, its histories, and colonial pasts must necessarily be attended to, not in addition to literary consumption, but as inextricable from it. Although I do not delineate the consumption of world literature or the data therein here, I assess the ways in which migritude in particular and African literary internationalism in general, do indeed negotiate and challenge the economics and cultural asymmetries of globalization. Shailja Patel’s *Migritude* is indeed representative here and so I conclude this introductory chapter with remarks on her 2010 text.

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**Shailja Patel’s *Migritude***

Black Migrant Literature examines immigration, diaspora, and movement in late-twentieth and twenty-first century African literature, particularly the ways in which “migritude” engages with and refashions earlier moments in the black radical tradition such as Négritude or anti-colonial Pan-Africanism. “Migritude” authors critically focus on migration within the context of globalization, emphasizing that the “past” of immigration is irreducibly entangled with colonial processes. Shailja Patel’s *Migritude*, for example, repurposes Négritude’s focus on the reclamation of blackness against colonial racism, as a migrant challenge to twenty-first century neoliberal capital. Patel and other migritude writers illustrate the ways in which immigration has evolved into an ever broadening network of borders, passport controls, checkpoints, as well as modes of “othering.” In

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64 See Edward Said’s *Orientalism*. 
response, Patel vaunts a “migrant attitude” as a challenge to the systemic national and international expropriation of the means of movement from, most pointedly, non-white peoples.

Immigration in the present is inextricable from historical processes of imperialism, which Patel’s text incisively brings to bear. Vijay Prashad states in his introduction to *Migritude*:

‘Immigration,’ as a concept, is born in the era of imperialism. ‘Immigrants,’ in this context, are not just those who cross boundaries, but those who pointedly enter the advanced industrial states from lands of dusky skin. Immigration is always already about mobile capital and immobile race. Colonial rulers went where they willed, and they even moved people from one colony to another; but the colonized were not to be fully welcomed in the heartlands of Empire, in Europe, in the United States. If they came, they were allowed in for their labor, not for their lives.  

I approach immigration phenomenologically and as a system, as interrelated techniques of power that manage and discipline the movement of migrant bodies (both interdicting and catalyzing it movement); these material structures succeed their *concept* (that is, the idea that there are insiders and outsiders and that both, in different ways, must be relieved of their capacity to move freely, without surveillance, without monitoring); the synthesis of the concept, institution, and practice of immigration creates what I call, paraphrasing Senegalese-French novelist Fatou Diome, the *condition of immigration*: it shapes not just the ways people move or don’t, but their very being. I begin with Shailja Patel’s relationship to Négritude, which for her opened up the possibility and the terms that would challenge white supremacy and would later allow her to connect racism and imperialism to immigration. I assess the Afro-Asian diasporas that subtend Patel’s critique both

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historically and in terms of identity, and finally, I conclude with remarks on gendering in migration in Patel’s work.

For Patel, Césaire and Senghor are “not direct influences or primary sources for Migritude. But the political and cultural space they opened up through négritude, and the discourse that continues from that, were the soil in which Migritude could germinate.”66 In an interview with Khainga O’Okwemba Patel reflects upon the legacy of Négritude and the ways in which aspects of it might be mobilized and refashioned, but for the figure of the migrant within globalization: "when I coined the term I was looking for a word that would draw from the legacy and tradition of Negritude that reclaimed and celebrated African cultures, black cultures around the world as powerful and central in their own right, and not as something that always needed to be measured against, and compared to European culture... I wanted to claim that same power for migrant cultures, for all migrant populations, that there is a culture, a space, a place where we inhabit, that world that does not need to be assessed against where we came from, or where we are, how well we have assimilated, that migrants have an unapologetic voice, and world view that enriches the world and that we need to claim and celebrate."67 Jiwon Chung argues that the term migritude as Patel has crafted it “shares the richness of connotation and inspiration of négritude, as applied to immigrants: a celebration and revalorization of immigrant/diasporic culture and identity, its greatness ‘measured by the compass of suffering’ (Aimé Césaire), with overtones of spiritual and political liberation.”68 Patel's

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66 Patel, Migritude, 144.
68 Ibid, 143.
Migritude is a liberatory and reparative celebration of migrants and, as Patel proclaims, it “is unabashedly political—feminist and anti-imperialist.”

Patel’s multimodal text, published in 2010, is based on her one-woman performance-theatre show, which debuted nationally and internationally in 2006. Migritude as a spoken-word performance piece follows Patel as she unpacks her trousseau of saris while narrating her own diasporic movements. These movements, as a South-Asian African in Kenya, Britain, and the United States, allow her to engage with and challenge global processes like neocoloniality, repression of migrants (particularly migrant women), and imperial histories while sharpening focus on South-Asian East-Africa. Both Migritude the text and the performance-piece are most explicit in terms of arguing that imperial pasts do in fact shape the present in violent ways. In the prelude to Migritude, for example, entitled “How Ambi became Paisley,” Patel begins by illustrating how imperial world-level processes shaped and commodified Ambi’s historical and migratory movements. This “stylized rendition of the date-palm shoot, tree of life, fertility symbol,” would move from Babylon to the middle-east and India when, in the colonial era, its movements would be drastically redirected. Adopting an anti-colonial Marxist perspective with echoes of J. M. Coetzee, Patel muses, “Enter the Barbarian. Imperialism. Armed with a switchblade, designed to slice out the heart of craft. To separate makers from the fruits of their labors.” British capitalism would export the production of Ambi to another colony, Scotland, to a town called Paisley. Weavers of Paisley, Patel remarks, “learned how to churn out imitation Ambi, on imitation Kashmiri shawls, and [unlike South-Asian workers under British rule], they got to keep their index fingers and thumbs.” Referencing the brutal practice of torture for resisting

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69 Patel, 137.
70 Ibid, 5.
71 Ibid, 5/7.
slavery under colonialism, (and one also hears echoes of Leopold’s Congo here), Patel’s tracing of the colonial commodification of a pattern and fabric provides an illuminating instance, and unsettling depiction of, racial capitalism and movement in the colonial era.

For Patel these are the histories that she did not learn in school and which do not appear in the media or national discussions. Migritude acts as a kind of counternarrative: “This is the history we didn’t learn,” Patel reports, “From 1952 to 1960, the people of Kenya mounted a fierce guerilla struggle, the Mau uprising, to reclaim their land and freedom from the British. The British incarcerated, tortured, and murdered approximately 25,000 Kenyans. Men, women, and children. More than a million Kenyans were detained for over eight years in concentration camps—barbed wire villages where forced labour, starvation, and death were routine.”

Ngugi Wa Thiong’o’s important novel Grain of Wheat also narrativizes the Emergency and is perhaps one of the literary antecedents that Patel refashions into her migrant present. These other historical partitions, quite literally apartheid, in the colonial and postcolonial era, are so necessary to contend with. They are the pasts that, to paraphrase the brilliant Saidiya Hartman, created the future that we live in.

The colonial structures that Patel’s Migritude grapples with would have significant effects in the postcolonial period, particularly on South-Asian diasporas in Africa. Patel shows that histories of South-Asian migrants in Africa are catalyzed and disciplined by imperial structures. I here relate what she calls a “migritude timeline,” appended to her text.

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72 Ibid, 17.
The South-Asian postcolonial present then is shaped by the colonial constitution and management of a diasporic population in the imperial era. In 1972 Patel reminds us, “Idi Amin, military dictator of Uganda, expelled the country’s entire Asian population. I was born and raised in Kenya, Third-generation East African Asian.” She continues, “Secret documents, declassified in 2001, show that Britain, Israel, and the United States instigated and backed Idi Amin’s military coup, which overthrew Uganda’s democratically elected government. What followed were eight years of terror that devastated Uganda, left hundreds of thousands dead. British Foreign Office documents describe Idi Amin as a man we can trust.” Important here is the way in which Patel exposes the global North’s violent neocolonial posturing as she reclaims her diasporic or migrant identity—her proud “third-generation East African Asian.” This seems to me not only an important identitarian gesture, sharing in the irreverent spirit of Négritude, but an abiding critique of material imperial and post-imperial histories that shape migration.

In her poem “Shilling Love Part I” Patel describes a post-independence Kenya and the neoliberal economic policies of the North, while, at the same time, weaving together memories of her parents, love, childhood, and immigration:

My parents never say/ they love us... Those words were not/ in any language/ spoken by my parents... save and count/ count and save... 1975 fifteen shillings to the British pound... Thirty

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74 Ibid, 130.
75 Ibid, 10.
76 Ibid, 10/11.
shillings to the pound/ forty shillings to the pound/ my parents fight over money… As yet another western country/ drops a portcullis of immigration spikes/ my mother straps my shoulders back with a belt/ to teach me/ stand up straight… Seventy shillings to the pound/ they hug us at airports/ tearless/ stoic/ as we board the planes for icy/ alien England/ cram instructions into our pockets like talismans.  

Patel’s formal innovation here, in which she interweaves a horizontal personal narrative into the crashing vertical movement of the value of the Kenyan shilling in relation to the British pound, poignantly illustrates the ways in which neoliberal market colonialism, or for Patel, “neocolonialism,” impinge upon the domestic, creating hardship and tension, even catalyzing migration. The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank play a key political role in decisions regarding the devaluation of currency. Michel Chossudovsky notes that “Currency devaluation is often demanded (as a pre-condition) prior to the negotiation of a structural adjustment loan: the destabilization of the national currency is a key objective of the IMF-World Bank’s ‘hidden agenda’… The social impact of the IMF-sponsored devaluation is brutal and immediate: the domestic prices of food staples, essential drugs, fuel and public services increase overnight.” In Kenya, Joseph Kipkemboi Rono argues, that “in spite of the impressive economic achievement in the first two decades of Independence [beginning in 1963], the last two decades have witnessed a general decline in the economy, which has impacted negatively in nearly all areas of development. This is mainly attributable to the introduction of [Structural Adjustment Programs] in the 1980s and the 1990s.” Further, Folasade Iyun notes that “A feature of SAPs is the reduction of government expenditure, particularly on social welfare programs… [as a result] mothers

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77 Ibid, 25/27/28  
and children in particular become marginalized." Patels poem narrativizes this marginalization as mother counts and saves rather than says “I love,” while preparing terrified daughters for “alien England.” Patel suggestively coins the phrase “portcullis of immigration spikes,” referring to what has been called “fortress Europe,” or the increasingly harsh policies of containment and exclusion Europe has developed against Africa and elsewhere in the past few decades.

*Migritude* then explicitly ties the conditions of immigration to gender and imperialism. For Patel, her project is “a tapestry of poetry, history, politics, packed into a suitcase, embedded in my body, rolled out into a theatre. An accounting of Empire enacted on the bodies of women.” The poem, “The Making (Migrant Song)” acts as the *raison d’etre* for Patel’s *Migritude* project, the “why?” behind the performance piece and text. “The Making” is bookended with italicized personal reflections beginning with her sari and family. “*Make it out of the sari that wraps you… make it out of every scar and callous/ on your father’s hand.*” Patel segues into a narrative about everyday features of migrant life. “We overdress, we migrants. We care too much how we look to you. We get it wrong. We ought to look like we don’t give a fuck.” But indeed Patel argues that the quotidian is connected to larger structures symptomatic of immigration as a system. “We absorb information without asking questions. Questions cost us jobs, visas, lives.” Shilling Love

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82 Patel, 96.
83 *Migritude*, 32. Patel’s emphasis.
84 Ibid, 33.
85 Ibid.
part II narrates her parents’ first journey to see her in the United States as they travel from Kenya.

Four hours/ after their plane landed/ they have not emerged/ and we know/ with the hopeless rage of third world citizens/ of African passport holders/ that the sum of their lives and labour/ dreams and sacrifice/ is being measured/ sifted/ weighed/ found wanting/ by Immigration… [She continues in her mother’s voice speaking to American immigration officials who ignore her] / listen to me/ I’m the one/ who filled in the visa forms… these Americans/ so advanced so/ modern but still/ in the year 2000/ they think it must be the husband in charge/ they won’t let the wife speak.86

Patel illustrates above not only the trials of traveling from Africa to the United States as a person of color and on an African passport (and this is pre-9/11), but that women are differentially targeted in movement, between home and hostland, and within and across (often militarized) spaces like checkpoints, Immigration Control, the island of Lampedusa, and other liminal and disciplinary spatial-structures. Here Patel’s mother is silenced and rendered invisible as she is visually marked as other—her husband’s masculinity conversely renders him more legible. While there is a growing and important literature on women’s experiences living in the diaspora as well as in the global South, what is unique about Patel’s text and the novels studied here, is that they illuminate the gendering, racializing, and often heteronormativizing techniques and practices of power in transit that are fundamental to nation-states and the international system in which they are embedded.

Shailja Patel ends “The Making (Migrant Song)” with the following line. “I make it out of the mother I got/ in all her wounded magnificence.”87 She enacts here, and literally enacts in her live performance-piece-iteration of Migritude, a migrant-feminist and South-Asian-African-diasporic invocation of the globalized crimes of Empire that continue in, and

86 Ibid, 57.
87 Ibid, 38. Patel’s emphasis.
subtend, the present. For migritude writers the past impinges upon the present, particularly upon the way people move or don’t move. This past is doubly mediated by racial and imperial histories as well as gendered and heteronormative policy and practice by twenty-first century nation-states and the international system they participate in, particularly in terms of expropriating the means of, and shaping, movement. This project embarks upon a counter-phenomenology of movement in globalization and analyzes the literature that contends and negotiates with it.

The first chapter in Black Migrant Literature, New African Diasporas, and the Phenomenology of Movement is titled “The ‘Condition d’Immigrés’ in Fatou Diome’s Le Ventre de L’Atlantique.” It excavates the origin of the term migritude from its Francophone origins and Anglophone iterations. Chapter one rethinks Jacques Chevrier’s definition of migritude—as a recent cohort of African writers in France who narrate existence between Africa and France and for whom immigration and exile are central themes—and suggests that migritude writers disclose the “condition d’immigres;” that is, they disclose the conditions and structures of immigration as a national and international network of systems expropriating the means of movement from formerly colonized peoples and that these systems’ have a colonial past. Since by name, migritude converses with earlier black radical traditions (namely Négritude), in chapter one I map out these genealogies in the Francophone world while re-reading earlier generations of African literary internationalist writers through the lens of immigration.

For example, I re-read Négritude from the perspective of migritude. I show that, from Paulette Nardal, to Senghor and Césaire, to Frantz Fanon and Cheikh Hamidou Kane, this Francophone African genealogy is one made up primarily of immigrant writers. Migration then necessarily informs their anti-colonial, anti-racist, and gendered critique. I
close-read Fatou Diome’s twenty-first century migritude text as something of an heir to this tradition while noting that, at the same time, she re-fashions and is “unfaithful” to certain aspects of it. I show how she re-appropriates, for example, Senghor’s black humanism, and mobilizes it into her global twenty-first century as a migrant humanism as a challenge to immigration under neoliberal globalization.

Chapter two, “Home to Hargeisa: Pan-Africanism, Black Internationalism, and the Politics of Migritude from Banjo to Black Mamba Boy,” further maps an African literary internationalism in terms of Anglophone migritude literature and its conversations with black radical forbearers. I examine Nadifa Mohamed’s 2010 novel Black Mamba Boy and her engagement with Claude McKay’s 1929 Banjo. I read McKay’s own mobilization of what I call “migrant pan-Africanism,” as anticipating migritude literature. His deployment of “moving globality” reveals that colonial-era global and racialized capitalism creates a multi-racial imperial world. From the “Indian archipelago” to the Caribbean Sea Banjo phenomenologically images the economy within which colonial exports and imports, a nomadic black workforce, as well as philosophies and various radicalisms are circulated. McKay details not only the flow and movement of commodities from the global South—particularly Africa—to the global North, but also the labor and flow of black bodies as commodities, as well as structures and objects of immigration like passports, deportations and various national immigration controls of which black nomadic workers have a sophisticated knowledge. The second part of “Home to Hargeisa” analyzes both Mohamed’s novel Black Mamba Boy as a migritude text and the ways in which it reshapes Banjo’s migrant pan-Africanism into a narrative that negotiates colonial structures from the perspective of Somali migration. Jama’s diasporic nomadism, for example, circulates and is impinged upon by both British and Italian colonial modes of managing movement. Beyond the colonial setting of Black Mamba Boy, Mohamed, I argue, also speaks to our twenty-first
century and the ways in which immigrants from the global South are haunted by colonial structures (of movement) in the present.

Chapter three “We Carry Our Home with Us: African Migritude in Italy in the works of Cristina Ali Farah, Marco di Prisco, and Fred Kuwornu,” expands migritude and African literary internationalism from Francophone and Anglophone worlds, to important works of African migrant literature in Italy written in Italian. Authors like Cristina Ali Farah delineate not only the pasts of Italian colonialism on the continent, but the ways in which colonial racialized modes of managing movement appear in present day Italy, particularly since the 1980s. This chapter engages Italian colonial history, historical moments such as the cold war, neoliberal economic globalization, and the ways in which these destructive histories create destabilization and thus African emigration. I use Somalia as a case study and engage with digital art and documentary film in contemporary Italy as Afro-Italian cultural production.

I begin chapter four, “A Matter of Timing: Immigration and Alternative Sexualities in Diriye Osman’s Fairytales for Lost Children,” by asking the following question. If African and African diasporic LGBTQ writers like Diriye Osman, Thomas Glave, and others articulate precisely the mixing of diaspora and desire, immigration and sexuality, does it therefore follow that sexuality and processes of gendering are entangled with institutions that manage immigration? I argue that immigration as a national and international system instituted by the global North not only manages and polices movement and immigrant populations in a way that racializes and genders the objects of its control, which I have shown, but heterosexualizes them as well, and that immigration as a system is inextricable from heteropatriarchal modes of domination while queer [white] capital on the

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other hand, is granted free passage under neoliberal capitalism. Secondly, I argue that analysis of LQBTQ migritude literature offers a critique of heteropatriarchal management of movement and its racializing and gendering formations, and that these authors challenge and engage with immigration and sexuality in implicit and explicit ways. Somali-British author Diriye Osman’s *Fairytales for Lost Children* is indeed substantially critical of the condition of immigration and explicitly attentive to gay and lesbian sexuality in diaspora.

As a counterpoint, I examine instances of queer liberalism and liberal (in)tolerance of queerness in Somali writer Nuruddin Farah’s 2014 *Hiding in Plain Sight*. Relying on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Robert Reid-Pharr, and David Eng, I argue that neoliberal globalization and the management of movement cannot be disentangled from discourses and laws circumscribing sexuality—whether they be conservative or liberal: that queer liberalism and liberal toleration of queerness both practice and promote intolerance in terms of racialization and homophobia respectively. This chapter show’s how Osman’s text pushes migritude further by narrating the experiences of queer diasporic subjects while suggestively asking whether institutions that manage immigration and their abiding rhetoric are linked to techniques of power and *épistemes* that police sexuality. I conclude *Black Migrant Literature* by reiterating the intervanations I make throughout the text and by remarking upon new directions in African diasporic and literary internationalism such as twenty-first century United States-based African novelists and the reshaping of American literature; and, finally, I discuss the radical post-national promise of what Aimé Césaire productively describes as, “making a claim on inheritance without designated heirs.”

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The “Condition d'Immigrés” in Fatou Diome’s *Le Ventre de L’Atlantique*

“It’s about the condition of migration—of *migritude*”

In a scene nearing the end of Fatou Diome’s 2003 novel *The Belly of the Atlantic*, Afro-Parisians from Senegal celebrate wildly in the streets of Paris. Set against the historical event of the Senegalese football team’s victory over France in the 2002 World Cup, Diome’s narrator describes an unprecedented postcolonial moment:

“...with Senegal’s World Cup triumph, the black population of France was singing and dancing; for once they were invited to play with the big boys who, what’s more, were saying good things about them.”

This postcolonial victory, however, allows Diome to reflect upon the failure of the postcolonial. As the weight of global capitalism in Africa creates migration via destabilization, continued racism in France makes life in the segregated and impoverished *banlieues* difficult, even perilous, for immigrant and second-generation populations.

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90 Only two other African teams have made it to the FIFA World Cup Quarterfinals: Cameroon in 1990 and Ghana in 2010.

For the majority of African migrants in France, Senegal’s triumph would be bittersweet. “Even those who were afraid to go home [to Africa] with their suitcases stuffed with failure, humiliation and disappointment came out of their cramped tower blocks to shout about their pride regained in France. They managed to forget that no one ever spoke of gratitude towards them or even simply citizenship, but only of tolerance and integration into the mould of a sieve-society in which they are the lumps.”92 If France’s black diasporic subjects manage to forget—for if but a moment—white France’s hostile attitude toward them, their structural segregation, cramped tower blocks, and the indignity of being “tolerated” without rights or citizenship, their amnesia represents a commensurate feat, almost rivaling Senegal’s World Cup victory. “As the Parisian Senegalese rejoiced, parading down the Champs-Elysées, they were overtaken by their condition of immigrants and its corollary, contempt. The Arc de Triomphe isn’t for negroes!”93 Fatou Diome’s novel indeed narrates the “condition d’immigrés”94 in France for Senegalese migrants. Her cast of characters in The Belly of the Atlantic are faced with detention centers, racial profiling, deportations, passport control, and immigrant under- or unemployment. The above passage also illustrates migrant negative affect produced by both cultural and economic humiliation, impoverishment, and the fear of returning home (or the inability to), experienced by many Africans in France.

Furthermore, Diome’s incisive description of the condition of immigrants more generally reconfigures the ways in which immigration is conceptualized or narrated, engaging not solely with immigrants themselves but with the structures, apparatuses, and institutions that catalyze, reshape, or interdict their movement. Fatou Diome’s novel then

92 Ibid.
93 Ibid, my italics.
stands among a number of 21st century works of African literature ushering in a new genre—*migritude*—whose authors narrate these “conditions” of immigration. Going beyond telling the story of individual migrants who cross borders, migritude discloses the “Being-in-the-World” of the migrant.95

A genealogy of French (African) migritude fiction must take into account earlier generations of French speaking black writing on immigration in both the colonial and postcolonial context. Before Bernard Dadié’s famous 1959 migratory travel-narrative and philosophical tract *Un Nègre à Paris*, for example, Négritude authors of the 1930s and 40s like Léopold Sédar Senghor and Aimé Césaire comment upon black migration to France and diasporic pan-African experience, an experience necessarily inextricable from the historical context of colonial racism. Earlier still, one of the unacknowledged godmothers of Négritude, Paulette Nardal, writes a short story entitled “In Exile” in 1929 detailing the stark economic conditions facing black migrant women in Paris. Inspiring the Négritude authors, Claude McKay’s pan-African writings on Marseille as a city of global black migrant labor in movement, also penned in the late nineteen-twenties, encompasses both Négritude and migritude.96 A careful reading of E. W. Blyden’s 1886 *Christianity, Islam, and the Negro Race*, an early pan-African and decidedly global tome, shows that pan-Africanism itself is predicated upon movement (both forced and voluntary). Further, perhaps Olaudah Equiano’s Anglophone 1789 *Interesting Narrative* represents a starting point in considering black international migrant narratives and movement.


In the French context however, from the first Négritude prose-novel—Cheikh Hamidou Kane’s 1961 *Ambiguous Adventure*, or Ousmane Sembene’s groundbreaking 1966 film visualizing a black woman’s migration and alienation *Le Noir de (Black Girl)*, to contemporary Congolese migritude author Alain Mabanckou’s 2009 *Black Bazaar* and many others, African migration to France in literature has been 1) significant, and 2) inextricable from the historical fact of European colonization (out of which the concept of immigration itself arises), racism, and global capitalism. This chapter furthers a broad theorization of migritude literature, maps out a “francophone” migritude genealogy along with attendant themes and issues, and finally showcases a close reading of Fatou Diome’s migritude novel *The Belly of the Atlantic* and its relationship to the Négritude texts of Senghor, Hamidou Kane, Sembene, and others.

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**Part I: Theorizing Migritude**

Exile and its condition of possibility—migration, are major themes in African literature. Perhaps it is most pronounced in the French context. For Dominic Thomas, exile and immigration subtend black literature in French. In *Black France: Colonialism, Immigration, and Transnationalism*, Thomas suggests that “exile itself constitutes the entry into writing... the Congolese novelist Emmanuel Dongala has underlined how both negritude and the more recent concept of ‘migritude’ emerged from these circumstances.”

In his lecture “From Négritude to Migritude: The African Writer in Exile” Dongala traces

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98 I include under the banner of “African literature,” literature by Africans living elsewhere as well as second generation African immigrants born outside the continent but for whom Africa (and the experience of being African or immigrant) is significant. I define African literature, then, broadly. Can *beur* or the more recent *banlieue* literature be included here? I argue that it should be.
99 *Black France*, 5.
the development of the “Francophone African novel through the lens of exile” suggesting that what these two generations of black writers share across a half-century or more is the experience of exile—a theme that is, not coincidentally, significant in Diome’s *The Belly of the Atlantic*. Salie, for example, describes herself as “a permanent exile, I spend my nights soldering the rails that lead to identity. Writing is the hot wax I pour between the furrows dug by those who erect partitions...” It is through exile that the entry into writing is marked. Diome negotiates the specific experience of immigration, illustrated here in her reference to partitions, which signals borders, checkpoints, passport control—the stuff of migritude experience; she writes to protest anti-immigrant milieus in her twenty-first century context just as she is shaped by them.

If Négritude centers upon the being of the black man in the colonial era, his experiences, and finally, the construction of an oppositional identity that would counter racism while forging a pan-African community, then migritude literature constructs a migrant-focused literature and solidarity. Thomas notes the immigrant-centeredness of works by contemporary African authors who write what Mamadou Diouf calls Africa-in-France narratives: For Thomas, “whereas protagonists of colonial-era texts navigated their way through France primarily for the purpose of education and travel, those in contemporary novels experience detention centers, are faced with legal procedural issues, are often categorized as illegal, clandestine, or undocumented.” Alain Mabanckou’s migritude novel *Blue, White, Red* opens, for example, in a detention center in France and closes with the deportation of his protagonist, an undocumented migrant or *sans-papier*.

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101 *The Belly of the Atlantic*, 182.
102 *Black France*, 4.
This allows Mabanckou’s narrator to illustrate both the plight of those who are “undocumented—sandwiched between complex and draconian laws,” and the politics of French xenophobia “used as a political football to win a vote or two from intolerant French people. The abandoned and undocumented horde was considered a pressure on French society.” Mabanckou’s commentary is suggestive of the legislative, political, and cultural structures and conditions that shape migrant’s lives. These pre-existing structures produce immigrants in the sense that there are already discourses such as anti-immigrant rhetoric or racial nationalism that constitute or interpellate diasporic subjects in France, while material structures (legislative and disciplinary) contain or manage migrant subjects.

Migritude writers ask us to think, not simply about those who move across borders or oceans, but about the techniques of power utilized by states, governments, transnational corporations, and “natives” to manage, contain, and surveille immigrant populations biopolitically: they illustrate how “condition” works both as a noun and verb, and show how these apparatuses operate within, along, beneath, and as, state structures. Michel Foucault, whose key terms I borrow here, has analyzed migration as early as The History of Sexuality Vol. 1. For Foucault in 1976, “The old power of death that symbolized sovereign power was now carefully supplanted by the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life. During the classical period, there was a rapid development of various disciplines—universities, secondary schools, barracks, workshops; there was also the emergence, in the field of political practices and economic observation, of the problems of birthrate, longevity, public health, housing, and migration. Hence there was an explosion of numerous diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of

populations, marking the beginning of an era of 'biopower'. Foucault tracks the proliferation of these “techniques,” including the observation and disciplining of migration, beginning in the eighteenth century that are necessarily bound up with the development of capitalism in Western countries.

Foucault then creates a productive vocabulary that allows for a more precise parsing of the proliferation of apparatuses and techniques of power, that in the context of migritude can be used to describe border control, detention centers, checkpoints, deportations, the distribution of passports, and population management, whose function is to manage the movement of non-white people in the postcolonial era of global capital. He defines biopower as “a number of phenomena that seem to me to be quite significant, namely, the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power, or, in other words, how, starting from the eighteenth century, modern western societies took on board the fundamental biological fact that human beings are a species. This is roughly what I have called biopower.” In this sense then, just as for Foucault the “homosexual” was invented as a “species” in 1889, so the immigrant was produced as such in the same era of high imperialism. Migritude literature shows how terms like sans papier or “undocumented” in Mabanckou’s France, “immigrant” or “illegal alien” in the U.S. context, or as we will see in Claude McKay’s 1929 (proto)migritude novel Banjo “Nationality Doubtful,” all become categorical terms, “species,” that are discursively weighted and legislative.

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105 (Ibid. 141).
Gary Wilder’s important *The French Imperial Nation State* documents an antecedent to these techniques of power managing migrant movement, beginning in the colonial era. In French West Africa in 1928, through a “decree establishing an Office of Emigration and Immigration in each colony, [Jules] Carde created a formal apparatus for policing native mobility. It prohibited Africans from traveling outside their colony of origin without first obtaining a permit, an official identity card (including the bearer’s photograph, fingerprints, race, and kinship lineage), and for those traveling to Europe, proof that they could support themselves once there.”\(^{107}\) Contemporary migritude writers show, in their parsing of immigration in the twenty-first century, that biopolitical colonial techniques indeed adumbrate the management of movement under globalization. In *The Belly of the Atlantic*, for example, Diome’s narrator shows how twenty-first century passport control is shaped by an imperial past.

On my arrival in France, before being issued with my residency permit, I’d been called into the International Immigration Office for a full X-ray. Free of scabies and pustules and not harboring any shameful diseases, I’d been sent, along with a bill for 320 francs, a medical certificate, which stated: *fulfils the requisite health conditions for authorization to reside in France*. So illness is considered an unacceptable defect that bars access to French territory. Mind you, in the days when Negroes, ebony and spices were sold any which way, no one bought a sick slave. And in the colonies, for a long time the natives believed that the master never fell ill, so cleverly did everything conspire to maintain the myth of his superiority… Did the immigration office think it was teaching me to toe the line? One thing’s for sure: they wanted to know everything about me. They’d seen me wearing Senghor’s Negritude on my face and were unsure which role I would play in *Les Misérables*.\(^{108}\)


The above passage begins by showing how the French nation-state has expropriated the free means of movement from Salie at the same moment that it biopolitically enfolds her: it examines her physically, keeps records, and through the language and attitude of its employees, racializes and silences her, all while externalizing the costs—she receives a bill for “320 francs.” Salie however, is quick to make the parallel between twenty-first century France and the techniques—material and otherwise—it uses to condition Salie in migration, and slavery, colonialism, and Les Misérable. In addition, Salie strategically refers to Senghor here—“They’d seen me wearing Senghor’s Negritude on my face”— as an anticolonial response to French racism that she remobilizes in her own context as she negotiates passport control and the immigration officers.

Abdourahman A. Waberi’s Djiboutian Francophone migritude novel Transit provides another illuminating picture of the instantiation of colonial processes bound to the present. In his novel, Ali Aref—president of the French colony of Djibuti in the Horn of Africa, takes cue from European models of population control. “Ali Aref and his supporters had done all they could to sort people out, and anathema and exclusion were the rule. Your membership in a tribe, or more precisely a clan, contrary to the common appellation, was stamped on your identity card, and as if that weren’t enough, they invented a new population category, decreed non-native on the pretext that they were supposed to be from Somalia.”109 Waberi’s narrator details the categorization of peoples and apparatuses like identity cards and checkpoints developed to manage movement. “Anathema” and “exclusion” also direct our attention to the rhetorical regulation of immigration through the construction of a discourse or ideology around questions of who or what constitutes “outsiders” and conversely who or what counts as a national or ethnic “we.”

Furthermore, recall Mabanckou’s ironic use of the term “horde” in *Blue, White, Red* which immediately calls to mind anti-immigrant rhetoric reminiscent of colonial-era racist attitudes. The perception of black immigrants as an “abandoned and undocumented horde [who create] a pressure on French society,” as they are sarcastically described by Mabanckou’s narrator, is instructive here. From “the black threat on the Rhine” propaganda against black French soldiers in Germany in 1920, to Jacques Chirac’s “notoriously expressed distaste for the ‘noise and smell’ of France’s immigrant population” in France in the early 1990s, non-white populations in France, elsewhere in Europe and in the United States were and are subject not only to discriminatory laws and policies but to ideological defamation as well. This illustrates why for Diome, in the epigraph framing this chapter, the corollary of the immigrant condition is *contempt*. In theorizing the immigrant condition, the terms delineated above shore up analyses of migritude literature by allowing the thinking of seemingly disparate phenomena such as deportation laws, discriminatory hiring practices, or the manufacture of anti-immigrant panic and its attendant epistemic violence, as actually interrelated techniques of power (biopolitics) leveraged to maintain control.

Stuart Hall’s cultural studies landmark *Policing the Crisis* deftly analyzes the kind of governmentality and epistemic violence above in the context of the manufacture of moral panic over mugging in 1970s Britain, arguing that the “panic” was really mobilized to ultimately control immigrants and black people. “When the official reaction to a person, groups of persons or series of events is *out of all proportion* to the actual threat offered, when ‘experts’, in the form of police chiefs, the judiciary, politicians and editors *perceive* the threat in all but identical terms, and appear to talk ‘with one voice’ of rates, diagnoses,

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prognoses and solutions, when media representations universally stress ‘sudden and dramatic’ increases (in numbers involved or events) and ‘novelty’ above and beyond that which a sober, realistic appraisal could sustain, then we believe it is appropriate to speak of the beginnings of a moral panic.”\textsuperscript{111} The manufacturing of a crisis is bound up with conceptions and conventions of national identity, and in the context of Britain and France in the 1980s the immigrant threat was used to reproduce white superiority. Mabanckou’s poignant use of the term “horde” ironically challenges series of moral panics across Europe and the U.S., uncovering their racism, xenophobia, nationalism, and essentially neoliberal capitalist agenda. Migritude literature generally uses these weighted linguistic terms in ways that defamiliarize and dislocate them from their habitual use exposing their imbrication in rhetorical racist techniques of power managing populations and maintaining the (white) status quo.

Yet, for a variety of historical, economic, cultural, and other reasons, there is no salutary “return” to Africa for migritude writers. “It is precisely the inability of the new immigrants to envisage or entertain a permanent return to a postcolonial space bereft of agential possibilities that Paris,” for Pius Adesanmi, “ironically, regains a problematic status as a site of redemption in migritude narratives.”\textsuperscript{112} So Mabanckou’s migritude narrator in Blue, White, Red ponders this “new immigrant” double-bind: “Foreigners in France, they would be equally foreign in their own countries. After all, one can’t just go back, impulsively, after an absence.”\textsuperscript{113} For Fatou Diome’s protagonist Salie in The Belly of

\textsuperscript{112} Pius Adesanmi “Redefining Transmodernity” in Paris, Capital of the Black Atlantic, 326).
\textsuperscript{113} Blue, White, Red, 107.
there is also no return to Africa from France since she also feels alienated upon her return trips home.

Dominic Thomas helps excavate the origins of migritude in the French context: “this neologism [migritude] designates both the thematic of immigration that is at the heart of contemporary African works, but also the expatriate status of most writers... their inspiration comes from their hybridity and decentered lives, elements that now characterize a kind of French-style ‘world literature’ ... In this way ‘migritude’ symbolizes a kind of ‘third space’ that comes from a ‘questioning of certain prevalent discursive configurations’ and ‘simultaneous disengagement from both the culture of origin and the receiving culture... within a new identitarian space’.” Chevrier’s definition here utilizes key terms in postcolonial theory in the 1990s focusing on identity such as hybridity, decentered-ness, and a kind of liminality. Terms that foreground identity can elide the institutions and economic processes that indeed shape subject positions. For example, “hybridity,” can stand in for an elite cosmopolitanism, while Afropolitan narratives like Taiye Selassie’s *Ghana Must Go*, though interesting and beautifully written, cannot adequately parse the immigrant condition. Issues of immigration are highly intertwined with *class* and so I would resist conflating hybrid elite cosmopolitan writers—often not subject to the same kinds of institutional apparatuses managing immigration that refugees or economic migrants are subject to—with the majority of immigrants or migrant writers. Fatou Diome’s *migritude* novel revises Senghor’s black humanism within the context of non-elite diasporic and migrant subjecthood as a challenge to, and negotiation of, the neoliberal conditions that produce and shape diaspora and movement.

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114 *Black France*, 5.
Furthermore, I expand Chevrier’s theorization of migritude by including Anglophone migrant narratives that philosophize upon and narrate the being-in-the-world of the migrant, not solely the territory of French-African writers. It is also equally important to assess the fact that a significant portion of migritude texts are in complex and dynamic conversations with earlier black radical writers of the anti-colonial period from the 1920s on, most notably Négritude—invoked by name in the nouveau portmanteau “migritude.” In what follows I briefly discuss Mabanckou’s Black Bazaar as an example of the relationship between Négritude and migritude in the Francophone African literary context.

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“For too long the West has force-fed us with lies and bloated us with pestilence” announces an Arab vendor in the beginning of Alain Mabanckou’s 2012 Black Bazaar.\textsuperscript{115} “Do you know which black poet had the courage to say that?” he asks Mabanckou’s Congolese protagonist “Buttologist” in the banlieue where he lives (who, instead of walking with his head up like everyone else “develops a thing for feasting [his] eyes on the lower backs of the girls walking by, followed by a full and in-depth analysis”).\textsuperscript{116} His somewhat embellished paraphrasing of Aimé Césaire’s Discourse on Colonialism represents the ambiguous relationship between the two generations. Although Buttologist, a SAPE,\textsuperscript{117} doesn’t have time to “sing the praises” of Négritude and thinks “the tom-tom is something we should get rid of for good because its time is up,” Mabanckou approvingly cites Césaire on more than a few occasions, in addition to Cheikh Anta Diop, Ferdinand Oyono, Rene Maran, and others.\textsuperscript{118} Négritude’s relationship to contemporary black France and its literature plays out

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{116} Ibid, 18/65.
\bibitem{117} Society for Ambiancers and Persons of Elegance originating in the Congo. Black Gentlemen’s clubs in Africa and the diasporas that promote dressing up to a “t” and where fashion is of the utmost importance.
\bibitem{118} See: \textit{Black Bazaar}, 45, 109, 120, 226, 227, 244.
\end{thebibliography}
satirically in two fairly extreme characters in *Black Bazaar*. The first is the pan-African Arab street vendor who sings the praises of Négritude (see his refrain above repeated throughout the novel), embraces African-Arab brotherhood, reiterates pan-Africanist anti-colonial rhetoric, and finally, radically claims that “all men are immigrants, except for the Africans who are at home here down below... It’s not easy telling Europeans that in reality they are nothing but immigrants themselves and that their continent actually belongs to the Africans who were the first men on earth!”¹¹⁹ Despite its bombastic delivery much in the Arab vendor’s statement is true: the first humans were Africans and somewhere around 100,000 years ago some groups in Africa began to migrate out of Africa, some of which would become European. In a radical reversal of the logic of European colonization, he uses this evolutionary claim to invoke proprietary rights of Africans regarding the entire world—that it is *the whites who are immigrants* and, *a fortiori*, racist immigration laws utilized by Europe targeting Africans are entirely wrong and misdirected. A refreshing take indeed!

Buttolgist (and perhaps Mabanckou) however, present the vendor as somewhat looney and old-hat. He is even dangerously patriarchal as, during one of his signature rants against the West he takes up what he sees as the “problem” of women who wear mini-skirts and asks an abominable question: “How are the rascals not supposed to rape them, eh?”¹²⁰ As a satirical character the extreme and somewhat clunky pan-Africanism of the Arab vendor is subtended by the misogyny of the above quotation, and his misguided yet black-centric view of the world. The relationship between Buttolgist and the Arab street vendor reflects the relationship between contemporary Francophone-African writers and the moments of earlier generations, such as Négritude—fraught. There are problematic

elements of the old-school (patriarchy for one, to use shorthand) that do not bear repeating, yet there are elements that can and should be refashioned (anti-racist humanism for one) just as Buttologist fashions and carefully crafts his SAPE outfits.

The other side of the dialectic in *Black Bazaar* is the character, “Mr. Hippocratic,” Buttologist’s racist and anti-immigrant neighbor who accuses Buttologist of ‘eating a hole in the dole’ and essentially repeats what he’s heard on the French news: “the hole in social security is getting deeper and deeper because there’s riff-raff out there, with no sense of republican values, threatening our democracy.”

This right-wing anti-immigrant rhetoric is coupled with vitriolic racism. “He says, for example, like most Blacks he knows, I always put the cart before the horse, I’m not worth peanuts, I’m a cabbage head, with an artichoke for a heart...” Moreover Mr. Hippocratic sings the praises of colonialism and insists that not only was colonialism positive but necessary—and that his least favorite book—“stuff and nonsense!”—is none other than Aimé Césaire’s *Discourse on Colonialism*. Mr. Hippocratic is an antagonist and so the novel would seem to ask its readers to identify with Césaire, perhaps however, in a more nuanced way than the Arab street vender. Ironically, it is revealed that Mr. Hippocratic is a black man from the Caribbean, which for Mabanckou both illustrates the pernicious colonial myth of French superiority (as well as the colonial myth of black Caribbean superiority over black Africans that Frantz Fanon famously shatters), so entrenched that even the formerly colonized adopt them, and offers comedic relief in the anti-black black man, as Mr. Hippocratic represents a foil to the

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121 Ibid, 21.
122 Ibid, 29.
123 Ibid, 227.
equally eccentric street vendor. Black Bazaar is such a rich, complex, and surprisingly funny novel, and one that has much to say about immigration that it would take far more than a few paragraphs to properly do it justice. However, I discuss it briefly here to illustrate the complex, fraught, yet fortuitous relationship that migritude writers have with Négritude in particular, and earlier black radical writing in general.

Migritude narrates the economic conditions of existence facing contemporary migrants and in many cases, refers to, mobilizes, and refashions black radical discourse and literature of the early anti-colonial period from the 1920s on, most notably, especially in the francophone school, Négritude. In this way generational categories can be useful due to both changes in global economic and political configuration over time and genealogies of black literary, activist, and artist resistance that parallel, change, challenge, and reconfigure those temporal economic and political conditions. For Abdourahman Waberi, “the children of the postcolony,” his term for migritude writers, “are also a generational phenomenon.” [They represent a] ‘fourth generation,’ the first three being the pioneer writers of 1920-1930, the negritude movement from 1930-1960, and finally decolonization and postcolonial disillusionment from the 1970s onward.” The fourth generation would be publishing from around 1990 and on into the 21st century. These temporal categorizations are purely heuristic and nowhere near absolute, but are useful in some ways as roadmarkers upon complex genealogical, historical, cultural, and geographical literary fields.

Although for Thomas, the second generation Négritude writers were always already “immigrant writers,” he cites Mamadou Diouf who presciently suggests that: “One must

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124 It may also point towards the pre-WWII era in which black French West Indians considered themselves above their “savage” African brothers in a complex and fraught colonial dynamic. Négritude of course was a major force in destroying this idea.
125 Quoted in Thomas, Black France, 20.
also speak of a new, extraordinary literature, that of novelists who are no longer the novelists of the in-between, of Africa and France, but rather novelists of Africa in France… They present a history and forms of modernity that are quite different from colonial and postcolonial modernities.” Migritude modernities include both first and second generation immigrant communities and thus Africa can be both central and secondary. The paradox of some children of the postcolony (or writers of this new “extraordinary” literature of Africa in France), is that while they are “French,” (or “English,” or “American”), given their skin-color, they are considered outsiders and are treated inhospitably. For Salman Rushdie in the British context, although “the facts are that for many years now there has been a sizeable amount of white immigration as well as black, that the annual number of emigrants leaving these shores is now larger than the number of immigrants coming in; and that, of the black communities, over forty per cent are not immigrants, but black Britons, born and bred, speaking in many voices and accents of Britain, and with no homeland but this one. And still the word ‘immigrant’ means ‘black immigrant’; the myth of ‘swamping’ lingers on; and even British-born blacks and Asians are thought of as people whose real ‘home’ is elsewhere.” This attests to the fact that “immigrant” is a discursively weighted word not least in terms of race. Immigrant is coded as black and conceptions of blackness in the global North often still carry colonial ideological baggage.

Salman Rushdie, in the above quotation for example, refers to an interview in 1978 wherein Margaret Thatcher claims that, “people are really rather afraid that this country might be swamped by people of a different culture. The British character has done so much

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126 Ibid, 23 my emphasis.
for democracy…”

This conforms to the imperialist racial hierarchy in which Europe defines itself as superior, civilized, and modern, while at the same moment constructing Africa as its opposite, primitive, unenlightened, and so on. Rahul K. Gairola argues in his rigorously researched article “A Critique of Thatcherism and the Queering of Home in Sammy and Rosie Get Laid,” that in the ’78 Granta interview, “Thatcher foregrounds her nativist racism, colonial nostalgia, and ‘family values’ under the patriotic sign of the Union Jack, which affords ‘home’ to white Britons while leaving out immigrants, queers, and those who did not neatly fit into her heralding of neoliberal economics.”

Gairola’s critique of Thatcherism and the xenophobia of the European nation is illustrated in French banlieue literature (which I explicate in more detail below). Writer Faiza Guéne, for example, narrates a scene between her young Arab protagonist and an old white (racist) neighbor, who yells at Doria for mispronouncing the biblical Job’s name in a kind of rote repetition of Thatcherian or Chiracian racialized anti-immigrant rhetoric. “She shouted at me because when I read, instead of pronouncing it like Job-rhymes-with-globe, I said ‘Jahb.’ Like what they call your work in America or the name of that fat guy in Star Wars. And that crazy old bag Mme Jacques accused me of ‘sullying our beautiful language’ and other stuff just as stupid. Nothing I can do, I didn’t even know this Job guy existed. ‘It’s the faaaaaulttt of people like youuu that our Frrrench herrrrritttage is in a coma!’ “Sullying” here clearly refers to Thatcher’s “swamping” and most likely Chirac’s racist anti-immigrant discourse as well. Fatou Diome’s migritude narrator Salie also illustrates this ‘immigrant condition’ in

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130 Ibid.
131 Faiza Guéne, Kiffe Kiffe Tomorrow 142/3.
The Belly of the Atlantic. “In Europe, my brothers, you’re black first, citizens incidentally, outsiders permanently…” I will discuss this excerpt at length later in the chapter but suffice it to say now that in many contexts, paradoxically, immigrant comes to mean simply black, regardless of where one is born.

This contradictory historical fact is readily apparent in subsections of Francophone migrate literature called “Beur” literature (of the 1980s) and “Banlieue” literature (1990s and beyond) in which the protagonists are born in France to North African immigrant parents yet are still discriminated against and, for all the intents and purposes of both the State and white “natives,” are “immigrant.” Abouz Begag’s autobiographical Shantytown Kid (1986) is often considered the first beur novel along with Mehdi Charef’s Tea in the Harem (1983), which is also considered an early example of later banlieue literature, which includes Faiza Guéne’s Kiffe demain (2004), Alain Mabanckou’s ouvre, and others. This literature arises within and in response to impoverished urban spaces in Paris at once targeted and neglected by the French government (see the 2005 Clichy-sous-bois riots in Paris), populated largely by North African Muslim populations as well as sub-Saharan and Caribbean black populations.

For Alec Hargreaves these groups and the urban spaces “were targeted in Le Pen’s attack on the alleged evils of ‘immigration’ and ‘Islam’… In popular discourse, North Africans have often been labelled as ‘Arabs,’ a term that frequently carries pejorative connotations inherited from colonial times. Tired of this stigmatization, during the 1970s second generation North Africans in the Paris conurbation began calling themselves Beurs, a self-valorising piece of verlan (backslang) formed by inverting and partially truncating

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132 The Belly of the Atlantic, 124.
the syllables of the word Arabe.” The urban spaces in the novels are called banlieues, roughly meaning “suburbs” but with very different connotations than the English term. The terms “project” or “ghetto” might better serve as loose U.S. equivalents.

_Buer_ and Banlieue writing should be considered subsections of migritude literature, or at the very least in the migritude constellation, as they document and philosophize the immigrant condition in French urban spaces, often structurally reserved for non-Whites. For Hargreaves “these spaces are characterized on the one hand by acute material deprivation and on the other hand by extraordinarily rich and dynamic cultural diversity.” In _Tea in the Harem_ Charef narrates this acute material deprivation endemic of urban immigrant spaces as Majid, his friend, and a young woman, Solange, who also happens to be a prostitute from their tenement building, walk towards another banlieue.

They walked through the long wild grass by the side of the disused railway line, to the hostel where the immigrant workers live. Solange complains endlessly. “How much further is it?” she asked. “I’ve got stones in my shoes.” As she walks, she treads on the hem of her long, crumpled, Indian skirt... The barracks consist of rows of prefabs on a starch of stony, dusty wasteland, which turns into a mud patch in winter. These barracks are run by local employers, and they house workers from North Africa and the Mediterranean. They live here like animals, excluded from the normal life of the city, stuck between the roadworks on the motorway, the railway line and the harbor, in a work-camp surrounded by a wire fence.

An important question these novels ask is that, is this dehumanization—“they live here like animals”—exceptional or an aberration in Paris (or in any other Northern metropole such as New York or London), or is the exclusion of various groups “from the normal life of the city” constitutive of the City of Lights? Migritude discloses a reality that reflects the latter.

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134 Ibid, 212.
Tea in the Harem paints a common theme, often necessarily rehearsed in immigrant literature, speaking to the above question: “At the time, Majid and his parents were living in Nanterre bidonville—the rue de la Folie—the largest and cruelest of any in the Paris suburbs. Shantytowns that could equal anything in Brazil, but without the sun and music. When Majid’s dad had sent for his wife and son to come from Algeria, he’d not told them about the cold, smoky barracks. When she first saw the place, Malika burst into tears, and Majid wondered if it was some kind of practical joke, because back home there was never enough to eat, but at least you had your little stone-built house: at least you had a home.”

In Faiza Guéne’s novel Kiffe Tomorrow a shade over twenty years later, Doria describes living in those same banlieues: “My mom always dreamed that France was like in those black-and-white films from the sixties. The ones where the handsome actor’s always telling his woman so many pretty lies, a cigarette dangling from his lips... So when she and my dad arrived [from Morocco] in Livry-Gargan, just north of Paris, in February 1984, she must have thought they’d taken the wrong boat to the wrong country. She told me that when she walked into this tiny two-room apartment the first thing she did was throw up.”

Migritude literature is predicated upon the vomiting up of colonial myths like the “Mirage of Paris” fed and swallowed by colonists and colonizer alike since the dawn of imperialism. This theme is genealogically traceable to earlier generations of black radical writing such as the founding godmother of Négritude Paulette Nardal who lays bare the myth of France in her 1929 short story “In Exile” published in Paris the same year as Claude McKay’s Banjo.

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Part II: Genealogies: Reading Négritude through the Lens of Immigration (1928-1966).

Up until recent interventions by folks like T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, Jennifer Wilks, Brent Edwards, and Shireen Lewis, Négritude has been theorized through what Sharpley-Whiting calls a “masculinist genealogy.” This conventional perspective has been passed down to us by “the founding poets and shored up by literary historians, critics, and Africanist philosophers.” The masculinist Négritude genealogy indeed “continues to elide and minimize the presence and contributions of French-speaking black women to Negritude’s evolution.” If it is in Jane and Paulette Nardal’s Paris salon in the late 1920s that Senghor, Césaire, and Damas are introduced to “black internationalism” (which is also the name of an article by Paulette Nardal published in 1928 in La Dépeche Africaine), then a reading of Négritude via migration must start with Nardal’s 1929 short story “In Exile,” which has everything to do with immigration but also challenges the colonial myth of Europe’s “civilization” contrasted over and against Africa’s “heart of darkness”—specifically the “mirage of Paris” which becomes an anti-colonial and pro-migrant trope, as we will see, from Négritude to migritude.

Paulette Nardal and her sister Jane moved from Martinique to France to study at the Sorbonne in 1920. They started a newspaper for black students, held a literary salon, and wrote articles on Africa, black humanism, and black internationalism. The milieu the Nardal soeurs created would inspire and shape the well-known Négritude movement. For Shireen K. Lewis in Race, Culture, and Identity: Francophone West African and Caribbean Literature and Theory from Négritude to Créolité, Nardal’s “In Exile” is “remarkable for its

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139 Ibid.
140 Ibid.
sensitive portrayal of a black woman and its contribution to modernism with its themes of exile, alienation, loneliness, and despair.”

“In Exile” is an illuminating portrayal of the conditions in France for immigrants from the West Indies during the colonial era. In particular, Nardal incisively reveals the ways gender and reproduction are bound up with migration and Elisa’s defamiliarization of “the mirage of Paris” represents an antecedent to contemporary migritude critique.

Elisa, the protagonist of “In Exile,” is an elderly black Martiniquean maid in 1920s Paris who works long days, is underpaid, and is subject to the institutional racism that migrants from French colonies face in the City of Lights. Along with the cold winter this produces a numbing effect on Elisa. “This land does not truly suit an old negress,” she laments, and the narrator describes Elisa’s imagination as almost “personify[ing] winter.” To ameliorate her psychic winter Elisa imagines “return” and “home,” concepts that would become important for generations of black writers. “If only her son, who had left almost five years ago to tempt his fortune in South America, would come back to her with a little money, she would return to her homeland, to that sweet Martinique that she should never have exchanged for the mirage of Paris.”

Elisa is warmed by thoughts of Africa in the Antilles. “It’s the whole soul of Africa, which passes into this Antillean tom-tom like an anxious call, awakening a vague emotion in the suddenly attentive talkers,” in her daydream of home. Elisa’s affective identification with Africa and Martinique confronts the phenomena of the mirage or myth of Paris—the contradiction between the colonial idea

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142 I’m grateful to *Small Axe Salon* in which a version of the next few paragraphs was published within a longer article. See Christopher Ian Foster, “Toward a Caribbean Migritude?: Immigration, Sexuality, and the Gendered Caribbean Body,” *Small Axe Salon*, Volume 18, Issue 46, February 2015.
144 Ibid, 118.
of France as a beacon of welcoming progress and the abject inhospitality blacks from the colonies were met with in Paris. Elisa endures this double-bind, symptomatic of the geographical ethnocentrism of imperialism and the condition of immigration, with imaginings of “homeland” and return.

As the bus driver calls Elisa’s stop on her commute home from work, she “gives a start”: “That shout, the brutal lights of the storefronts, have shredded the veils of her reverie. Coming back to reality she sees around her strained faces, the hard eyes, the closed or indifferent physiognomies of whites. And the weight of her existence falls back more heavily on her shoulders." As Elisa surveys the “hard” white faces appraising her with their gaze, what Nardal suggests is that the reality for Elisa in Paris is a reality reserved for black migrants—what Diome calls the “condition of immigrants” in France, always subtended by contempt. The hard faces on the bus, the economic privation of immigrants, and the taunting Elisa bears at the hands of white college students in the short story shape her experience and being. Indeed, she is cast as a black immigrant woman, categorically placed within imperial hierarchies. “In Exile” ends with Elisa’s wish of a return ticket home to the Antilles fulfilled, thanks to her erstwhile son.

Nardal’s story asks us to think about gender in migration, implicitly suggesting to the careful reader that the migrant body is “caught” by techniques of power in terms of both law and discourse, and that these technologies of power, such as Immigration Control, Residence Permits, and so on, are meted out in racialized, gendered, and heterosexualized ways. These techniques and the concepts behind them shape public discourse and perceptions around immigrants, race, and gender. “In Exile” demonstrates this, for example, when white college students pigeonhole Elisa in a deceivingly simple yet revealing

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145 Ibid.
way: “Oh what a beautiful blonde!” they yell as she passes by. “Indifferent to the laughter of a bunch of students enchanted by their witty remark [Elisa] went on in her interior monologue. No she could not keep this up much longer.” The conceit of the white college students’ “joke” is to address Elisa precisely as what she is not: a young white blonde woman—the “beautiful blonde.” I read this as necessarily gendered because if Elisa had been a black man the students would not have hailed him in exactly the same way. Frantz Fanon, another Martiniquan immigrant in France during the colonial era, speaks in his famous *Black Skins, White Masks* of the excruciating existential anxiety when a child hails him as a black male: “Look mommy, a Negro.” Fanon and Elisa are constructed as both black and, at the same time, necessarily foreign, noncitizens, and thus immigrant. That Nardal’s short story is titled “In Exile” suggests as much. These moments, in addition to formal discrimination, shape Elisa’s and Fanon’s existence. Elisa is hailed, however, as black, *female*, and undesirable. The students’ racist irony in the call “Oh what a beautiful blonde!” acts as a linguistic symptom of the ways the French colonial nation-state managed race, immigration, and black sexual reproduction.

The “joke” belies a national anxiety about black women’s sexuality and reproduction in the context of immigration. Alys Eve Weinbaum’s concept of the “race/reproduction bind” argues that it is in and through both the material and figural black woman’s body that control is manifested: “The interconnected ideologies of racism, nationalism, and imperialism rest on the notion that race can be *reproduced*, and on attendant beliefs in the reproducibility of racial formations (including nations) and of social systems hierarchically organized according to notions of inherent racial superiority, inferiority, and

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146 Ibid, 116.
degeneration.”¹⁴⁸ For Rahul K. Gairola, the race/reproduction bind “helps explain why women’s bodies . . . are subject to ideological and physical violence and/or can be coerced to produce [or not produce] offspring that contribute to the neoliberal nation-state’s racial and sexual fantasies of an ideal citizenry.”¹⁴⁹ Gary Wilder discusses black reproducibility in the French colonial context as being similarly irreconcilable with national belonging: “The administration recognized that if an African woman was allowed to obtain citizenship through marriage, all of her subsequent children automatically would be French citizens, whether or not they were assimilated. . . . In this unacceptable variant of republican motherhood, the colonial state would lose control over political enfranchisement.”¹⁵⁰ As a black mother in Paris, Elisa represents among other things, this “unacceptable variant of Republican motherhood” as she is neither blonde, white, nor a citizen.

The whites’ joke—“Oh what a beautiful blonde!”—then, is not a mere passing statement but one connected to larger national-colonial structures and anxieties in which race, gender, and sexuality are policed and disciplined. Its condition of possibility as a joke relies on racial and gendered categories of French belonging. Further, these categories operate within existing structures of immigration, therefore disclosing the ways in which black migrant bodies were managed, policed, and surveilled from the colonial period into the present. Nardal’s rich three-page short story is brilliantly suggestive of immigration, reproduction, and gender as interrelated and imperial in nature. Nardal’s (proto)Négritude migrant story may have also inspired the title of Ousmane Socé Diop’s 1937 novel, Mirages de París, which for Aedin Ni Loingsigh, is “crucial to establishing the fundamental link

¹⁵⁰ Wilder, The French Imperial Nation State, 132.
between travel and exile that informs the psychological drama of so many subsequent African accounts of journeys (to France, in particular, but also to other Western destinations).” If Nardal’s short story asks us to think about the condition of immigration we must think along these same lines to conceptualize Négritude writers “proper” in Damas, Senghor, and Césaire.

In a 1959 interview Léopold Sédar Senghor defines Négritude as inextricable from processes of immigration and its world-historical context. Significantly, he locates the Négritude movement he helped create within the context of globality, diaspora, and migration: “Nevertheless, negritude, even when defined as ‘the total of black Africa’s cultural values,’ could only offer us the beginning of a solution to our problem and not the solution itself. We could not go back to our former condition, to a negritude of the sources. We were no longer living under the Askias of the Songhai, or under Chaka the Zulu. We were twentieth-century students in Paris, and one of the realities of this twentieth-century was the awakening of national-consciousness: another, even more real, however, is the interdependence of peoples and continents.” His location in Paris via Senegal is not simply consequential but fundamental to even the most concise definition of Négritude. Furthermore, thinking migration negates earlier criticisms of Négritude’s essentialism via a supposed “return” to pre-colonial Africa given that twentieth century colonialism and world capitalism indeed create the conditions in which immigration as a phenomena and a concept arise, just as Senghor’s globality is the condition of possibility of Négritude—thus the “even more real” situation in which “peoples and continents” are interdependent.

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Given the predatory colonial relationship between the North and South as well as
patriAfrican collective resistance to colonialism (reflected in the make-up of the core
Négritude writers hailing from Africa as well as the Caribbean), Négritude was
transnational at its birth and was predicated upon the movement of people across borders,
across places. If Senghor’s first collection of poetry *Chants d’ombre* doesn’t explicitly call out
immigration in the title as Césaire’s *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* does,
Senghor’s text published in 1945 after “sixteen years of wandering”\(^{153}\) recalls his Senegalese
childhood as well as ancient Africa from the vantage point of anti-colonial black Paris. “Let
us listen to the ancients of Elissa, Exiled, like us” Senghor entreats in his poem “Night of
Sine.”\(^{154}\) And in his ode to his small childhood village Joal in Senegal he exclaims “I
remember/ Joal!... I recall the pageantry of sunsets/ where Koumba N’Doféne would cut his
royal cloak/ I remember funeral feasts steaming with blood of slaughtered herds,” here his
warm nostalgia for his lost Africa is tempered as he recalls his location in exile, “My head in
motion with/ What weary pace the length of European days where now and then/ and
orphan jazz appears sobbing, sobbing, sobbing.”\(^ {155}\) “Orphan jazz” pictures African-
American in exile in France, those who had brought with them this singularly black
American mode of musical expression. Gary Wilder I think rightly argues that “The poetic
‘return’ to Africa staged repeatedly in *Chants d’ombre* is not simply about recovering a
primordial racial identity or reconnecting to a cultural tradition after straying into Europe.
In these poems, the exiled African seeks to rejoin his native community—to immerse
himself in the aesthetics, wisdom and practices of ancient Africa—in order to reengage

\(^{154}\) According to Ellen Conroy Kennedy, Elissa is “the region in former Portuguese Guinea where Senghor’s
family originated,” as is Sine. Léopold Sédar Senghor, “Night of Sine” in *The Négritude Poets: An Anthology of
\(^{155}\) Komba N’Doféne was the King of Sine. Senghor, “Joal,” (Ibid, 131/2).
Europe on different terms: as a Negro-African and as a poet.” Senghor’s temporal doubling in terms of time and space in which ancient African aesthetics, wisdom, and practices are re-appropriated along with European elements like surrealism, black diasporic elements such as Haitian ethnography and literature, jazz, and the literature of the Harlem Renaissance are cobbled together to fashion an identity *with which* to engage with and challenge European thought and practice, namely colonialism, racism, and philosophy. This complex mode of identification and disidentification is created by the condition of its possibility in immigration.

In *Ethiopiques* Senghor’s poem “New York” finds Manhattan’s cold gray skyscrapers metonymically representing the West’s “Reason”—seemingly still perceptive as Manhattan represented and continues to represent the embodiment and location of global capital, in stark contrast with “Harlem! Harlem!... radiating like suns,” while the whole poem is set to a “trumpet solo for a jazz orchestra.” In “Prayer to the Masks” Senghor calls out global capitalism and its adjunct colonialism in which the global South is constructed as a commodity export zone including the circulation black bodies. “They call us men of cotton, coffee, oil/ They call us men of death,” where Europe and the U.S. extract surplus value by stealing resources and enslaving blacks wherein the high mortality rate creates “men of death;” yet for Senghor, on the contrary, “we are men of dance, whose feet take on new strength from stomping on the ground.” In *Chants d’Ombre* Senghor writes a poem “In Memorium” meditating upon the condition of migration and exile: “Like the forerunners of my race on the banks of the Gambia/ and Salum/ Now of the Seine, at the foot of the hills!/

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157 *The Negritude Poets*, 139/140.
158 Ibid, 133.
Yesterday was All Saints, the solemn anniversary of the sun/ In all the cemeteries there was no one to remember.” Consider in these lines the double meaning of forerunners and race, tied to migration from Africa to Europe as well as the loneliness of exile, represented by the journey from the banks of the Gambia to the banks of the Seine River in France where there are no Africans in the cemetery, “no one to remember.” Senghor again references migration from Africa to France: “From the Sine to the Seine and in my fragile veins you my unyielding blood/ Guard my dreams as you have guarded your sons, your slender limbed wanderers.” If Senghor’s sons of Africa are wanderers, then it would not be inaccurate to suggest that immigration, exile, and diaspora implicitly subtend Senghor’s early poetry as apparent above. These themes however become more explicit, and are mobilized in critique of the West, capitalism, and imperialism in Césaire’s crowning book-length, free-form, free-verse poem first published in 1938.

As its title suggests, Aimé Césaire’s *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* is predicated upon migration. Césaire imagines a return from Paris to his native Martinique as he begins writing it in 1936 on the eve of his first return home to Martinique since arriving in Paris. He uses this moment as a vehicle to poetically engage issues of the colonized under European imperialism, global capitalism, and the history of slavery from the perspective of “those who have known voyages only through uprooting.” The following famous passage can also be read in terms of immigration and colonial era-global capitalism under which the North preys upon, and is indeed constituted by, the South:

and these loins which secrete for Europe

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161 Wilder, 278.
the hearty liquor of a Gulf Stream,
and one of the two slopes of incandescence between which
the Equator tightrope-walks toward Africa.
And my non-fence island,
its brave audacity standing at the stern of this Polynesia, before it,
Guadeloupe, split in two down its dorsal line and equal in poverty to us,
Haiti where negritude rose for the first time and stated
that it believed in its humanity and the funny tail of Florida
where the strangulation of a nigger is being completed,
and Africa giganticallly caterpillarling up to the Hispánica foot of Europe,
its nakedness where death scythes widely.
And I say to myself Bordeaux and Nantes and Liverpool and New York
and San Francisco
not an inch of this world devoid of my fingerprint
and my calcaneus on the spines of skyscrapers and my filth
in the glitter of gems!
Who can boast of being better off than I?
Virginia. Tennessee. Georgia. Alabama
Monstrous putrefaction of revolts
stymied

From the Caribbean to Europe to Africa and America Césaire evokes a global economic
condition. If Senghor’s globality above is suggestive more of collectivity, both pan-African
and mixed race, Césaire speaks to the violent material relations of inter-continental
exploitation whereby, to use Walter Rodney’s formulation, Europe “underdevelopes Africa”
and the rest of the world in a dialectical relationship. Césaire takes up Claude McKay’s use
of gulf streams in *Banjo* to theorize the flow of commodities and people (immigration) under
globalization but it is again within an economic reality in which Europe drinks the “hearty
liquer” of the South. The line, Africa “caterpillarling up to Europe...” can be analyzed
looking forward to twenty-first century migritude literature not only in terms of
immigration from colony to metropole but in terms of the perils of migration—“where death
scythes widely.”

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163 *Notebook*, 15/16.
If read in this way, Césaire’s phrase will get taken up in Fatou Diome’s novel as she depicts the dangerous realities of African emigration. The man from Barbés, for example, had “seen some of his friends return to the village in crates packed with ice—killed by tetanus, an ammonia leak or crushed beneath tons of rice…” A migritude reading of Négritude must then consider the salient commentary upon migration by the founding poets, but it must also consider the ways in which philosophy itself was used to buttress the poignant poetics that they put forth. For Senghor, “Négritude’s ontology (that is, its philosophy of being), its moral law and its aesthetic, is a response to the modern humanism that European philosophers and scientists have been preparing since the end of the nineteenth century.” Césaire’s passage is suggestive of a number of important elements: it references black revolts around the world “stymied,” the American South in particular. It represents global black labor—“And I say to myself Bordeaux and Nantes and Liverpool and New York and San Francisco not an inch of this world devoid of my fingerprint”—subtended by slavery and black migration. In particular it is in the location of the global South (Haiti here) that “negritude rose for the first time and stated that it believed in its humanity,” a castigation of European humanism and structures of racial hierarchies in which non-white is tantamount to non-human.

For Senghor, Négritude “is a rooting oneself in oneself, and self-confirmation: confirmation of one’s being.” Négritude is, as Sartre has it, “the Being-in-the-World of the black man”—it considers the being not just of black Africa’s cultural values but of black

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164 The Belly of the Atlantic, 16.
people who move.\textsuperscript{167} For Senghor, Négritude is in this sense “essentially relation with
others, an opening out to the world, contact and participation with others. Because of what
it is, negritude is necessary in the world today: it is a humanism of the twentieth
century.”\textsuperscript{168} Jean-Paul Sartre explicitly ties Négritude philosophy to exile and racism: “it is
from the shock of the white culture that his Négritude has passed from immediate existence
to the state of reflection. But by the same token he has more or less ceased to live it. In
choosing to see that which he is, he has split himself in two, he no longer coincides with
himself. And reciprocally, it was because he was already exiled from himself that there was
this duty to declare himself. He begins thus by exile: the exile of the body offers a striking
exile of the exile of his heart.”\textsuperscript{169} In \textit{Black Skin, White Masks}, published at the same time as
Cheikh Hamidou Kane’s \textit{Ambiguous Adventure}, Frantz Fanon would substantially theorize
the colonized black man’s psychological alienation under colonialism wherein immigration
and exile would figure in significantly.\textsuperscript{170} Yet from these pieces of poetry and philosophy one
can tease out both a poetics and a philosophy of movement, however subtle, in the
Négritude \textit{oeuvre}. This becomes apparent not just in the second generation (and Fanon as
well I have argued), but in Kane’s francophone African novel of migration, exile, and
colonialism.

Cheikh Hamidou Kane’s 1962 \textit{Ambiguous Adventure} offers a genealogical link
between the Négritude of the 1930s and 40s and twenty-first century migritude narratives
in French. Marc Caplan, in his chapter “\textit{Nos Ancestres, les Diallobés}: Cheikh Hamidou

\textsuperscript{167} Jean-Paul Sartre “Black Orpheus” in \textit{What is Literature?} and other Essays, trans. John MacCombie
\textsuperscript{168} Ibid, 28.
\textsuperscript{169} Marc Caplan, “\textit{Nos Ancestres, les Diallobés}: Cheikh Hamidou Kane’s \textit{Ambiguous Adventure} and the
Paradoxes of Islamic Négritude,” in \textit{Paris, Capital of the Black Atlantic: Literature, Modernity, and Diaspora},
Kane’s *Ambiguous Adventure* and the Paradoxes of Islamic Négritude,” argues Kane’s “narrative is simultaneously an assessment of Négritude’s directives for the African intellectual, as well as a dramatization of the conflicts affecting traditional African elites on the eve of decolonization. Though a writer from the second generation of Négritude... Kane was nonetheless a part of the first generation of Francophone African novelists.”

For Caplan, although Hamidou Kane’s novel offers one of the most sophisticated expositions of Négritude values, it is also its “swansong” in its elegiac and existentialist tone and resolution in “ambivalence and death.” Indeed the protagonist of the novel Samba Diallo states towards the end of the novel “I confess I do not like the word [Négritude] and I don’t always understand what it would be meant to cover.”

Ambiguity does not simply come to symbolize the novel’s relationship with Négritude. It is the abiding condition of the text, as the title suggests, and further, the ambiguity of the adventure is indeed predicated upon migration. Samba Diallo hails from an aristocratic Islamic family in Senegal and is groomed to take the place of the community’s spiritual leader. However, his powerful aunt decides that a Western education in Senegal would be more beneficial to him and the community, in part, to learn the ways of the West to better fight colonialism. He then travels to France to study at a University. While at the French schools in Senegal and the university in France he becomes estranged from his family and his community’s values, yet at the same time, he never quite identifies with a French civilization that others him in various ways—so goes Samba’s “ambiguous adventure.”

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171 Caplan, 292.
172 Ibid, 306.
Just as migration writers show that the management of movement in the era of globalization is inextricable from earlier colonial forces and structures, so Samba’s migration is propelled by the “strange dawn” of colonialism. “Strange dawn! The morning of the Occident in black Africa was spangled over with smiles, with cannon shots, with shining glass beads. Those who had no history were encountering those who carried the world on their shoulders.”174 The spangled smiles with which the white civilizing mission in black Africa presents itself belies the very violence constitutive of it, the “cannon shots” paired with the medium of exploitation in the “shining glass beads.” Invoking Hegel’s racialized philosophy of history and colonial representations of Africa, Kane narrativizes the unfolding of the colonial era and, like both his Anglophone contemporaries Chinua Achebe and Ngugi wa Thiong’o, he illustrates both the material and cultural violence of colonialism. “The new school shares at the same time the characteristics of cannon and magnet. From the cannon it draws its efficiency as an arm of combat. Better than the cannon, it makes conquest permanent. The cannon compels the body, the school bewitches the soul.”175 Presaging Ngugi’s important Decolonizing the Mind Kane, like Achebe and Soyinka as well, calls out cultural colonization, yet, as his novel is subtended by immigration, Kane’s text subtly connects African diasporas to immigration as an imperial structure.

For Hamidou Kane it seems that exile predates his migration to Paris as Samba’s alienation commences at the French school in Senegal. Yet it is France, through the intimacy of racialization via his immediate contact with whites in Paris, that secures his

175 Ibid, 49.
personal exile/alienation. Samba, in a conversation with his white friend Lucienne’s family muses,

‘You know the fate of us Negro students is a little like that of a courier: at the moment of leaving home we do not know if we shall ever return.’ ‘And what does that return depend on?’ asked Pierre. ‘It may be that we shall be captured at the end of our itinerary, vanquished by our adventure itself. It suddenly occurs to us that, all along our road, we have not ceased to metamorphose ourselves, and we see ourselves as other than what we are. Sometimes the metamorphosis is not even finished. We have turned ourselves into hybrids, and there we are left. Then we hide ourselves, filled with shame.’

Here “hybridity” does not reflect a utopic postmodern usage but a painful uneasiness or “shame,” not unlike Fanon’s “psychoexistential complex” that he hopes to “destroy.” Kane seems to pick up on and then revise Senghor’s more utopic hybridity revealed in Senghor’s statement that “we are all cultural half-castes,” by imbuing it with a Césairian discontent.

If Hamidou Kane’s novel ends with ambiguity and death it does so with what I will call a black ontology of movement, one that revises not just Heidegger’s philosophy of being-in-the-world but the concept of being-towards-death as well. Interestingly, the narrator of Ambiguous Adventure makes a distinction between Africa and Europe in these terms: “...in the country of the Diallobé man is closer to death. He lives on more familiar terms with it. His existence acquires from it something like an aftermath of authenticity... here [in Paris] death becomes a stranger to me...” Death becomes a “stranger” for Samba in Europe just as, with the advent and hastening of modernity and industrialization, existence itself (and

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176 Ibid, 113. My emphasis.
177 Fanon, Black Skin White Masks, 14.
178 Senghor, Léopold Sédar Senghor: Prose and Poetry, 74.
179 Kane, Ambiguous Adventure, 149.
“authenticity,” another Heidegger term), moves further away. Kane also uses the terms “dwelling” and “being” in the ontological sense, perhaps referring to either Heidegger or Heidegger-through-Sartre and thus is continuing, along with Fanon, an ontological conversation around race, exile, colonialism, and modernity that the earlier Négritude poets had participated in. Ultimately, the consideration of the “Being-in-the-world of the black man” cannot be disentangled from migration and death as the character of “the fool,” whose own narrative of movement, migration, exile, and return, gives him a Fanonian “psychoexistential complex” so great that he cannot overcome it.

He spoke little—and that was since people had begun to call him ‘the fool.’ This man, who was an authentic son of the countryside, had left home sometime before, without even his family knowing where he was going. He had been absent a number of years, then one morning he had suddenly turned up, buttoned into his frock-coat. At the time of his return he had been very loquacious: he claimed that he had come back from the white man’s country, and that he had fought against the white men there... One day, in explaining how he had been wounded in the abdomen—in fact he did have a scar there—the man had suddenly crumpled up, then fallen, his arms on his abdomen, while a rattle of agony came from his throat.¹⁸⁰

Conscripted into what was presumably World War I “the fool” returns with what might now be called PTSD and kills Samba Diallo—who had recently returned from Paris—for refusing to pray at the grave of their religious mentor. The last few pages of the novel end with a surreal philosophical stream-of-consciousness in which exile plays no little part:

“Light and sound, form and light, all that is opposed and aggressive, blinding suns of exile, you are all forgotten dreams... Hail! I have found again the taste of my mother’s milk; my brother who has dwelt in the land of the shadows and of peace, I recognize you. Announcer of the end of exile, I salute you.”¹⁸¹

What is it, then, in Kane’s novel about exile, death, and

¹⁸⁰ Ibid, 86/7.
¹⁸¹ Ibid, 176/177.
migration in Samba’s ambiguous adventure, that allows its echoes to be drawn in and refashioned by migritude writer Fatou Diome some half-century later? The import of mapping this question speaks not just to African literature in the era of globalization and immigration, but to twenty-first century modernity itself and histories of the global South.

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**Part III: Fatou Diome’s *The Belly of the Atlantic* as Migritude**

As I note at the outset of this chapter, Fatou Diome’s *The Belly of the Atlantic*, written in French in 2003 and translated into English in 2006, is a timely novel of African migration and of the perils of emigration under and alongside global capitalism in the twenty-first century and negotiated through the locations of Senegal and France. *The Belly of the Atlantic*, like other great works of African literature—both old and new—engages the history of imperial rule and the ways in which colonialism, and its vestiges in the present, have controlled and continue to mediate the movements of people, things, and ideas. Yet *The Belly of the Atlantic* speaks to a global world, not solely a Francophone one, in which Coca-Cola, American songs, and the global phenomena of football deeply touch the small island of Niodior, Senegal, from whence its protagonists journey and tell their stories.

Ayo A. Coly points out that around the time Diome begins to write *Belly* in the late 1990s, “African capitals became stages for mass demonstrations against structural adjustment programs, and an expanding group of African thinkers set themselves to exposing the neocolonial processes of globalization.”182 For Coly, Diome’s embeddedness in the context of anti-globalization movements “feeds an anticolonial and nationalist narrative of home and migration.”183 Diome’s novel, which I will argue is not nationalist, does

183 Ibid.
necessarily speak to the destabilization of Africa by neoliberal economic policies wielded by the global North.

Manthia Diawara analyzes the 1994 currency devaluation imposed on Francophone Africa by European and American financial institutions.\textsuperscript{184} For Diawara, many in West Africa conceptualized this move as “the recolonization of Africa by international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.”\textsuperscript{185} Diawara shows how the CFA devaluation effected all walks of life in West Africa: farmers, students, factory workers, and women and children. “Imagine the farmer being told that his harvest is only worth half of its real value, or the head of a household of sixteen now having to spend for the equivalent of thirty-two;” or imagine students, who “because of the recent structural adjustment programs and the devaluation... are being treated to reduced scholarships, higher admission standards, school closures, and the lack of jobs after graduation.”\textsuperscript{186} Diawara also details how workers are negatively affected, while Folasade Iyun, in her study of Structural Adjustment Programs (SAP) in Nigeria, notes that, “A feature of SAPs is the reduction of government expenditure, particularly on social welfare programs... [as a result] mothers and children in particular become marginalized.”\textsuperscript{187} How then do these neocolonial relations between France and Africa, often catalyzing emigration, get taken up by migritude writers?

Dominic Thomas reminds us that “migration to the French metropole has been a constant feature of francophone sub-Saharan African literature from colonial times to the

\textsuperscript{185} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{186} Ibid, 105.
contemporary moment of postcoloniality.” However, it is a particular set of neocolonial economic policies that produces massive African destabilization that would by extension, produce mass migration in the 1980s and 1990s. For Thomas, “Whereas writers during the colonial era such as Ousmane Socé, Cheikh Hamidou Kane, and Bernard Dadié (all of whom Diome alludes to in her novel) were concerned with the ‘ambiguous’ nature of the cultural encounters with France... Diome extends and updates the implications and parameters of her work in order to situate her observations and critique within the contextual framework of a reflection on globalization and its impact on Africa.”

Twenty-first century Francophone African writers respond to and challenge these very shifts in cultural and economic configurations. “Even in these regions,” Diome’s narrator reflects, where “drinking water’s still a luxury, Coca-Cola brazenly comes to swell its sales figures. Have no fear, Coca-Cola will make the Sahel wheat grow!”

Building upon Coly and Thomas’s important work I argue that a close reading of Fatou Diome’s novel allows for a substantive unpacking of Dongala’s pithy phrase “from Négritude to migritude,” and begins to answer the question of the theoretical and genealogical import represented in the shifting of the prefixes “Négré” in Négritude to “migrā-” in migritude. Perhaps this linguistic evolution, for example, mirrors changes in radical lineages or traditions, from the racial identity politics of blackness in the colonial period to the critique of the codification of non-white bodies as “migrant” in our global present. Writers like Fatou Diome, on the other hand, reflect upon what stays the same, given that, though African nations have what Julius Nyerere calls “flag independence,” for many, little has changed in terms of cultural, economic, and other freedoms. Fatou Diome

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189 Ibid, 186/7.
190 *The Belly of the Atlantic*, 6
goes beyond writing what is already a wonderfully global novel replete with literary-genealogical references to a bevy of Négritude writers of generations past that considers her own ambiguous adventure as an African woman in Paris, but further, both *rehearse* and *re-fashion* Léopold Senghor's "black humanism" by 1) meditating upon the condition of what Cameroonian writer Leonora Miano terms the "Afropean"—the mixing of African and European identity and culture, also a preoccupation of Senghor’s—and, 2) penning, through her novel itself (and short stories), a kind of migrant humanism (migritude), embodied particularly well, for example, by Salie’s short new-Négritude migrant poem embedded in the novel.

Like Diome herself, the protagonists Salie, a young writer and maid in Paris, and her younger brother Madické, an obsessed football fan (“soccer” in the U.S.), hail from the tiny Senegalese island Niodior off of the West coast of Africa. Salie leaves the island, “a scrap of land stuck to the gum of the Atlantic,” to pursue her education in Dakar and then Paris where she marries a Frenchman. She continues her grueling work as a maid after her husband divorces her due to the pressures of his family who wanted “only Snow White.” She regularly spends a fortune calling her brother back in Niodior since Madické insists she update him on all the football matches he misses (there is only one television in the village and it often stubbornly refuses to cooperate). The narrative begins with Madické excitedly watching a football match in Niodior while Salie, in France, reflects upon leaving the island: “It’s nearly ten years since I left the shade of the coconut palms. Pounding the asphalt, my imprisoned feet recall their former liberty, the caress of the warm sand, being nipped by crabs and the little thorn pricks that remind you there’s life even in the body’s

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191 The term “Afropean” is Leonora Miano’s, See *Afropean Soul et autres Nouvelles.*
192 *The Belly of the Atlantic*, 2.
forgotten extremities. I tread on European ground, my feet sculpted by African earth.”

This passage beginning the novel is subtended by movement—the practice of walking—but it also suggests that the place within which one moves (and the in-between of those spaces) sculpts not only movement but the way we move, just as for Fanon, the language we speak not only determines the words we say but how we think.

Like the spaces of Africa and later Europe, which mold Salie’s identity, the materiality of the sand and concrete mediate her “body’s forgotten extremities.” Salie’s positional in-betweenness, what Ayo Coly calls her “nomadic homelessness,” shapes Diome’s migrant narrative. Salie is statedly “always in exile, with roots everywhere, I’m at home where Africa and Europe put aside their pride and are content to join together: in my writing, which is rich with the fusion they’ve bequeathed me.” This fusion is best illustrated through her “hybrid” literary upbringing under the exiled Marxist schoolteacher in Niodior, Ndétare, who takes pity on Salie and becomes her mentor as she is orphaned and subsequently raised by her grandmother. “I owe him Descartes, I owe him Montesquieu, I owe him Victor Hugo, I owe him Molière, I owe him Balzac, I owe him Marx, I owe him Dostoevsky, I owe him Hemingway, I owe him Léopold Sédar Senghor, I owe him Aimé Césaire, I owe him Simone de Beauvoir, Marguerite Yourcenar, Miriama Bâ and the rest... I owe him in short my ambiguous adventure.” Ambiguous Adventure references Senegalese author Cheikh Hamidou Kane’s novel of the same name about the very alienating fusion of African and French culture. Further, in the above passage two-thirds of the Négritude poets are named, in addition to one of the Godmothers of feminist

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194 Ibid, 2/3.
195 Black Skin White Masks, 18.
196 The Pull of Postcolonial Nationhood, 122.
197 Belly, 127.
198 Ibid, 41.
African literature in Miriama Bâ who also hails from Senegal. The French and African philosophical and literary traditions join German, American, and Russian greats in uneasy yet promising company.

Salie’s intellectual genealogy echoes a sort of Senghorian black humanism, predicated not upon racial exclusion or isolation but on African and European interconnectedness. In 1956 Senghor argues that “we are all cultural half-castes,” and suggests that “we are now living the final stage of world unification through interdependence. Thus, though our humanism must have West African man as its major objective, it cannot without peril, end with West Africa, not even with all of Africa. An effective humanism must be open... I dare say, pan-humanism—a humanism that includes all men on the dual basis of their contribution and their comprehension.” For Souleymane Bachir Diange, “Negritude is not the ideology of separated identities that, despite his protestations, many critics of Senghor have taken it to be. Hybridity is always at work deconstructing his essentialist assertions and the Senghorian obsession with mixture is a Penelope ceaselessly making sure to undo fixed differences: ‘the humanism of hybridity’ could very well have been one of the poet’s slogans.” And like Blyden before him and Mbembe after, Senghor thinks world interdependence: “Once again it is a matter of decolonizing and developing beyond the value of négritude our civilization and our African personality. For the very being of being is to persevere in one’s being... It must be the contribution from us, the peoples of sub-Saharan Africa, to the growth of Africanity, and beyond that, to the building of the Civilization of the Universal.” Though Senghor

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199 Senghor, Prose and Poetry, 74.
202 Léopold Sédar Senghor: Prose and Poetry, 97.
castigates colonialism and the West elsewhere, his rhetoric here is more utopic and futural
then say, Kane after him, as we saw above (note however that Senghor does reference the
nineteenth century godfather of pan-Africanism E. W. Blyden’s concept of “African
personality”). Salie similarly utters a sort of utopic humanism in *The Belly of the Atlantic.*
“I’m at home where Africa and Europe put aside their pride and are content to join
together.”203 This black humanist futurity exists in uncomfortable tension alongside the
novel’s portrayal of the violence of dispersal and the perils of emigration within which
Diome embeds her critique of the neocolonial and neoliberal globalization of the West, and
its not-so-distant colonial past.

In addition to the central stories of the two main protagonists in the novel (Salie and
Madické) there are several side stories (set in the late twentieth and early twenty-first
century), each telling the story of an African who migrates in one way or another, usually
ending badly. Furthermore, Diome deconstructs the conventional *reasons* to migrate,
downplaying representations of Africans as impoverished and starving looking to fulfill
their dreams in the various paradises of the North (a leftover colonial myth). It is rather *les
mirages* of Paris and their function as discursive apparatuses—dialectically underwriting
material exploitation of the South by the global North—that Diome and her protagonist
Salie take to task. The young football fan Madické, for example, his peers, and others in the
village fall prey to *mirages de Paris.*

France is tantamount to paradise for Madické, (meaning at the very least that his
sister must watch all the football matches he misses): “In paradise, you don’t struggle, you
don’t fall ill, you don’t ask questions: it’s enough to be alive, you can afford everything you
desire, including the luxury of time, and that automatically means you’re available [for

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203 *Belly,* 127.
football on TV]. As Salie struggles to pay rent, work a decidedly unglamorous job, write (which is her true passion), study, and keep up with football matches for her brother, her reality has a much different hue than his imagined France. “It was no use telling Madické that as a cleaning woman my survival depended on the number of floor cloths I got through, [because] the Third World can’t see Europe’s wounds… For Madické, living in a developed country was in itself a huge advantage I had over him, he with the family and the tropical sun. How could I have made him understand the loneliness of exile, my fight for survival and the permanent effort my studies demanded?” Here Salie not only refers to a colonial “illusion” or mirage ‘third worlders’ subscribe to about France, but also to her job as a maid to a French couple, picturing a reality in which demeaning jobs are reserved for black (women) immigrants (see Nardal’s “In Exile”).

Interestingly, Senegalese filmmaker and author Ousmane Sembene’s 1966 film Le Noir de... (Black Girl) is an incisive critique of just such a condition, as young protagonist Diouana labors away for her liberal white French employers, themselves clinging to colonial era racial hierarchies in the just post-independence era of the 1960s. Her interior monologue would echo in Diome’s novel as Diouana in the film muses, “back in Dakar they must be saying Diouana must be happy in France. She has a good life... But France for me is the kitchen, bathroom, living room, and my bedroom. Did the mistress bring me here to shut me in?” And then later, before she ends up committing suicide, Diouana laments, “I am a prisoner here. I know no one here. That is why I am their slave” (Le Noir de). Diouana’s voice-over, along with Sembene’s wonderful shots and mis-en-scene, give us a

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204 Ibid, 26.
205 Ibid.
206 Le Noir de, Ousmane Sembéne, Film, France and Senegal, Filmi Domirev and Les Actualités Françaises, 1966.
clue as to the perspective of those “back in Dakar,” who hold fast to a colonial mythology of metropolitan France, as well as the jolting view of the actual reality of the black immigrant condition—a technique that Diome both borrows from Sembene and refashions within her twenty-first century narrative.

For example, as the narrative progresses in *The Belly of the Atlantic* Salie warns Madické that papers, passports, residency cards, checkpoints, and border control all control or shape the migrant and her movement in one way or another. Further, “illegal” immigration can be fatal as we see in Moussa’s story. Salie argues with Madické here: “I’m not trying to stop you but to warn you. If you turn up without papers, you’re going to run into serious problems and have a miserable existence in France.” Madické stubbornly responds, however, that “Hey we’re hard workers, we are! Aren’t we guys?”… needlessly urging on his allies, who were already on a war footing. ‘We’re capable of finding jobs and holding onto them like real men. You managed it, and you’re only a girl’.” Salie’s following response to Madické’s gendered dismissal of her admonition is something of a migritude manifesto in miniature, a statement not only addressing the perils of immigration but a challenge to those, like Madické and his starry-eyed friends, driven by survival, who firmly hold onto the myth of the “first” world.

You’re wrong. In the past, just after the Second World War, the French welcomed lots of people with open arms because they needed workers to rebuild the country. They hired immigrants from all over the place who agreed to go and risk their lives down the coal mines to escape poverty... Successive waves of African immigrants have all ended up in slums. They dream nostalgically of an unlikely return to their homeland, a land which, to be honest, worries them more than it attracts them because its changed while they’ve been away, and when they do go back for rare holidays they feel like foreigners. Their children, who’ve grown up with the refrain ‘Liberty, Equality,
Fraternity’, no longer have any illusions once they realize, after a long battle, that their hard-won naturalization doesn’t improve their opportunities... In Europe, my brothers, you’re black first, citizens incidentally, outsiders permanently, and that’s certainly not written in the constitution, but some can read it on your skin.²⁰⁹

Salie first references the second post-World-War II diaspora in which people from former colonies in Africa, the Caribbean, India, and elsewhere migrated to the “mother country.” Some who fought in the war alongside their white brethren believed (mistakenly) that for their service decent treatment in Northern metropoles would follow.²¹⁰ Some came to help re-build Europe as jobs were opening up, and as Ashley Dawson notes in the British context, “as a continuation of their wartime sacrifice.”²¹¹ However, Dawson continues, “despite the powerful fiction of British subjecthood, which suggested that all the members of the empire were equal in the eyes of the reigning king or queen, imperial power was based on a firm distinction between colonial metropolis and colonized periphery. Subjecthood and citizenship were distinct and uneven categories.”²¹² So it was in the French context. The black migrants from Senegal in France, as Salie notes above, often ended up in “slums” or banlieues and were subject to racism—“my brothers, you’re black first.” And as the passage describes above, a return home is just as “unlikely” and fraught with contradictions as European hospitality.

“Liberté, Egalité, Fraternité,” France’s universalist catch-phrase, an “illusion” for Salie, is shown to encompass its opposite both historically—slavery—and contemporarily—the exclusion of blacks, immigrants, and others at the same moment France targets them

²⁰⁹ Ibid, 123/124.
²¹¹ Ibid.
²¹² Ibid, 4.
with, as Mabanckou puts it, “complex and draconian laws.” Ndétare, in the same conversation, furthermore, deconstructs another liberal yet contemporary neoliberal catchphrase in France: “Blacks, Blancs, Beurs—Blacks, Whites and Arabs—is nothing more than a slogan stuck on their international showcase, like a bad Benetton ad... if French society were truly integrated, they wouldn’t need to invent a slogan.” Ndétare remarks here upon France’s World Cup win in 1998, its team including football stars of Algerian immigrant parents (Zinedine Zidane) and an immigrant from the Caribbean (Lilian Thuram). This multi-racial team was then used to laud supposed French multicultural equality, liberty, and brotherhood. Haby Assevero lucidly describes this context: “When France won the World Cup in 1998 on their home soil it wasn’t just a sporting achievement, it was a social phenomenon... This team, they told us, was the ultimate proof that integration had been a success. There was nothing, they said, that prevented the children of immigrants succeeding in French society. ‘Black, Blanc, Beur’ was the slogan.” However, for Assevero, and Ndétare in the novel as well, “integration in France, if it ever truly happened, was most definitely not the resounding success people would have you believe. Those same young people that look up to Zidane and other French soccer players, are the ones burning cars in suburbs of France’s major cities as we speak. Their dream is to be like Zidane but their every-day reality is much harsher. They live in slums, they are undereducated and/or unemployed and the future looks bleak.” Thus “Black, Blanc, Beur” joins “Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité” on a long list of rhetorically seductive European slogans.

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213 Mabanckou, Blue, White, Red, 107. Also see the 2005 Clichy-DuBois protests in France regarding treatment of black and immigrant communities.
214 Belly, 125.
216 Ibid.
dating back to the colonial era that, in this case, create Nardal’s *mirage of Paris* used to justify Northern control while contributing a bait and switch model of migration—hiding the peril with the lacquer of paradise.

Moussa’s tale is another important narrative of African migration in *The Belly of the Atlantic* that uses the subject of football to make an argument about Franco-African relations and immigration. That our narrator begins Moussa’s tale with “All that remained of Moussa was a yellowed photo, sent from France” suggests that this story, like the man from Barbés and Salie’s, does not conform to the narrative of France as paradise and the colonial myth. Moussa is described as a promising football prospect, a village boy made good by his athleticism, ready to make the big journey to Paris, possibly to become a star athlete. He is targeted by a French scout (who turns out to be unscrupulous) and, rather than a rags-to-riches tale, Moussa sees the realities of the system from inside, and his tale, like Samba’s ambiguous adventure, ends in death. His perspective from within Paris shatters the image of Paris he had consumed, like Coca-Cola, in Niodior. Further, Moussa’s narrative deconstructs the workings of the global football racket.

Moussa was incensed at the buying and selling of players, and he’d end up ranting at the phenomenal transfer sums: Real Madrid bought that kid for how many million French francs? Much as he enjoyed this calculation, imagining himself as the object of such a transaction, he didn’t like the process, which smacked of slavery. But he had no choice: he was a part of this sporting cattle market now. Moussa knew that if he wasn’t taken on by the club backing him, he’d have to reimburse Sauveur himself for the expenses he’d incurred: the plane ticket, bribes, accommodation costs, training, etc.

This often meant working execrable jobs under-the-table in which his meager salary would be taken by his agent, Sauveur. Moussa’s narrative also challenges the notion of “Black,

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217 *Belly*, 63.
218 Ibid, 65.
Blanc, Beur” that Ndétare critiques above, detailing the experience of racism in Paris. His fellow “teammates” shout “‘Hey! Darkie! Pass! Come on! Pass the ball, it’s not a coconut!”219

Both Moussa, the man from Barbès, and Salie negotiate the various ways in which racism is mobilized against immigrants in France, as encapsulated in Salie’s warning “you’re black first” and citizens only “incidentally.”

On April 27th 2014 Al Jazeera America posts on an incident symptomatic of Europe’s continued structural racism in the realm of football. Eliot Ross and Sean Jacobs report that “when a spectator threw a banana [during a match] at the Brazilian footballer as a racist insult, he quickly picked it up, peeled it and ate it” and that, “of course we should all applaud Barcelona’s flying fullback, Dani Alves, for his inspiring protest action during a Spanish league match Sunday.”220 However, this ugly gesture does not represent an isolated incident limited to one individual but rather an abiding condition in Europe. For Ross and Jacobs, it reflects “the deep-rooted racism that persists across European societies, on the institutions and authorities whose years of lip service have so dismally failed to protect black players and on all those in the game, as in society, who stand silent and thus complicit.”221 So it is with Mario Balotelli in Italy. Moussa’s tale in The Belly of the Atlantic parallels the treatment of Alves, showing the “persistent racism” subtending European society—yet Moussa isn’t a football star and thus certainly doesn’t make the news, like so many other African hopefuls, he therefore falls through the cracks and ends up dead in the Atlantic. And so Salie grapples with her brother Madické’s dream to become a football star like his hero, Maldini, knowing the reality beneath the lacquer for African immigrants.

219 Ibid, 66.
221 Ibid.
The man from Barbés, of an older generation of Senegalese migrants, both subscribes to and reproduces the mirage of Paris. He had “seen some of his friends return to the village in crates packed with ice—killed by tetanus, an ammonia leak or crushed beneath tons of rice—but he’d kept going.”222 In other words, he sees clearly an African migration in which “death scythes widely,” to use Césaire’s phrase, but he represses these facts so that, through the reproduction of the Parisian colonial and neocolonial myth, his own legacy and social capital might be reproduced as he accumulates relative wealth by Niodior standards—“that television was there in his huge house as a sign of his success.”223

Upon his return from his seventh trip abroad, “the man from Barbés built a well-stocked shop at the entrance of his house and moved to the village for good. As the symbol of successful emigration, his advice was now sought after on every matter...”224 However, “his flood of tales” about Paris-as-paradise that he recites for the young football fans of the island, held rapt by his tales and habitus, “never hinted at the wretched existence he’d led in France. How could he, scepter in hand, have admitted that in the beginning he’d hung out in metro entrances, picked pockets to relieve his hunger, begged, only survived the winter thanks to Salvation Army before finding a squat with his companions in misery?... As a perpetually illegal immigrant, he later travelled the length and breadth of France at the beck and call of less than scrupulous employers, equipped with a false residency permit, a photocopy of a friend and accomplice’s residency card.”225 The man from Barbés, as he is called (Barbés being a primarily African and North African Parisian arrondisment populated by migrant communities) heavily edits his own narrative, refusing to

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222 Ibid, 16.
223 Ibid, 15.
224 Ibid, 18.
225 Ibid, 59.
acknowledge the “wretchedness” of the black immigrant experience. Interestingly, in Mabanckou’s novel *Blue White Red*, this editing is used to exploit recent migrants in Paris to benefit more seasoned migrants, who become inured to the immigrant condition, essentially enacting a transference of violence beginning with France’s treatment of immigrants and passing it along to newer immigrants in an ugly cycle of manipulation and survival.

After regaling the boys with his tales the man from Barbés retires to his bedroom. The following passage suggests that, in a sort of picture of Dorian Gray-esque way, the longer he represses the brutality of Paris and hides from consciousness his actual fraught personal history (and thus “consolidating his status”), the more pained and alienated becomes his soul: “Biting the inside of his cheek, the man from Barbés threw himself into bed, relieved that once again he’d succeeded in preserving, even consolidating, his status. He’d been a *nigger in Paris*, and as soon as he’d returned he’d set about sustaining the illusions that gave him an aura of success.”

(It is important to note here that the original French in Diome’s passage is “Il avait été *un négre à Paris* et s’était mis, dés son retour, à entretenir les mirages…” and though in the latter phrase *mirage* was translated as “illusions” in the English edition it is clearly a reference to Soce’s *Mirages de Paris* or perhaps even Nardal’s short story before that: and while *un négre à Paris* refers to Bernard Dadie’s *Un Négre à Paris*, translated in English *An “African” in Paris*, mitigating the valences of *négre*, Ros Schwartz and Lulu Norman though, translate *négre* as “nigger” in the English version of *The Belly of the Atlantic*, keeping the term’s politicized and violent history).

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226 Ibid, 58/59. Author’s emphases.
227 *Le Ventre de l’Atlantique*, 88. Author’s emphases.
At night the man from Barbés fails to keep his memories of Parisian realities at bay with as much success as he has with an audience during the day. He remembers that as a night watchman in a big supermarket, he’d wander the aisles, salivating at the sight of goods that were beyond his reach. To avenge his frustration, he’d sniff out the thief among those fellow travelers he considered so arrogant as to do their shopping like whites, or too poor to be honest. Sometimes, North African or African prey would be gripped in his hawk-like talons, ensuring his boss’s approval. His victims eventually came to understand that the foreigner’s worst enemy isn’t the native racist, that kinship doesn’t guarantee solidarity. As his piece of mind grew, a gang from his estate decided to make him pay for his devotion to the rich: he left two teeth on the pavement.  

The man from Barbés in the above passage represents the “successfully” assimilated immigrant who identifies with colonial whites against his fellow black travelers, a crime for which he is relieved of two pearly whites. In the end, the man from Barbés does “successfully” emigrate and return to Niodior from Paris since he accumulates a house, a television, and attendant prestige. However Diome problematizes this neoliberal notion of success, itself striated with the contradictions of the failures of African migration within a global capitalism helmed by the States and transnational corporations of the North.

Yet the novel also shows that in this era of globalization the techniques of control used to manage and codify non-white bodies are as varied as they are manifest. Again, as Dominic Thomas reminds us, “whereas protagonists of colonial-era texts navigated their way through France primarily for the purpose of education and travel, those in contemporary novels experience detention centers, are faced with legal procedural issues, are often categorized as illegal, clandestine, or undocumented.” In Moussa’s experience, for example, “one morning a policeman arrived, smiling broadly, and threw an official paper

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228 Ibid, 60.
229 Black France, 4.
at him with a flourish: ‘there you go, your invitation!’ It was an IFQ, an invitation to quit
France. Twelve hours later an aeroplane spat him out on the tarmac at Dakar airport.”

Salie is also met with repressive techniques managing the movement of non-white bodies as
we saw earlier. Upon her “arrival in France, before being issued with my residency permit,
I’d been called into the International Immigration Office for a full X-ray. Free of scabies and
pustules and not harboring any shameful diseases, I’d been sent, along with a bill for 320
francs, a medical certificate, which stated: fulfils the requisite health conditions for
authorization to reside in France.”

Representative of French neocolonial biopower, as
Salie’s body itself, as well as her movement, is integrated into a dynamic system of control,
this passage also alludes to the fact that bodily controls have proliferated rather than
decreased from the colonial period in to the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

As migritude writers generally show, there is no salutary return to Africa. For Salie
returning is the same as leaving, “The urge to return to the source is irresistible, for it’s
reassuring to think that life is easier to grasp in the place where it puts down its roots. And
yet, for me, returning is the same as leaving. I go home as a tourist in my own country, for I
have become the other for the people I continue to call my family.” Salie is othered at the
same time she is held accountable for something like remittances upon return. “Despite the
whispering, [villagers would] lower themselves to extract money or a T-shirt from me in the
name of a custom—one that prevents many poorer migrants coming home for the
holidays—which has it that the returning migrant must bring presents, presents whose
values is calculated by how far you’ve come and your relation to the recipient.”

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230 Belly, 73.
231 Ibid, 153.
232 Ibid, 116. Diome’s emphasis.
233 Ibid, 38.
Moussa this custom seals the tragedy of immigration. His fate is far worse than Salie’s or the man from Barbés. Upon returning, Moussa is shunned by his family, and by extension his village, as he is branded a failure—he does not enrich the village either economically or symbolically; those who have adopted the France-as-paradise myth expect the returned to uplift their families as well as the community. The ostracization he is met with leads him to ultimately commit suicide by drowning himself in the belly of the Atlantic. “The fisherman had caught Moussa’s inert body in their nets. Even the Atlantic can’t digest all that the earth throws up.”234 “Nor could Ndétare’s memory absorb Moussa’s adventure. It stuck in his throat every time his protégés, pleading their passion for football, let themselves be blinded by the red, white and blue chimera… ‘Be careful, my boys’ he’d conclude. ‘Go and watch that upstart’s TV, but please don’t listen to the nonsense he spouts. France is not paradise. Don’t get caught in the net of emigration. Remember, Moussa was your brother, and you know as well as I do what happened to him.”235 Ndétare presents a much different, and less self-interested, story of migration to the young boys than does the man from Barbés. Diome provides a sophisticated literary critique of the “net of emigration” as “net,” here, more than a poetic continuation of the titular metaphor, indicates the interwoven techniques of power managing, re-educating, and interdicting black movement in ultimately fatal ways.

For Diome these stories are not necessarily exclusive to the Senegal-France relationship, but are global. The United States is invoked, for example, when an extended family member, after having been deported back to Senegal, literally sings the U.S.’s praises: “Everything you want, you’ve got it!” A cousin who’d been deported from the USA

234 Ibid, 77.
235 Ibid.
never stopped listening to that song and translated it for everyone who wanted to hear: where there’s a will there’s a way,” he would say.\textsuperscript{236} Interestingly, Diome keeps the English in her use of Roy Orbison’s American original, itself misremembered by the nameless cousin (the original is “Anything you want—you got it”). Orbison’s song is of course not about the American Dream or a panegyric about the riches of Americans or those who immigrate there, but a fairly clichéd love song about a man who would give his paramour anything to win her love. This moment of meaning lost-in-translation is suggestive of the ways in which ideology \textit{interpellates} its subjects, coloring, even changing, original meaning. In this case Orbison’s love song becomes a metonym not for the country of its origin but the \textit{idea} of American supremacy and excess. So there is also a myth of the United States as a “paradise” for immigrants (this myth is of course is bound up with the U.S.’s own creation story). Thus the novel speaks to a nationally grounded yet \textit{global} system, or what Salie calls “the kingdom of capitalism which stretches into the shade of the coconut trees.”\textsuperscript{237}

There are moments throughout the novel, woven in-between migrants’ narratives, in which Salie-as-narrator takes on this global system: “All those legions of third-world areas colored red on the map, soon decimated by AIDS, dysentery, malaria and the economic bazookas aimed at us from the west. Devaluation. Demolition of our currency, of our future – of our lives, pure and simple! On the scales of globalization, the head of a third-world child weighs less than a hamburger.”\textsuperscript{238} Salie, specifically referencing the CFA devaluation discussed earlier as one of many “economic bazookas,” also discloses, the global guns of the IMF, World Bank, and Structural Adjustment policies that were being protested, and continue to be critiqued, since Diome began writing the novel. She also reproduces, whether

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Ibid, 12.
\item Ibid, 140.
\item Ibid, 130.
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as a critique or not, the CNN-Western-Media preoccupation with Africa as “AIDS, dysentery, malaria,”-ridden and war torn. The difference is Diome engages with histories and economic contexts and doesn’t solely rely on Afro-pessimistic narratives pre-packaged for white liberal consumption.

Salie, for example, takes on the problems with Aid. “Listening to the news, I realize that religious hypocrites are invading the country, opening institutes under cover of humanitarian aid and building Arab schools in remote parts of the country-side so they can spread their doctrine... Naturally, the state sees no harm in it and uses the excuse of progress to avoid resolving the problem. As with colonization, by the time we wake up, it’ll be too late, the damage will already be done.”239 Again, her critique of the problems connected to globalization cannot be disentangled from their colonial past, which Diome mentions here. Finally, she introduces the problem of Western tourism as an apparatus of global capitalism, which, far from creating jobs and benefitting “natives,” at best bequeaths only “a bone for the poor.” At a resort town in Senegal Salie muses, “…third-world hotels are only for the tourist’s benefit... [They] stand there, hideous on their gilt pedestals. As the state is so keen for revenue from tourism, it lets foreign investors take over the most beautiful stretches of coast and pay their staff peanuts. Steak for the powerful, the bone for the poor! So be it in the kingdom of capitalism which stretches into the shade of the coconut trees.”240 The owners of the means of production (white and European or American) exploit a native workforce held at the bottom rung of the global economic ladder and “pay their staff with peanuts,” thus reproducing that “kingdom of capitalism”—perhaps a more apt term

239 Ibid, 132.
240 Ibid, 140.
than globalization since upward economic mobility for “third world” countries and their populations is feudal and thus futile.

It is important for Diome, who extends a line of Senegalese feminist writers like Miriama Bâ and Ken Bugul, that the kingdom is *gendered*. Diome’s migritude text is always already feminist. In the following passage Salie relates her discomfort at what she considers the patriarchy of tradition in Niodior. “…Men don’t like details, and [Madické], even as a kid, had it drummed into him that he must behave like a man. He’s been taught to say ‘Ow!’, to grit his teeth, not to cry when he’s hurt or afraid. As a reward for the courage he had to show in all circumstances, a throne had been built for him high above the female sex… I’m only a moderate feminist, but really, that’s going to far.”\(^{241}\) I can’t help but think back to the ways in which Chinua Achebe both represents and critiques patriarchal gender roles in *Things Fall Apart*. In a particularly insightful passage he exposes the violence associated with masculinity while providing an alternative to that violence in the character of Nwoye, a male with an uneasy relationship to received masculinity. “Nwoye knew that it was right to be masculine and to be violent, but somehow he still preferred the stories that his mother used to tell.”\(^{242}\) Nwoye, then, understands his societal role as a male but hesitates to "perform" gender in that he prefers the opposite, represented in his mother’s tales. For Salie, only a “moderate” feminist—perhaps a mode of distancing herself from white middle-class feminism—such roles “go too far.”

Sankéle’s story, for instance—also a story of migration—is one catalyzed by the violence of patriarchy. She is a young woman who, on the verge of being forced by her father into an unwanted arranged marriage that would economically and socially benefit

\(^{241}\) Ibid, 24.

\(^{242}\) Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 53.
the father, has an affair with her true love, a younger Ndétare with whom she has a child. Ndétare, who would go on to become Salie’s mentor, is unacceptable to the community as he is a “foreigner” (he comes from mainland Senegal), and feels exiled in the village. “As an unmarried mother, [Sankéle] was denigrated, then banished from the community, and finally exiled herself with her son to the city. Some say she worked as a maid; others imagined a less respectable activity.”

For Ayo Coly “The story of Sankéle who rebels her arranged marriage and is forced into exile by her father offers a symbolic frame for Salie’s emigration.” We will remember that for Salie, returning home is the “same as leaving” as she feels exiled at home. Her language, demeanor, education, and privilege already mark her as more French than the villagers and since she was already an orphan as a child to begin with, home in this sense was never home to begin with. Coly argues that Diome uses gender to revise her “narrative of home dictated by [her] antiglobalization agenda.”

I suggest that most migritude novels are feminist in the first place (see authors like Nadifa Mohamed, Shailja Patel, Calixthe Beyala, Leonora Miano, Marie N’Dayie, Diome herself as well as male authors such as Abdourahman Waberi, Alain Mabanckou,Diriye Ousman and others, for example). Take Sankéle’s narrative of resistance for example: “Since diplomacy is fine-tuned between a woman’s thighs, declarations of war may also issue from there. Sankéle knew this. To become an unmarried mother was the most radical way to reduce her father’s matrimonial strategy to dust.” Echoing Gayle Rubin’s theory of the patriarchal traffic in women, Diome adds a radical (and tragic) level of resistance to traditional patriarchy but within a global configuration. In other words, Sankéle refuses to

243 Ibid, 35.
244 The Pull of Postcolonial Nationhood, 112.
245 Ibid, 111.
246 Belly, 88. My emphasis.
relinquish her own freedom simply because, by accident of birth, she was not born with a “throne” waiting for her as would a male child. Sankélé’s rebellion is radical because everything is on the line including home itself.

Nearing the end of the novel Salie takes a break from “home” and travels to the Petite Côte of M’bour just South of Dakar (which is where she meditates upon tourism and globalization, as above). As she hears the rhythms of a Senegalese band she muses, “No daughter of Africa can remain indifferent to the sound of the tom-tom, even after long years of absence.” Earlier on she mentions that immigration officers in France had “seen me wearing Senghor’s Negritude on my face and were unsure which role I would play in Les Misérables.” These two references to Négritude in the novel by a “daughter of Africa,” first implied and then named, answer in some ways, the above question. Diome’s gendered revision of home is also a revision of Négritude’s “black humanism” as inaugurated by Senghor within what is a different context in time and space among a different cohort of writers (largely women) who narrate immigration precisely because the management of immigration is the mechanism of control that in our twenty-first century allows us to figure and figure-out modernity, a modernity that, for Ndétare has “left us high and dry.” It’s not so much as a temporal leaving that would allow for a more precise picture of modernity and home (though it does seem apt to pair this “leaving” with Salie’s description of the economic “bazookas” “aimed’ directly at the global South from the “ahead” of the West), but rather something like a “hopping over,” to paraphrase the words of James Ferguson, that incisively depicts the economic and cultural configurations that Diome challenges with her migrant narrative of movement.

247 Ibid, 137.
248 Ibid, 153.
249 Ibid, 126.
In his article “Seeing Like an Oil Company: Space, Security, and Global Capital in Neoliberal Africa” Ferguson confronts the seeming contradiction that Africa is so rich in resources (oil, for one) yet so poor in actual wealth. Ferguson smartly points out that this contradiction is explained by looking at the way global capital moves (we will remember Salie’s opening refrain about walking in Africa and Europe and that place shapes movement itself). “It is worth noting that the movement of capital that is entailed in such enterprises [large multinational corporations and their African partners] is ‘global’ in the sense that it crosses the globe, but it does not encompass or cover contiguous geographic space. The movements of capital cross national borders, but they jump point to point, and huge areas are simple bypassed.”

Capital then is by no means evenly disseminated: just as Salie’s feet don’t land everywhere she walks, capital only lands in certain places, usually where and when it benefits elites. Ferguson notes, for example, that “the Angolan government receives something on order of $5 billion in oil revenue each year [yet] very little of the oil wealth even enters the wider society.” Thus Ndétare’s deceivingly simple yet profound “modernity’s left us high and dry,” can be rephrased—it simply hops over us, at most paying “peanuts” to non-elite populations.

Salie is not just a “daughter of Africa”—or of Senghor even—but is also in some ways a daughter of Europe, as we saw. By that simple fact, home and movement are revised as such by: 1) the highly asymmetrical movements of people and movements of capital, 2) by its imbrication in the production of not simply gender but the construction and reproduction of the non-white body moving across space itself. We will remember Alys Eve Weinbaum’s concept of the “race/reproduction bind” and that it is in and through both the material and

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251 Ibid, 378.
figural black women’s body that control (colonial and neocolonial for our purposes) is manifested and Ashley Dawson’s study of the post-World War II black British context: “the lingering, eugenically tinged construction of national identity in postwar Britain ensured that black maternity would be represented as irreconcilable with national belonging.” If we remember Salie’s biological examination at state level—“I’d been called into the International Immigration Office for a full X-ray”—as well as her white ex-husband’s family desiring only “Snow White,” thereby reproducing conventional (white) notions of French belonging, we are led by Diome’s sophisticated narrative to formulate the following argument: it is through the black immigrant woman’s body specifically that technologies of power managing movement culminate in sustaining both notions of national belonging and global hierarchical figurations. Perhaps this is why Salie chooses to foreground her own cultural hybridity, as she identifies as an African-European fusion, and chooses furthermore (regardless of its unhappy ending) an interracial spouse. In this way she refashions a Senghorian black humanism of the Négritude era into the literary-historical context of migritude in the era of globalization.

In closing this chapter on *The Belly of the Atlantic* I offer a few remarks on Salie’s migritude (or new-Négritude) poem nearing the end of the novel.

*Shut in, cooped up,*
*Captives of a land once blessed,*
*Hunger our only comfort,*

*Passports, Permits, Visas*
*And endless red tape,*
*The new chains of Slavery.*

*Bank branch, account number,*
*Address, ethnic origin,*
*The fabric of modern apartheid,*

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Perennial mother Africa suckles us

The west fuels our desires
And is deaf to our hungry cries.

African globalization, generation
Enticed, then sifted, dumped, ejected, wounded.
We the unwitting travelers.

The speaker of this poem represents a voice in the diaspora much like Diome’s narrated cast of Senegalese migrants in France such as Salie, Moussa, and the man from Barbés, each “shut in” and “cooped up,” eternally hungry while struggling to get ahead. Yet these lines also reference earlier characters in the Franco-African migrant tradition, like Elisa in “In Exile,” Samba in Ambiguous Adventure, or Diouana in Sembene’s film Black Girl, and as such, they delineate black movement from Négritude to migritude. But just as earlier generations of black writers speak to their own colonial and postcolonial context, Salie here speaks to new and proliferating technologies controlling movement as she phenomenologically and literally examines “passports,” “visas,” “permits,” and the “endless red tape” re-educating African migration. It is not inaccurate for Salie to name this new era under global capitalism a “modern Apartheid.” As Achille Mbembe argues, “Europe has developed over the last 25 years or so an attitude of containment in the sense that the biggest preoccupation has been to make sure that Africans stay where they are,” and that—as Salie also appears to suggest—“the fixation with the question of immigration has jeopardized to a large extent the development of more dynamic relations between Africa and Europe.”

In this newer global era of surveillance and management of black bodies, the tracking of “account numbers,” and “bank branch[es]” are connected to “ethnic origin,”

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253 The Belly of the Atlantic, 154.
as the placement of words in the third stanza suggest, perhaps anticipating Weinbaum’s race/reproduction bind. In the phrase nearing the end of the poem “African globalization, generation,” the word “generation” is both suggestive of genealogy (successive generations of family or literary movements), but also of biological reproduction, itself shackled to the “new chains of slavery.”

The novel ends with Madické opening up a small shop on the island, as Salie has saved up enough money to send him. He chooses, ultimately, not to migrate to France. Coly deems the narrative then a “nationalist narrative of home” as he opts to stay in and contribute to the Island community. However, given Ndétare’s narrative (a Senegalese man not from Niodior who is not accepted in Niodior), as well as Salie’s stated “hybrid” or migrant humanism “fusing” Africa and Europe, I do not call the narrative “nationalist” as such. The island of Niodior after all is both a part of Senegal and not. *The Belly of the Atlantic* is both African and highly local, insofar as it embodies both “Africa’s” relationship to France and the world, as well as the “tiny island” of Niodior, which is again, not a nation. Given that the novel is predicated so fundamentally upon the *condition* and *structures* of movement and migration, it is, rather, about the “*condition d’immigrés*.” So the griot of Salie’s poem, perhaps channeling the voice of migrant African humanism, muses about those who would leave Africa, ending the poem, “perennial mother Africa suckles us/ We the unwitting travelers.”

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255 Ibid. Emphasis mine.
256 *Belly*, 154.
Chapter Two

Home to Hargeisa:  
Pan-Africanism, Black Internationalism, and the Politics of Migritude from *Banjo to Black Mamba Boy*

"Their faces were passports inscribed with the stamps of many places but in their countenances was something ancient, the variety of those who went wandering and peopled the earth."—Nadifa Mohamed, *Black Mamba Boy*

"[Africa] was always a continent on the move"—Achille Mbembe

Toward the end of an interview with Achille Mbembe in 2013 entitled “Africa and the Future” Thomas Blaser asks the following question: “what is the African contribution to the world?” Blaser’s interview intervenes in an ongoing conversation about the shift in discourse about Africa, from the pessimism of the last quarter of the twentieth century marked by the discourses of “crisis” and “emergency” to recent more optimistic sets of statements about an “Africa Rising.” Critics of the “gospel of an Africa rising” argue that while there is recent evidence of continental economic improvement, the discourse at best ignores the complexities of the continent and at worst turns Africa into a brand.

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Interestingly, Blaser’s question concerning the African contribution to the world was asked by Edward Wilmot Blyden over 130 years ago. One of the first pan-Africanists, Blyden in 1880 delivered a speech entitled “Ethiopia Stretching out Her Hands Unto God (Africa’s Service to the World)” which was later re-printed in his tome *Christianity, Islam, and the Negro Race* in 1886. Further still, Mbembe’s response to Blaser’s question also echoes Blyden’s discourse, specifically in terms of *movement* and Africa.

Mbembe explicates three major “attributes” of the cultural history of Africa: multiplicity, movement, and the compositional. In terms of movement he offers these remarks: “Another important concept that we haven’t explored much, but which comes from the African historical cultural experience is the modes of circulation and of mobility, of movement. Almost everything was on the move. It was not at all true as Hegel, and those who rely on him, intimated that Africa was a closed continent—not at all. It was always a continent that was on the move.”

In terms of migration Mbembe argues that in opposition to Europe’s continued racist practice of harsh immigration laws and the closing-off of its borders, Africa must “open itself up.” It must “become a vast regional space of circulation which means that it will have to dismantle its own internal boundaries, open itself up to the new forms of migration, internal as well as external, as we see happening, to a certain extent in Mozambique, and Angola where some Portuguese are coming back. As Europe closes its borders, Africa will have to open its borders.”

Here Mbembe speaks eloquently to the economic and cultural configuration under globalization in which, as Vijay Prashad argues, “capital is mobile and race immobile.” Against a closed colonial model Mbembe

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261 Ibid.
proffers a new model in which the constricting European nation-state becomes outdated and is replaced by an Africa “always on the move.”

Edward W. Blyden’s meditation on Africa and movement in 1880 is resonant here as he describes a particularly global and interconnected continent:

> Africa is no vast island, separated by an immense ocean from other portions of the globe, and cut off through the ages from the men who have made and influenced the destinies of mankind. She has been closely connected, both as source and nourisher, with some of the most potent influences which have affected for good the history of the world. The people of Asia, and the people of Africa have been in constant intercourse... Africans are continually going to and fro between the Atlantic Ocean and the Red Sea. And as in the days of Abraham and Moses, of Herodotus and Homer, there is a constantly accessible highway from Asia to the heart of Soudan.²⁶³

He then mentions the high amount of intra-continental migration that he himself saw living in Liberia and Sierra-Leon for well over fifty years to suggest that, far from being the “Dark Continent” which Europe has deemed it—“probably for the purpose of kindling their religious zeal”—Africa and its movement, indeed constitutes the “modern world.”²⁶⁴

Although colonialism may nominally be over, European attitudes and economic practices continue to resemble the colonial epoch, particularly visible in and through the management of migration and the movement of capital. For Mbembe, “In relation to the continent, Europe has developed over the last 25 years or so an attitude of containment in the sense that the biggest preoccupation has been to make sure that Africans stay where they are. The fixation with the question of immigration has jeopardized to a large extent the development of more dynamic relations between Africa and Europe. The obsession with boundaries and visas, the emergence of racism in most parts of Europe, the strengthening

of right wing parties in the context of an economic crisis that is quite obvious—all of that has been detrimental to the development of productive and mutually beneficial relations between Africa and Europe.” Just as Europe and America continue to develop an “attitude of containment” utilizing various techniques of power managing immigration along with neoliberal economic policies like structural adjustment programs, free trade agreements, and illicit partnerships with African warlords, so capital is freed at all costs from any burden of constraint. It is perhaps not surprising then that contemporary African literature significantly negotiates these issues, certainly most saliently in the literature of migritude.

African migritude writers utilize the trope of movement as a hinge through which to address colonialism, racism, globalization and modernity with specific reference to Africa and the world. As such, migritude provides both a new and sophisticated way of understanding immigration in the era of global capitalism as well as a critical engagement with it: it lends a new perspective to the study African literature itself by bringing to the fore conditions of diaspora, movement, and migration. Further, just as Mbembe’s comments echo Blyden’s, so migritude writers echo, mobilize, and refashion earlier pan-African works. In this chapter, for example, I analyze the ways in which Somali writer Nadifa Mohamed strategically weaves Claude McKay’s wandering protagonist Banjo from his 1929 novel of the same name into her own twenty-first century migritude novel, harnessing his pan-African politics of vagabondage into the deployment of a kind of literary nomadism critical of the colonial management of immigration and movement. Further, I argue that the reason she finds Banjo so important is that McKay anticipates migritude in various ways.

“Migritude” describes the literature of a recent diasporic group of African authors. They narrate the being-in-the-world of the migrant within the context of globalization, yet

they emphasize that the “past” of immigration and conceptions of the immigrant are irreducibly entangled with the history of colonialism.266 Migritude authors, publishing in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, confront issues of migrancy (forced or not), diaspora (forced or not), errantry, departure, return, racism against immigrants, identity, gender, and postcoloniality. Going beyond narrativizing the individual lives of people who cross borders these writers offer a phenomenology of immigration and movement. They negotiate borders, both material and imagined, and what it means to move across them by the majority of the world’s population (non-white and poor or working-class, economic migrants, or refugees). This affords a critique not just of recent machinations of global capital and the abject inequity of people in the world but a re-thinking of colonialism and the ways in which its management of movement, predicated upon the construction of race and tribe, remains constitutive of modernity.267

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Part I: Claude McKay’s Banjo as a (Proto)migritude Text.

I initially set out to read the intertextual and thematically-linked relationship between Claude McKay’s 1929 “story without a plot” and Somali-British writer Nadifa Mohamed’s Black Mamba Boy as symbolic of the relationship expressed in Congolese novelist Emmanuel Dongala’s productive phrase “from Négritude to Migritude.”268 However, a careful reading of McKay’s text shows that it is not a static representative of the “then” of

266 “Being-in-the-world” is Heidegger’s term used to theorize what all humans have/are ontologically, marking a departure from Cartesian metaphysics. Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, trans. John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson (San Francisco: Harper, 1962).


the Négritude era, but speaks to our “now,” illustrating how immigration was radically refigured in the early twentieth century as an imperial project to be managed and was tightly bound up with racial capitalism and colonialism—it surely images Prashad’s statement that immigration was “born in the era of imperialism.”\textsuperscript{269} Banjo as a (proto)migritude text, speaks directly to twenty-first century African authors who show that migration in the era of globalization and mobile capital is indeed constituted by and entangled with imperial-era structures of migration, the immobility of race, and the movement of capital. Banjo in this way, produces what I call a \textit{migrant pan-Africanism}.

During a reading in New York City, September 25\textsuperscript{th} 2012, discussant Peter Hitchcock asks Somali migritude writer Nadifa Mohamed about her reference to McKay’s Banjo in the acknowledgements to her 2010 novel \textit{Black Mamba Boy}, to which she responds that it represents, \textit{par excellence}, the black pan-African experience during the colonial era of her father and other black nomadic working class seamen, drifters, immigrants. Indeed McKay’s classic 1929 text, set in the “Ditch” area of the “great port” city Marseille, is thoroughly pan-African and yet \textit{migrant}, as evinced in the following passage: “All shades of Negroes came together there. Even the mulattoes took a step down from their perch to mix in… But the magic had brought them all together to jazz and drink red wine, white wine, sweet wine. All the British West African blacks, Portuguese blacks, American blacks, all who had drifted into this port that the world goes through.”\textsuperscript{270} In the Senegalese-owned bar in the Ditch the eponymous Banjo strums an old “Aframericant” tune on his banjo, Papa

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Prashad “Speaking of Saris,” ii.
\item Banjo, 45/6.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Charlie Jackson’s “Shake That Thing,” and dreams of starting a “black orchestra” with his fellow black diasporic vagabonds.271

What McKay ultimately suggests is that it is not “magic” that brings this transnational community of blacks together (though magic is created there), but the global system of world capitalism, specifically institutions controlling migration: colonialism, structures of racism, passport control, and the construction of citizenship, each embodied in this “port the world goes through.” McKay’s concept and practice of vagabondage (both literary and biographical) discloses the being-in-the-world of blacks in the diaspora as well as transnational immigrants during the colonial era. My close reading of vagabondage in *Banjo* parses modern world-systems of exploitation like imperialism and an increasingly global racial capitalism, both constitutive of Western civilization, not adjunct to it. *Banjo*, I argue, asks its readers to carefully consider these issues by utilizing movement itself as a trope or hinge through which to negotiate “the violence of dispersal” and its correlative structures—immigration for example.272

“‘Immigration’, as a concept,” Vijay Prashad argues “is born in the era of imperialism. ‘Immigrants,’ in this context, are not just those who cross boundaries, but those who pointedly enter the advanced industrial states from lands of dusky skin. Immigration is always already about mobile capital and immobile race.”273 Immigration denotes not simply movement but material world historical contexts. It is born out of

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271 *Banjo*, 19. “Aframerican” is McKay’s term. *Banjo*, 12. The banjo instrument itself is pan-African as it is originally West-African but developed by slaves on West Indian and American plantations. In my larger project I consider the banjo at greater length. I argue that the instrument is symbolic of migritude in the following ways: it moves or migrates from Africa during the slave trade to the Caribbean and the American South. It is diasporic then but it also necessarily interrogates the conditions that catalyze its movement—the slave trade and the plantation economy where it is initially surreptitiously developed by slaves. Its history also calls into question its use in minstrelsy by a racist white public. It is then recast by Banjo in *Banjo* as inextricable from himself—“mahself”—as a black agential subject as well as representative of radical black transnational networks guided by the saxophone jazzing and music of the ditch.

272 “Violence of dispersal” is Nadifa Mohamed’s phrase. Reading, Sept 25th 2012, The Graduate Center, CUNY.

colonization itself and in this sense illuminates the relationship between the global North and its colonies. Accordingly, Banjo’s narrative follows McKay’s cast of black migrants through the vibrant port of Marseille and recounts tales of pan-African characters from around the globe populating his novel. It also shows how the “immigrant,” as a category and subject-position, is produced by a variety of Western institutional settings (the mobile capital of imperialism), how those colonial structures function to among other things, control or manage non-white populations (“immobile race”), and, finally, how ideological and material effects debilitate not only black subjects but those from the “lands of dusky skin” throughout the global South.

Kevin Gaines deftly analyzes the black pan-African world that Mohamed picks up on in Banjo “over the short African century of anticolonial struggle and pan-African nationalism, multiple histories of migration, a variety of institutional settings, mass communication technologies, and social and cultural movements provided the basis for a global culture of black modernity linking colonies with metropolitan centers, forging a new sense of a unified black world out of once-disparate diasporas.” Brent Hayes Edwards’ The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism takes up the transnational and global aspects of black social and literary movements in the space between the two World Wars arguing that it was in and through a practice of translation (of difference) that black global communities and politics were forged. Edwards uses the already international loci of Paris and Harlem to articulate these links suggesting, in an important chapter on Banjo, that the novel attempts to describe and create a “vagabond internationalism.” For Edwards “If the dream [of Banjo’s] to form an orchestra is the dream

to institutionalize a vision of black internationalism, it is an inherently open and wandering, performative representation of the links between men of African descent.”

Building upon Edwards’ sophisticated meditation on *Banjo* I open up the term “wandering” here suggesting that movement in general subtends and drives McKay’s text and in terms of immigration in particular.

As McKay’s subtitle suggests, the wandering “story without a plot,” as well as the eponymous vagabond Banjo, *Banjo* is a phenomenology of movement. It tracks physical movement in terms of immigration, diaspora, the wandering spirit of vagabondage, the movement of ships, commodities, and the circulation of black bodies under imperial-era capitalism. It is about *social movements*, often radical, in terms of pan-Africanism and race-consciousness solidified by the circulations of periodicals like *La Race Negre*, *The Negro World* and others, and the people that make up the diasporic Ditch. As Edwards reads it *Banjo* is also about movement in terms of music (movement in this sense being a structural unit of a song): it is Banjo’s desire to create a black orchestra that sustains not only blues or jazz notes, but his pan-African diasporic community as well.

If for Edwards music is the articulating factor in the black diaspora, as black internationalism is “less like a sturdy edifice [and] more like an uncertain harmony,” the banjo instrument itself can be read as symbolizing migritude. It moves or migrates from Africa during the slave trade to the Caribbean and the American South. It is diasporic but it also necessarily interrogates the conditions that catalyze its movement—the slave trade and the plantation economy where it initially surreptitiously developed by slaves. Its

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276 *The Practice of Diaspora*, 318.
history calls into question its use in minstrelsy by a racist white public. It is then later appropriated by whites who further develop, commodify, and claim it as their own. Cecilia Conway, the original historian of the African roots of the banjo notes that in the twentieth century this percussive stringed instrument was emblematic of white, mountain folk. “Behind this reality” she argues “stands a myth… Blacks brought the banjo to this country, and they were the only ones who played the instrument for many years.” Caribbean historian Laurent Dubois has also found historical records that place the first written reference to the banjo in the Caribbean in the seventeenth century as played by slaves and free black on the plantation.

Banjo and Goosey debate the roots and cultural history of the instrument itself in the novel, providing insight into its diasporic movements, the discursive markers attached to it, and metonymic relationship with transnational black modernity. For Banjo the instrument is inseparable from himself, “Banjo caressed his instrument. ‘I nevah part with this, buddy. It is moh than a gal, moh than a pal; it’s mahself.’” The race-conscious Goosey, however, is skeptical of the instrument. “‘Banjo! That’s what you play?’ exclaimed Goosey. ‘Sure that’s what I play,’ replied Banjo. ‘Don’t you like it?’ ‘No. Banjo is bondage. It’s the instrument of slavery. Banjo is Dixie. The Dixie of the land of cotton and massa and missus and black mammy. We colored folks have got to get away from all that in these enlightened progressive days. Let us play piano and violin, harp and flute. Let the white folks play the banjo if they want to keep on remembering all the Black Joes singing and the hell they made them live in.’ ‘That ain’t got nothing to do with me,’ replied Banjo. ‘I play

279 *Banjo*, 6.
that theah instrument becaz I likes it. I don't play no Black Joe hymns. I play lively tunes. All that you talking about slavery and bondage ain't got nothing to do with our starting up a li'l orchesty.’”

Goosey here is understandably critical of the function of the banjo as a metonym for the racist stereotypes attributed to blacks under slavery and Jim Crow, perpetuated through the phenomenon of minstrelsy, as well as its close association with the institution itself. Similar to an early-du Boisian alternative he argues for black association with “proper” white bourgeois and aristocratic instruments such as the harp and flute. Banjo dismisses Goosey’s strident reservations—“that ain’t got nothing to do with me”—and continues to play his lively tunes. The banjo instrument as “mahself” shifts the agency and subjechthod to Banjo himself and away from objecthood, stereotype, property. In a move that will inspire the Négritude authors, McKay re-appropriates what was vaunted as a pejorative black image, the banjo-playing Black Joe—an object of the white gaze, and recasts him not only as subject but as the conduit for the “magic” of black transnational migrant communities within the pan-African ditch, i.e. the black orchestra. If the banjo is reclaimed as the black diasporic instrument that it is, Banjo himself represents the diasporic black migrant that McKay is wont to represent.

Similarly, music in Banjo also speaks to movement in terms of the verb or action it represents, not just in terms of the progression from verse, chorus, bridge, solo, to outro, but in terms of the commodification of black music, images, and cultures. For Banjo, the banjo, like himself (Subject/agent/mover), is verb, while for Goosey it represents the static noun of white stereotypes of black culture. The conversation between Amiri Baraka’s chapter “Swing: from Verb to Noun” and Nathaniel Mackey’s “Other: From Noun to Verb” is

\[280\] Ibid, 90.
instructive here.\textsuperscript{281} Mackey’s essay recalls Baraka’s chapter on white commodification of black jazz in the U.S. 1920s and beyond. “From verb to noun’ means the erasure of black inventiveness [\textit{to jazz, to swing}] by white appropriation [Jazz and Swing as nouns]… the ‘noun,’ white commodification, obscures, or ‘disappears’ the ‘verb’ it rips off, black agency, black authority, black invention.”\textsuperscript{282} Goosey, in this sense understandably reacts to the association of the banjo with the noun bondage, a process beginning in slavery and continuing through reconstruction and into the twentieth century. Anticipating Mackey’s reversal of the machinic white verb-to-noun process in his title “From Noun to Verb,” Banjo moves to dislocate the banjo from the shell of its noun. These are, for Mackey, “the countering, contestatory tendencies” which he sees in black writing and poetry—specifically the practice of “verbing” nouns.\textsuperscript{283}

We will remember that in the opening quote McKay uses the verb form “\textit{to jazz}” in describing the black diasporic “magic” happening in the Ditch and Banjo dismisses Goosey’s reaction to the reification of black music into a reductive stereotype by again using the verb form when referring to the black “saxophone-jazzing” in the United States.\textsuperscript{284} “The magic had brought them all together to jazz and drink red wine, white wine, sweet wine.”\textsuperscript{285} If music \textit{moves} this social body of black folks in the diaspora, they become \textit{a} movement as well: the pan-African Ditch community contains circulating politics attached to various black activist practices represented in the novel. For Edwards it’s vagabond

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\textsuperscript{281} Amiria Baraka \textit{Blues People}’; Nathaniel Mackey, “Other: From Noun to Verb”, \textit{Representations}, No. 39 (Summer 1992), pp51-70.
\textsuperscript{282} Ibid, 52.
\textsuperscript{283} “Baraka’s valorization of the verb recalls a similar move on [Zora Neale] Hurston’s part thirty years earlier, her discussion of ‘verbal nouns’ as one of black America’s contributions to America English. She emphasizes action, dynamism, and kinetics arguing that black vernacular culture does the same.” Mackey, “Other: From Noun to Verb”, 53.
\textsuperscript{284} Banjo, 90. My emphasis.
\textsuperscript{285} Ibid, 56/6.
\end{flushright}
internationalism, for Gary Holcomb it’s queer black Marxism with a twist of Trotskyist internationalism, and finally, according to Lilyan Kesteloot, for the Négritude authors, Banjo and its cast of black migrants “was the first novel to articulate the Negro problem fully and clearly.” Yet, if we do not take into account the fact that movement itself drives the novel, in terms of migration in particular—easy enough to miss for, to paraphrase Heidegger, what is closest to us is often farthest away—the novel’s raison d’être is thereby obscured; therefore I inaugurate a reading of Banjo as anticipating migritude.

So Banjo moves. He “was a great vagabond of lowly life. He was a child of the Cotton Belt, but he had wandered all over America... He had worked at all the easily-picked-up jobs—longshoreman, porter, factory worker, farm hand, seaman.” Yet for all his wanderings in America he had never been to the great sailor’s port, Marseille, and thus, after having returned from Canada he is again ready to move. “Seized by the old restlessness for a sea change while he was working in an industrial plant, he hit upon the unique plan of getting himself deported.” He had seen his friends, who had entered the United States illegally, held for deportation, and so Banjo calmly announces that he is not American. And although the immigration officers do not believe him as his “accent, attitude, and movement—shouted Dixie,” he is eventually given a chance to work his way across the Atlantic to Marseille, where the majority of the novel is set, relating the experiences and conversations of the black beach boys and descriptions of the world at large.

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286 Kesteloot, Black Writers in French, 72.
287 Banjo, 11.
288 Ibid.
289 Ibid, 11/12.
If *Banjo* moves then it must also be about that which *impedes* movement—borders, checkpoints, deportations, immigration laws, police raids on the black neighborhood in Marseille, categories of citizenship or non-citizens, and racial barriers both material and ideological—all interdict the black migrants from the global South or the U.S. in various ways. Taloufa, for example, and many other of the black beach boys are caught, arrested, hounded, deported. Some are branded “Nationality Doubtful,” a legal category in Britain, confirming their liminal (non-Western) positionality and subjecthood. “Lonesome Blue,” a character who is arrested “about every ten days,” lives in a sort of migrant purgatory between the threat of deportation, ill health, and the impoverished underbelly of the Ditch where he is not protected by law but subject to it, (the “Ditch” neighborhood in colonial Paris in the 1920s prefigures the *banlieue* in late twentieth and twenty-first century France taken up by contemporary Francophone migritude authors).

Within the first few pages of our “story without a plot” the narrator, in describing the multi-racial and multi-cultural beach in Marseille, introduces the immigration laws that catalyze migration in the first place: “They were all on the beach, and there were many others besides them — white men, brown men, black men. Finns, Poles, Italians, Slavs, Maltese, Indians, Negroids, African Negroes, West Indian Negroes — deportees from America for violation of the United States immigration laws — afraid and ashamed to go back to their own lands.” The novel not only depicts U.S. immigration law, but French and English as well—each tied in different ways to race and the colonial project. In addition to portraying a diasporic *condition* of modernity as the beach is made up of those coming

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290 The checkpoint, for example “functions not only to control the flow of migrants, illicit goods, and insurgents/terrorists, but also to divide contiguous lands and to reproduce politically and legally encoded distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them.’” Karim Mattar and David Fieni quoted in Emily Apter *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability* (New York: Verso 2013) 106.

291 Ibid, 6.
from all over the global South in addition to European working-class migrants, it also portrays the conditions and structures producing diasporic movement such as laws and techniques of power managing migrant populations.

The biopolitics of the imperial state and immigration are narrativized particularly well in Banjo via the character Taloufa who is West African but who, like the other black migrants from around the world in Banjo, moves through the colonial capitalist system via shipping routes and other nodes connecting the global economy in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Taloufa “went to America after the riots and jumped his ship there. He lived in the United States until after the passing of the new quota immigration laws, when, the fact of his entering the country illegally getting known, he was arrested and deported.”

He eventually joins Banjo and the beach boys in Marseille and the narrator tells his story, disclosing the conditions and structures constitutive of immigration as a colonial product. “When Taloufa arrived in England, the authorities would not permit him to land, but wanted him to go home direct to West Africa. Taloufa did not want to go there. Christian missionaries had educated him out of his native life. A Christian European had uplifted him out of and away from his people and his home. His memory of his past was vague. He did not know what had become of his family.”

Frantz Fanon famously argued that when one speaks one uses a certain syntax and must grasp the morphology of the language one has learnt, but that “it means above all to assume a

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[292]{See my analysis of Foucault’s “biopolitics” in relation to migritude in chapter one. Foucault defines biopower as “a number of phenomena that seem to me to be quite significant, namely, the set of mechanisms through which the basic biological features of the human species became the object of a political strategy, of a general strategy of power, or, in other words, how, starting from the eighteenth century, modern western societies took on board the fundamental biological fact that human beings are a species,” \textit{Security, Territory, Population}, 1.}
\footnotetext[293]{\textit{Banjo}, 101.}
\footnotetext[294]{Ibid, 311.}
\end{footnotes}
culture, to support the weight of a civilization.”

Talufo’s relationship with English as a colonial language represents the ironic double-bind of cultural alienation and “immobile race.” The colonized are, in this case, British “Subjects” so long as they labor under the colonial system extracting surplus-value, but they are at the same time not Subjects and less so citizens in terms of the global racial hierarchy of imperialism. Though they can move throughout the world essentially as slaves, they are “immobile” in terms of race. Taloufa as an individual for example, is not allowed in England, but the value of his labor power is, just as the structural condition of possibility of imperial England is built upon the blood of Africans and others and at the same moment, the exclusion of their persons.

The second irony in this double-bind is ideological. Taloufa is alienated from his local African traditions, language, and culture by the colonizing mission—“Christian missionaries had educated him out of his native life” —yet he is not allowed in “civilization”: “The paper bore Taloufa’s name and fingerprint and read: The above-named is permitted to land at this port on condition that he proceeds to London in charge of an official of the Shipping Federation, obtains document of identity at the Home Office, and visa (if required), and leaves the United Kingdom at the earliest opportunity. (Signed) ... Immigration Officer.”

Prashad’s phrase concerning “mobile capital and immobile race” indicates my earlier argument about the colonial construction of, and at the same moment interdiction of, the immigrant. Ngugi Wa Thiong’o has forcefully analyzed double-alienation. In Decolonising the Mind he argues that “colonial alienation takes two interlinked forms: an active (or passive) distancing from oneself from the reality around

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296 Banjo 311, my italics.
297 Ibid.
[here Talufa’s native African environment and language]; and an active (or passive) identification with that which is most external to one’s environment [the English language and culture].”  

When Talufa is met with the racist European refrain “go back to Africa” he becomes confused as he has been taught that Africa is the Heart of Darkness. But the fact remains: “Colored subjects were not wanted in Britain.” This highlights not only that the material structures governing movement and citizenship are tightly bound to ideological conceptions of race and the function of African in the European imaginary and that the material and ideological operate in a dialectical relationship each subtending and reproducing the other as well as the contradictions therein.

In Race and Racism in Britain John Solomos argues that it is important to analyze “the politics of black migration and settlement in Britain in the early twentieth century, since it was during this period that the terms of political debate and domestic ideologies and policies towards ‘coloured workers’ and their communities began to be formed. Indeed it was during that period that the question of racial difference began to play a central part in the politics of immigration.”  

Legislating citizenship becomes a colonial mode of relation. “Early immigration legislation was concerned with the entry into Britain of people who were by law aliens, that is, non-British citizens. However this legislation also contained provisions on a certain category of British subject: seamen recruited in various parts of the Empire... despite being British subjects [these seamen] had been subject to discriminatory treatment by the British state since the nineteenth century, if not before, partly in order to prevent their settlement in Britain when the passage they had worked terminated in

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299 John Solomos, Race and Racism in Britain (Gordonsville: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003), 44.
Britain.” Further, these structures are intertwined with “national ideology” and work together to produce groups of people, each group accorded meaning in European consciousness and unconsciousness. According to Clive Harris, “social decay was supposed to be connected with the presence of a ‘Negro’ population of Somalis, Arabs, West Indians, West Africans, and so on who constituted an almost insignificant percentage of the population of the sea-port towns.” The condition of the black migrant, which as we saw earlier, is shaped by world-level structures, is outlined in *Banjo* as Talufa and others are categorized and managed as “nationality doubtful.”

Consider the following excerpt near the end of *Banjo* directly preceding Talufa’s story:

The majority of the papers were distinguished by the official phrase: Nationality Doubtful. Colored seamen who had lived their lives in the great careless tradition, and had lost their papers in low-down places to touts, hold-up men, and passport fabricators, and were unable or too ignorant to show exact proof of their birthplace, were furnished with the new "Nationality Doubtful" papers. West Africans, East Africans, South Africans, West Indians, Arabs, and Indians — they were all mixed up together. Some of the Indians and Arabs were being given a free trip back to their lands. Others, especially the Negroes, had chosen to stop off in French ports, where the regulations were less stringent. They were agreed that the British authorities were using every device to get all the colored seamen out of Britain and keep them out, so that white men should have their jobs.

Immediately interesting in this passage is the transnational awareness of the differences in stringency between French and British immigration laws, an everyday practical knowledge necessary to the well-being of the black migrants that McKay here, and later Nadifa Mohamed in *Black Mamba Boy* will, portray. This also shows that McKay interrogates the

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300 Ibid, 45.
301 Ibid.
302 *Banjo*, 312.
laws, subject-positions, categories, State practices, and economy that structure the world and life of the migrants, including day-to-day issues like identity papers (which have a particularly violent history in South Africa) and passports that become daily instances of colonial governmentality each conditioning the being-in-the-world of black migrants.\textsuperscript{303}

These instances were not solely the daily condition of the colonized and mobile black workers, but also shaped the lives of middle-class black expatriates from Africa and the diaspora who came to Paris to study and work. The Négritude authors are one such example and further, they were necessarily struck by \textit{Banjo}.

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Négritude’s genealogy of origins (which I have argued is also an immigrant one), has been well documented.\textsuperscript{304} In Paulette and Jane Nardal’s Paris salon for black students, writers, and artists, Aimé Césaire, Leon Damas, and Leopold Senghor were all reading and inspired by the Harlem Renaissance (including Langston Hughes and Claude McKay), the antiracist project of the black Haitian anthropologists such as Antenor Fermin and Jean-Price Mars, European Surrealism, Rene Maran and others. Leopold Senghor describes this era of burgeoning pan-African and global consciousness. “We were in contact with these black Americans [Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, Jean Toomer, and Countee Cullen] during the years 1929-34 through Mademoiselle Paulette Nardal, who, with Dr. Sajous, a Haitian, had founded the \textit{Revue du Monde Noir}. M Nardal kept a literary salon, where African Negroes, West Indians, and American Negroes used to get together.”\textsuperscript{305} Senghor has also famously pointed out that "Claude McKay can rightfully be considered the true

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{303}{The term is David Scott’s in “Colonial Governmentality” Social Text No. 43 Autumn, 1995, pp. 191-220.}
\footnote{305}{Lilyan Kesteloot, \textit{Black Writers in French: A Literary History of Negritude}, 56/7.}
\end{footnotes}
inventor of Negritude. I speak not of the word, but of the values of Negritude."³⁰⁶ In 1937 Damas published his first book of poetry *Pigments* which would become one of the first seminal Négritude works. In a poem entitled “Hiccups” Damas dramatizes Banjo and Goosey’s debate about the banjo instrument:

> I hear that once again you did not go
to your vi-o-lin lesson
A banjo
did you say a banjo
what did you say
a banjo
you really said
a banjo
No sir
    you must learn that we do not allow in our home
neither ban
nor jo
nor gui
nor tar
the *mulattos* do not do that
leave it to the *negres*³⁰⁷

This poem dramatizes a bourgeois “mulatto” mother castigating her son for choosing a banjo over the acceptable violin. Like Goosy she subscribes to the stereotype of the banjo as symbolic of lower-class/(black) music. Her racialized classism, explicit in her use of the pejorative *négre*, is deconstructed by her son, who might represent the young race-conscious Négritude authors as they reappropriate the banjo instrument as well as the term *négre* itself in an irreverent celebration of blackness. Brent Edwards points out that although Césaire re-appropriates *négre* and invents the neologism Négritude, which first appears in *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land*, he is not the first to use term *négre* in

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this way. In fact, black Marxist Lamine Senghor, an active pan-Africanist in France before and during the Négritude moment and who also makes key appearances in McKay’s *Banjo*, uses the term in 1927 in an article published by the newspaper of his group Comité de Défense de la Race Négro. In “Le Mot Négre” he decries the term’s use under colonial racism to perpetuate the oppression of blacks: “The youth of Comité de Défense de la Race Négro have made it their duty to take this name out of the mud where you are dragging it, so as to make of it a symbol... Yes, sirs, you have used this word as a tool to divide. But we use it as a rallying cry: a torch!” This torch flares up throughout *Banjo* as well as within the global pan-African movement from whence Négritude catches fire. Léon Damas’s “Hiccups” dramatizes the aesthetic arm of the movement quite well while reiterating McKay’s importance as a predecessor.

In her analysis of the genealogy of Négritude, Lilyan Kestlehoot suggests that “*Banjo* was the first novel to articulate the Negro problem fully and clearly. Blacks in Paris could not remain indifferent to so many revolutionary ideas. But they were also attracted by *Banjo*'s free and easy style, by its human warmth, the reality of its characters. Senghor, Césaire and Damas can still cite entire chapters. ‘What struck me in this book’, said Aimé Césaire, ‘is that for the first time Negroes were described truthfully, without inhibitions or prejudice’.” *Banjo* embodies the politics of Négritude *par excellence* in a chapter titled “Jelly Roll,” which describes the “magic” of black nightlife in Marseille with its “big black-throated guzzling of red wine, white wine, and close, indiscriminant jazzing of all the Negroes of Marseille.” “Shake that thing! Sweet dancing thing of primitive joy, perverse
pleasure, prostitute ways, many-colored variations of the rhythm, savage, barbaric,
refined—eternal rhythm of the mysterious, magical magnificent—the dance divine of life....
Oh, Shake That Thing!”

In this prose-poem-esque chapter McKay inaugurates the politics and practice of the vagabond poet “with a purpose.” A close reading of the words he uses and their placement shows anti-colonial and anti-racist sentiment within this warm, pan-African aesthetic: an “affective attitude,” to use Sartre’s term for Négritude. The words “primitive,” “savage,” and “barbaric” have a long colonial history with much ideological baggage. Representative of colonialism’s scientific racism, these words, as Chinua Achebe has wonderfully argued, are symptomatic of the “desire—one might indeed say the need—in Western psychology to set Africa up as a foil to Europe, as a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar, in comparison with which Europe’s own state of spiritual grace will be manifest.”

For Achebe, Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* constructs this linguistic binary: Good/Bad, Europe/Africa, Light/Dark, Civilized/Barbaric, Venerable/Savage, The Thames/The River Congo and so on. Achebe closes his essay with these remarks:

> As I said earlier Conrad did not originate the image of Africa which we find in his book. It was and is the dominant image of Africa in the Western imagination and Conrad merely brought the peculiar gifts of his own mind to bear on it. For reasons which can certainly use close psychological inquiry the West seems to suffer deep anxieties about the precariousness of its civilization and to have a need for constant reassurance by comparison with Africa.

McKay’s sentence aesthetically parallels Lamine Senghor’s politics. McKay re-casts terms like “savage” and “barbaric” by couching them with positive terms and in the context of

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313 Ibid, 58.
lightness or the magic jazzing: “Sweet dancing thing of primitive joy” where “primitive” and “joy” rest in a metonymic relationship, or, “many-colored variations of the rhythm, savage, barbaric, refined…” where “many colored variations of the rhythm” and “savage” co-exist, and opposites “barbaric” and “refined” become ironically synonymous. The paleonymic refashioning and re-signifying of racist European terms into something not just positive but revolutionary, anticipates the anti-racist anti-colonialism of Négritude on the one hand, and on the other, limns a certain black “affective attitude,” a form of radical collectivization in the sense that it attempts to “institutionalize a vision of black internationalism.” Moving beyond black internationalism, which appropriately signifies international workers’ movements, McKay phenomenologically images what I call a “moving globality”—a high level of imperial-era and asymmetrical interconnectedness of places, things, and people.

Gary Wilder eloquently states that “McKay’s representation of black migrants [in Banjo] demonstrates that global capitalism created a multiracial imperial city through which commodities, laborers, and ideologies circulated.” Indeed. And I would build upon this and posit that McKay’s novel reveals that global capitalism creates a multi-racial imperial world, from the “Indian archipelago” to the Caribbean Sea. Banjo images the economy within which colonial exports and imports, a nomadic black workforce, as well as philosophies and various radicalisms are circulated. McKay details not only the flow and movement of commodities from the global South—particularly Africa—to the global North, but also the labor and flow of black bodies as commodities, eternally “under the whip, under the terror.” Ray’s poetic, political, and phenomenological description of the Ditch in Marseilles is well worth studying.

There any day he might meet with picturesque proletarians from far waters whose names were warm with romance: the Caribbean, the Gulf of Guinea, the Persian Gulf, the Bay of Bengal, the China Seas, the Indian Archipelago. And, oh, the earthy mingled smells of the docks! ... rice from India, rubber from the Congo, tea from China, brown sugar from Cuba, bananas from Guinea, lumber from the Soudan, coffee from Brazil, skins from the Argentine, palm-oil from Nigeria, pimento from Jamaica, wool from Australia... Barrels, bags, boxes, bearing from land to land the primitive garner of man's hands. Sweat-dripping bodies of black men naked under the equatorial sun, threading a caravan way through the time-old jungles, carrying loads steadied and unsupported on kink-thick heads hardened and trained to bear their burdens. Brown men half-clothed, with baskets on their backs, bending low down to the ancient tilled fields under the tropical sun. Eternal creatures of the warm soil, digging, plucking for the Occident world its exotic nourishment of life, under the whip, under the terror. Barrels . . . bags . . . boxes...  

McKay's language pictures movement—something like a constellation of living objects within a moving globality: the waters of the various sunny Southern gulfs upon which commodities flow, the black workers' bodies loading and unloading the goods upon the Occidental dock that “the world goes through,” and those under the equatorial sun threading a caravan way. Ray's tone here, as he describes the warmth and bustle of the port within the city that he loves and the exotic and “earthy” smells of the commodities flowing through the dock from the global South, belies his sophisticated awareness of the violence of processes of colonialism and world capitalism.

In the above excerpt Ray first charts the long reach of colonialism through his cast of “picturesque proletarians” from colonies scattered across the globe in the Caribbean, the gulf of Guinea in Africa, and the Persian gulf describing, interestingly, not the countries from whence they come but the waters (or gulfs) that connect them to the global economy.

318 Banjo, 67. My emphasis.
He also describes the regions by their respective extracted commodities, “rice from India, rubber from the Congo,” for example. It is no coincidence that McKay mentions the Congo here. As Walter Rodney notes in his important *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*, from the Berlin conference in 1886 to 1906 “King Leopold II of Belgium made at least $20 million from rubber and ivory.”319 Yet what stood out was not the standard extravagant European profit at the expense of Africans nor the brutality of Leopold’s reign (one can simply look to Britain’s concentration camps in Kenya as a contender in brutality), but the fact that these processes were not exceptional: for McKay and later Césaire, this is what modernity looks like—hence his description of black men “trained to bear their burden” existing “under the whip, under the terror.”320

McKay’s unique bricoleur combination of anti-colonial pan-Africanism, U.S. anti-racism in the DuBoisian tradition, and world-level revolutionary anti-capitalism in the Trotskyist sense, gives McKay’s politics and world-view a particular color. McKay, for example, is well aware of France itself as a global player. “When he first set foot in France, McKay was well aware of its politics and its role in colonizing Africa,” notes Michel Fabre in *From Harlem to Paris*. “As early as 1920 he had written the editors of the London *Daily World* to protest the bourgeois press coverage of the black occupation troops by the French in the Rhineland… But, McKay thought, defending the morality of the Negro race mattered less than understanding that, by helping French capitalism to hold Germany down, the black troops were supporting France’s dominion in Africa.”321 In other words, a possible unintended effect of defending black troops from the manufacture of a racist European

320 *Banjo*, 67.
crisis would, by extension, shore up French Empire. In 1920 McKay does, however, write a scathing critique of European racism and the construction of black sexual menace on the Rhine, but it is not published by the *Daily Herald* in London, the newspaper that had printed the racist attacks by E. D. Morel to begin with. It was published only later in *The Workers’ Dreadnought*, a rag more in line with McKay’s leftist politics.

As Walter Rodney eloquently states in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*,

“Colonialism was not merely a system of exploitation, but one whose essential purpose was to repatriate the profits to the so-called mother country. From an African viewpoint, that amounted to consistent expatriation of surplus produced by African labor out of African resources. It meant the development of Europe as a part of the same dialectical process in which Africa was underdeveloped.” McKay anticipates this analysis when, in the long passage above, he describes the colonized who toil under slave-like conditions, for the benefit of the global North: the “eternal creatures of the warm soil, digging, plucking for the Occident world.” Here the Orient (Africa) labors for the benefit of the Occident (Europe). And later: “The eternal harvest of the world on the docks. African hard wood, African rubber, African ivory, African skins.” The narrator also describes Marseille as “Europe's best back door, discharging and receiving its traffic to the Orient and Africa.”

Here, *Banjo* recalls nineteenth century pan-Africanist Edward W. Blyden, for whom world commerce dialectically favors Europe by the same process of underdeveloping Africa. For Blyden this phenomenon begins with the slave-trade. “Everybody knows how it

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324 *Banjo*, 67.
326 Ibid, 69.
happened that the Africans were carried away in such large numbers from Africa to America; how one continent was made to furnish the labourers to build up another."\textsuperscript{327}

McKay’s moving globality details Europe’s traffic, both material and human, to and from “the Orient and Africa,” updating Blyden’s 1886 pan-African musings, just as twenty-first century migritude writers would update McKay’s.

\textit{Banjo’s} characters converse about and describe the global flows of commodities and laborers and do not disconnect capitalism from the ills of colonialism. Back in the Senegalese’s bar, “The barkeeper spread out the copy of \textit{La Race Negre} and began reading, while the Senegalese crowded around him with murmurs of approval and that attitude of credulity held by ignorant people toward the printed word. He read a list of items:

- Of forced conscription and young Negroes running away from their homes to escape into British African territory.
- Of native officials paid less than whites for the same work.
- Of forced native labor, because the natives preferred to live lazily their own lives, rather than labor for the miserable pittance of daily wages.
- Of native women insulted and their husbands humiliated before them.
- Of flagellation.
- Of youths castrated for theft.
- Of native chiefs punished by mutilation.
- Of the scourge of depopulation.

“That’s how the Europeans treat Negroes in the colonies,’ said the barkeeper.”\textsuperscript{328} The circulation of anti-colonial sentiment, produced by simple descriptions of how Africans are treated under colonialism, suggests \textit{Banjo} is not solely a pan-African text, but is one that engages with the circulation of a black affective modernity.


\textsuperscript{328} \textit{Banjo}, 75/6.
Consider Ray’s modernist theory of what he calls “world conquering and leveling machine civilization...” Ray’s perspective is an anti-capitalist vagabond openness to the world and to the other, which, in contemporary parlance might be called transnational and/or postcolonial. “For civilization had gone out among these native, earthy people, had despoiled them of their primitive soil, had uprooted, enchained, transported, and transformed them to labor under its laws, and yet lacked the spirit to tolerate them within its walls.” Ray’s description of modernity here illustrates the dialectic of resource extraction and enslavement on the one hand, and metropolitan inhospitality on the other, as black immigrant subjects are disallowed citizenship—Europe and the U.S. “lacked the spirit to tolerate them within its walls.”

Ray’s monologue also operates as an anticolonial fashioning of Marx’s global premonitions in *The Communist Manifesto*. Marx famously argues that “Modern industry has established the world market, for which the discovery of America paved the way... The East-Indian and Chinese markets, the colonisation of America, trade with the colonies, the increase in the means of exchange and in commodities generally, gave to commerce, to navigation, to industry, an impulse never before known, and thereby, to the revolutionary element in the tottering feudal society, a rapid development... In one word, for exploitation, veiled by religious and political illusions, it has substituted naked, shameless, direct, brutal exploitation... In one word, [the bourgeois mode of production] creates a world after its own image.” These passages show an already global Marx. Ray reiterates Marx’s capitalism, modern industry, or bourgeois mode of production as a “world conquering machine

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329 Ibid, 66.
330 Ibid, 314.
331 Karl Marx and Fredrick Engels, *the Communist Manifesto*, Chapter I “Bourgeois and Proletarians” [http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch01.htm#007](http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch01.htm#007)
civilization” utilizing black internationalist perspectives. This move both retains and refashions Marx’s prescient yet ultimately European work.

Furthermore, Ray’s critique of patriotism and *a fortiori* nationalism, anticipates transnational considerations of the Nation-State that come out of postcolonial theory. In the passage below patriotism is described as a “poisonous seed” that, far from creating a national solidarity, nurtures a sort of xenophobic, capitalist “meanness” of life:

> The sentiment of patriotism was not one of Ray’s possessions, perhaps because he was a child of deracinated ancestry. To him it was a poisonous seed that had, of course, been planted in his child’s mind, but happily, not having any traditional soil to nourish it, it had died out with other weeds of the curricula of education in the light of mature thought. It seemed a most unnatural thing to him for a man to love a nation — a swarming hive of human beings bartering, competing, exploiting, lying, cheating, battling, suppressing, and killing among themselves; possessing, too, the faculty to organize their villainous rivalries into a monstrous system for plundering weaker peoples. Man loves individuals. Man loves things. Man loves places. And the vagabond lover of life finds individuals and things to love in many places and not in any one nation. Man loves places and no one place, for the earth, like a beautiful wanton, puts on a new dress to fascinate him wherever he may go. A patriot loves not his nation, but the spiritual meannesses of his life of which he has created a frontier wall to hide the beauty of other horizons. 332

Ray’s critique of the unrecognized brutality of patriotism, nationalism, and even capitalism here allows for both a meditation on structures that impede free movement, and at the same time, creates an alternative—a vagabond openness to other peoples and things, to movement. Rather than creating “frontier” walls to hide the beauty of things the vagabond lover of life moves towards other horizons and allows others to move towards him. McKay’s own travels in Europe and specifically Africa are representative of this ethics of transnational vagabondage with respect to immigration itself.

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332 *Banjo*, 137.
In September of 1928, partway through writing *Banjo*, McKay sojourns in Casablanca, Rabat-Salé, and Fez, Morocco having come from Barcelona and before that Marseille. This period of movement, specifically within Africa, produces a particularly black transnational vantage point, and in a way, expands his consciousness. McKay happily states, for example, upon arriving in Africa that “for the first time in my life I felt singularly free of color-consciousness. I experienced a feeling that must be akin to the physical well-being of a dumb animal among kindred animals...” Yet, McKay soon feels the long reach of colonialism, specifically its structures regulating citizenship and movement; its aim to categorize, monitor, and manage his migration. “Suddenly I found myself right up against European intervention and proscription.” A messenger from the British consulate appears suddenly on his doorsteps asking for papers and inquiring as to whether he is American or not. “I said I was born in the West Indies and had lived in the United States and that I was an American even though I was a British subject, but I preferred to think of myself as an internationalist.” The messenger from the Consulate asks what an internationalist is and McKay responds, perhaps channeling Ray in this oft-cited passage, that an internationalist “was a bad nationalist.” McKay intimates that initially he responds in jest “without thinking of its radical implications.” Echoes of the radical implications of McKay as a bad nationalist appear in *Banjo*, representing what I call an African literary internationalism.

Interestingly, McKay finishes writing *Banjo* during his seven month sojourn in Africa around the same time he is interrogated and almost deported by the British

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334 Ibid.
335 Ibid, 300.
336 Ibid.
consulate due to “hints” that he is a “radical propagandist.” Again channeling Ray, in his autobiography McKay laments, “And now even in Africa I was confronted by the specter, the white terror always pursuing the black.”337 Another description of this “white terror” (a chapter heading in the novel) might be: the global-imperial structures that manage the movement and subjectivity of non-white people, whether they are deemed “Subjects” with requisite passports and papers, whether they can go here or there, or whether they are forcibly expelled. This seems precisely to anticipate the project of twenty-first century African migritude narratives.

I have defined “migritude literature” as a set of twenty-first century international African texts that take diaspora and migration as their object of literary representation and political engagement, that migritude includes a philosophical meditation of the conditions and structures therein, and a fortiori interrogates the interpellation and production of the subject position “immigrant”—that this subject position is created by racialized world colonialism. Jean-Paul Sartre has famously argued that Négritude is not an “ensemble of vices or virtues or of intellectual and moral qualities, but rather a certain affective attitude toward the world... To use Heidegger’s language, negritude is the Negro’s Being-in-the-World.”338 I argue that migritude is an ontological phenomenology of the being-in-the-world of the migrant, encompassing all the above mentioned structures (the world –societal structures) and conditions (existential experience of being-in-the-world including categories of ideological subject positions). To riff on Simone de Beauvoir’s famous pronouncement in The Second Sex, one is not born an “immigrant” but becomes one. It is thus important to consider what I call McKay’s “politics of vagabondage” which ontologically produces a

337 Ibid, 304.
situated aesthetics that would challenge colonial modernity and its twin, racial capitalism, with specific reference to the black migrant body.


In both Banjo and McKay’s 1937 autobiography A Long Way From Home “vagabondage” and “vagabond” are McKay’s specific terms signifying his politics, ethics, poetics, ontology—perhaps all of the above. The English term “vagabond” derives from Latin and Anglo-Latin sources; it literally means “to wander from bondage; but more idiomatically to escape from bondage.” According to the Oxford English Dictionary the Middle English root word “bondage” harkens back to the system of bondage in which a serf farms the land of the Lord and is taxed heavily, thereby beholden to the lord. It also connotes “the condition of a serf or slave” itself, which was famously illustrated in Hegel’s dialectic, often translated as “The Lord and Bondsman” or “Master and Slave.” The prefix “vaga” derives from the Latin vagārī, “to wander.” Not coincidentally McKay opens his autobiography with his “lust to wander” where the “spirit of the vagabond” takes hold. McKay may well have been aware of the etymology here as he chooses this term, vagabondage, to represent his politics and poetics of movement, thus opening up a critical space through which modernity itself can be re-conceptualized.

In the novel alone there are twenty-one appearances of the word “vagabond.” Latnah, for example, likes Banjo because he “is vagabond” which takes the form of a condition or attitude, not a noun, and Ray dreams of “vagabonding” with Banjo, an instance

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of “verbing” the noun. Black migrants as well as the poor and working-class whites of Marseille are described as “vagabonds,” while Ray, mirroring McKay, is named “vagabond poet.” In addition, the form “vagabondage” (both a condition and action) gets two mentions in Banjo: Ginger is arrested for “vagabondage,” while Banjo’s life is described as the always incomplete but never unsatisfactory “dream of vagabondage,” tied explicitly to the global movements of poor and working-class black migrants moving upon colonial routes and structures of world-capitalism.\(^{343}\)

The last line of the novel sees Banjo and Ray (of *Home to Harlem*) setting off again out into the world: “Come on pardner. Wese got enough between us to beat it a long ways from here.”\(^{344}\) In *A Long Way From Home*, McKay’s autobiography, he remembers his own migratory desires. “After a few years of study at the Kansas State College [arriving from Jamaica in 1912] I was gripped by the lust to wander as I wonder. The spirit of the vagabond, the daemon of some poets, had got hold of me. I quit college. I had no desire to return home… I desired to achieve something new, something in the spirit and accent of America. Against its mighty force, its grand energy and power and bigness, its bitterness burning in my black body, I would raise my voice to make a canticle of my reaction. And so I became a vagabond—but a vagabond with a purpose.”\(^{345}\) His reaction to the intense racism of the U.S.—“its bitterness burning in my black body”—catalyzes a vagabondage embodying both physical movement and political or philosophical attitudes, evinced in the need to write poetry “with a purpose.” One purpose is a race-conscious struggle against the barriers of institutional racism. McKay’s own peregrinations, from Jamaica to the U.S., to England,

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\(^{343}\) This is shown mainly through borders and citizenship on the one hand, and water (gulfs, seas, bays, etc) upon which commodities and black bodies flow, on the other (*Banjo*, 11).

\(^{344}\) Ibid, 326.

\(^{345}\) *A Long Way From Home*, 4.
Russia, France, and Africa imbricate and enliven the narrative movements and descriptions in *Banjo*.

In the debate between Banjo and Goosy in the novel the root word is a major point of contention: “Banjo is bondage,” argues Goosey, “let us play piano and violin, harp and flute. Let the white folks play the banjo if they want to keep on remembering all the Black Joes singing and the hell they made them live in.” Banjo dismisses Goosey’s contention and the stereotype, arguing that that shouldn’t stop the dream of starting a black orchestra. “All that you talking about slavery and bondage ain’t got nothing to do with our starting up a li’l orchestry.” Banjo and Goosey’s dialogue here, closely read at length earlier in this chapter, enacts the tension in the word vagabondage itself. In other words, the prefix vagārī works upon the suffix, both engaging with the conditions that produce it (slavery) and escaping or wandering away from it. Though the banjo is born of bondage and has stereotypes affixed to it via the institutions of racism, there is a challenge to that root of bondage in the vagārī of the banjo, not minstrelsy but “saxophone-jazzing” and “blues.” Vagabondage here discloses the being-in-the-world of black men and Latnah (the lone female character in *Banjo*) in the diaspora as well as transnational migrants; McKay’s theorization of vagabondage marks a necessary intervention for any understanding of modernity as it delineates modern world-systems of exploitation constitutive of the world in McKay’s colonial and our neocolonial world.

If Banjo does not himself voice an etymological challenge to bondage himself, Ray, his writerly counterpart and stand-in for McKay, does. For Ray, the vagabond “lover of life” becomes a “challenge to the clubbers of helpless vagabonds—to the despised, underpaid

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346 *Banjo*, 90.
347 Ibid.
protectors of property and its high personages. He was a challenge to civilization itself.”

If bondage represents not just the Antebellum institution of slavery but racial capitalism and global colonialism in McKay’s 1920s and 30s, the prefix vagārī anticipates the “anti” in anti-colonialism and anti-racism, it represents a revolutionary linguistic *cum* political-ontological gesture that opens up the possibility of a new way of being-in-the-world. A reading of the banjo through vagabondage views the instrument not as a symptom of slavery but as indicative of black modernity.

At Sartre’s initial suggestion, that Négritude represents the being-in-the-world of the black man, I turn briefly to Heidegger and this philosophical concept in the service of a close reading of the ontological aspect of McKay’s migritude and his conception of modernity itself. In his chapter on “Being-in-the-World” in *Being and Time* Heidegger argues that philosophy must no longer forget about the question of being itself—ontology—and, more specifically, the being that is particular to humans (Dasein). We must think beyond our inherited Cartesian dualism (Mind/Body, Subject/Object), Heidegger argues, and phenomenologically examine the being of humans in the world and the relationship between humans and things in the world. The “subject-object-relation” must be presupposed. But that is a presupposition which, although it is inviolate in its own facticity, is truly fatal, perhaps for that very reason, if its ontological necessity and especially its

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348 Ibid, 314.
351 Jean-Luc Nancy states that “Heidegger clearly states that being-with (Mitsein, Mitseindersein, and Mitdasein) is essential to the constitution of Dasein itself. Given this, it needs to be made absolutely clear that Dasein, far from being either ‘man’ or ‘subject,’ is not even an isolated and unique ‘one,’ but is instead always the one, each one, with one another.” Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O’Byrne (Stanford: Stanford Univeristy Press, 2000), 27.
ontological meaning are left in obscurity.”\textsuperscript{352} The world itself is not just made up of subjects and objects but must be disclosed ontologically and understood as a “system of relations.”\textsuperscript{353} The ontological “worldliness” of the world is one of the “structures” of being itself or “Being-in-the-World,” and “…Being-in-the-World [is] an essential structure of Da-sein.”\textsuperscript{354} In other words, being \textit{in} the world is an essential structure of human beings and “world,” for Heidegger, is philosophically weighted. Here, his shift in terms mark a shift in scope from the liberal Individual or Subject, to the world, and to the structures and conditions that produce Dasein itself.

“World,” for Heidegger, is determined by systems, structures, objects, and modes that condition human Being and meaning.\textsuperscript{355} Furthermore, analysis of Dasein shows that the idea of a Subject is insufficient. “In clarifying Being-in-the-World we have shown that a bare subject without a world never ‘is’ proximally, nor is it ever given. And so in the end an isolated ‘I’ without Others is just as far from being proximally given.”\textsuperscript{356} In other words, there is not only no “I” without others but others constitute “I.” Being-in-the-World is defined as “that basic state of Dasein by which every mode of its Being gets co-determined... In the foregoing explication of the world [regarding “equipment,” ready-to-hand entities, signs, signification, language, worlds, and other structures of Being], the remaining structural items of Being-in-the-World have become visible...”\textsuperscript{357} McKay’s \textit{Banjo} does the work of making visible the structural items of being-in-the-world elided by, for one, European philosophy’s entanglement with Empire, and secondly, the critical vocabulary

\textsuperscript{352} \textit{Being and Time}, 55.
\textsuperscript{353} Ibid, 82.
\textsuperscript{354} Ibid, 53.
\textsuperscript{355} “Worldhood” is the term used when Heidegger refers to the ontological conception of world, \textit{Being and Time}, 93.
\textsuperscript{356} Ibid, 152.
\textsuperscript{357} Ibid, 153.
subtending Heidegger’s philosophical programme suits this goal—that pairing this vocabulary with McKay’s black *Banjo* novel re-invigorates both philosophy and, further still, postcolonial and diaspora studies.

Instead of the *ontic*, meaning things, individuals, and aspects of the political, Heidegger turns towards the existential or ontological, that is, the meaning of Da-Sein (humans’ Being) itself, modes or structures of being, systems of relations, *worlds*, etc. He uses the German words “struktur” and “struktural” often which in English means both “structure” and “texture.” He is thus interested in the conditions of possibility of being in order to figure out the texture and structures of everyday beings and things in the world. “All the structures of being which belong to Dasein, together with the phenomenon which provides the ‘who’, are ways of its Being.” Heidegger here changes the philosophical conversation surrounding Being by speaking in terms of basic structures, condition, modes, and systems of relations. In sharp contrast to transcendental philosophy, like Hegel’s Absolute Spirit (seemingly in the clouds), Heidegger uses his hermeneutics to get to the ground of things, to the root of Being. Heidegger uses the term “primordial” not to suggest “primitivity” but rather something primary, again, the roots or ground of something that, invisibly shapes or conditions some mode of Being. “To the thing itself!” urges phenomenology, beyond the mere representation, symptom, or signifier.

In another work Heidegger contrasts the terms “earth” and “world” where the earth is material while world “grounds itself on the earth” and is “formed” or constituted by the meanings humans attach to it. “The stone” for Heidegger is indeed “worldless, the animal

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358 *Being and Time*, 149.

is poor in the world, and man is world-forming.” Against a bee, “the world of man is a rich one, greater in range, far more extensive in its penetrability, constantly extendable... This is why we speak of man as world-forming.” And later, “The Dasein in man forms world: 1) it brings it forth, 2) it gives an image or view of the world, it sets it forth; 3) it constitutes the world, contains and embraces it.” Humans constitute a world as much as they are constituted by it. Humans exist in worlds and worlds do not exist without or outside of Dasein. Existence is world (as the saying goes: existence is essence). Dasein is also shaped by the world it forms: “Yet man is not simply regarded as a part of the world within which he appears and which he makes up in part. Man also stands over and against the world. This standing-over-and-against is a ‘having’ of world as that in which man moves, with which he engages, which he both masters and serves, and to which he is exposed... he is at once both master and servant to the world”. Here two interesting things happen: 1) a complex and ontological mode of thinking world is inaugurated; and 2) the concepts of mastery and servitude are uncritically metaphorized.

Importantly, as Susan Buck-Morss reminds us, “By the eighteenth century, slavery had become the root metaphor of Western political philosophy, connoting everything that is evil about power relations. Freedom, its conceptual antithesis, was considered by Enlightenment thinkers as the highest universal political value. Yet this political metaphor began to take root at precisely the time that the [European] economic practice of slavery

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361 Ibid, 193.
was intensifying.” In some ways Heidegger's hermeneutic existentialist program was a radical challenge to eighteenth and nineteenth century philosophy. However, it is interesting that the metaphor of slavery re-appears in Heidegger without reference to actual slavery—a mode of rendering invisible the contemporary transatlantic slave-trade (a seemingly important “structural item” of Dasein’s Being-in-the-World) just as Hegel does in the *Phenomenology*, and that Heidegger's ontology is indeed so grounded in the abstract, at least in *Being and Time*, that it is necessarily apolitical. Unlike McKay's *Banjo* published just two years later, it disallows a politics. Robert Reid-Pharr’s important work *Once You go Black* argues that Sartre (and Heidegger as well), “simply reiterates the centuries-long tradition of writing black individuality out of narratives of Western modernity. He establishes, like Burke, Hegel, Freud, Marx, and many others, a humanist discourse in which blackness stands as a sort of absolute boundary, the place at which even the most rigorous logic falls apart.” For Reid-Pharr though, this does not mean one should throw away Heidegger completely, but to problematize and de-racialize (or decolonize) the tenets of Western philosophy in the service of a more “radical humanism.”

Heidegger's complex philosophical program and radical change in perspective is an important one and one that must be taken into account when analyzing the world of the black migrant, as Sartre in a way, points towards in 1948, and black writers like Senghor and later Hamidou Kane would forge a kind of black existentialism using Heidegger’s philosophy via Sartre. Heidegger however, partly due to his own (Eurocentric) ontological program, cannot reach a politics. On its own it cannot reach, as Claude McKay does with

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367 Ibid, 98.
his situated and black ontology of vagabondage, an understanding of Being in modernity, in which the structural forces, conditions, and modes of Being are predicated upon slavery, colonialism, the production of the Immigrant, and the management and re-education of movement. Movement in this way, from global and asymmetrical circulation of commodities to the movement of people predicated upon world-systems such as colonialism is the modern. McKay, as we have seen, shows the being-in-the-world of the vagabond, the black migrant, the colonized, and the entanglement of slavery and modernity.

Paul Gilroy’s path-breaking The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness argues that slavery and racial terror were not outside modernity but constituted it and that enlightenment conceptions structuring modernity such as Reason and Rationality were complicit with white supremacy and racial terror.368 “Modernity is understood as a distinct configuration with its own spatial and temporal characteristics defined above all through the consciousness of novelty that surrounds the emergence of civil society, the modern state, and industrial capitalism... slavery is somehow assigned to blacks. It becomes our special property rather than a part of the ethical and intellectual heritage of the West as a whole.”369 In a similar vein Kevin K. Gaines remarks: “Indeed, as Richard Wright observed during the early 1950s [in his reflections on the slave castles in Ghana], such places of darkness and dire suffering actually constitute quintessential sites of Western modernity, enlightenment, and even rationality by virtue of the planned efficiency of their commodification of human flesh.”370 McKay’s vibrant vagabond novel indeed illustrates pernicious “sites of Western modernity” through the phenomenology of

368 Gilroy, Paul The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness (United Kingdom: Verso 1993), 39, 73, 118.
369 Ibid, 49.
370 American Africans in Ghana, 280.
movement in/under colonialism and racial capitalism as I’ve shown above. See again his picture of moving globality and critique of “world-conquering” civilization.

Nikhil Pal Singh argues that before Wright, and one could argue since the nineteenth century in E. W. Blyden and Martin Delany, black radical thinkers have questioned modernity in this way. “By the 1930s, a highly internationalist and leftist cohort of black intellectuals had begun to produce a sophisticated body of work analyzing racism and colonialism as a global history of Euro-American dominance.” Singh mentions George Padmore, W. E. B. Du bois, Ralph Bunche, C. L. R. James, Eric Williams, and Oliver Cox who “outlined the spatial and temporal coordinates of a modern world-system, racially ordered by the international slave trade in African bodies, and the conquest of the aboriginal peoples in the Americas.” McKay himself was an integral member of Singh’s internationalist cohort yet exiled amongst French counterparts like Rene Maran, the Nardal sisters, and later, the Négritude poets.

McKay’s oeuvre is not only an integral and formative piece in this “global culture of black modernity” as Kevin Gaines describes it in this period, but it also allows us to posit the following: movement and migration are cast upon the routes of colonialism at the same time as they are induced by colonialism and racial capitalism. Vagabondage is movement, but just as the vagārī rests in tension upon bondage, so movement and immigration are born of colonialism and the expropriation of free movement by nation-states and the international system they are embedded in. Ray’s critique of modernity in Banjo, his machine-leveling world-conquering civilization, is predicated upon movement. “Once in a moment of bitterness he had said in Harlem, ‘Civilization is rotten.’ And the more he

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372 Ibid, 49.
traveled and knew of it, the more he felt the truth of that bitter outburst. He hated civilization because its general attitude toward the colored man was such as to rob him of his warm human instincts and make him inhuman. Under it the thinking colored man could not function normally like "his white brother." The more Ray "traveled and knew of it" the less colonialism and racial capitalism became regionally or nationally specific. The point of Banjo is that the system is global. Later Aimé Césaire will say that the same Western civilization Ray challenges, whose own existence has given rise to the proletariat and the colonized the world over, is "sick."

I take Sartre seriously when in the introduction to the anthology of negritude poets, "Black Orpheus," he muses that Négritude gets to the "Being-in-the-world of the black man." But he is wrong if he limits Négritude to black existence solely. Banjo isn't simply the being-in-the-world of the black pan-African migrant under colonialism and world capitalism, but in addition, being-in-the-world itself. Vagabondage accesses the being-in-the-world of the black migrant under colonialism yet unlike Heidegger's Being-in-the-World, "grounded" to the point of apoliticality, vagabondage also offers a politics. To restate Vijay Prashad's argument quoted earlier in his preface to Sheilja Patel's 2010 Migritude: "Shailja's book is not simply about migrants. It's about the condition of migration—of migritude. It is not a cultural anthropology of migrant lives, but rather a philosophical meditation on what it means to live with the concept of Migrant. Riffing as it does off the term négritude, it is also about race." What Sartre (for Négritude) and Prashad (for migritude) point towards but do not fully elaborate is that if Heidegger's

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373 Banjo, 163/4.
376 Patel, Migritude, iv
project is to create a hermeneutics elaborating, interpreting, and creating a philosophical language for the conditions and structures of being itself, so migritude writers ontologically parse the structures, modes, and conditions of being of the migrant, which is born of imperialism, colonialism, and a racial capitalism that produces non-White subjects from formerly colonized areas of the globe as immigrant.

I have shown above through a sustained reading of McKay’s *Banjo* in terms of movement that his novel is not just about individuals who cross borders, but about the being-in-the-world of black migrants and the oppressive structures and conditions (both material and ideological) that produce and manage his pan-African cast of characters: And that if it is about the being-in-the-world of the black migrant it is also about challenges and interrogations of those oppressive structures and the “system of relations” that create the “magic” of black pan-African internationalism. Further, it illustrates how immigration was radically re-figured in the early twentieth century as an imperial project to be managed and was tightly bound up with racial capitalism and colonialism. *Banjo* then, as a (proto)migritude text, speaks directly to twenty-first century African writers who show that migration in the era of globalization and mobile capital is indeed constituted by and entangled with imperial-era structures of migration, immobile race, and the movement of capital. As we will see in the following section of this chapter, the politics of vagabondage will reemerge in one shape or another as the “nomadic” in Nadifa Mohamed’s *Black Mamba Boy*. This intertextual relationship indicates the temporal movement of radical concepts and practices through time and across oceans, seas, and gulfs, from Négritude, to migritude, where *Banjo* in many ways embodies both locations.
Part II: Nadifa Mohamed’s *Black Mamba Boy* as a Migritude Text

Nadifa Mohamed’s 2010 novel is a semi-biographical account of Mohamed’s Father—Jama—as a young boy and his journey to find his father, taking him across and between the Horn of Africa, the Middle East, Sudan, North Africa, and Europe (including a brief sojourn in Palestine and an intertextual foray into McKay’s “ditch” in Marseilles). As a migritude text *Black Mamba Boy* narrates not just the story of an individual who crosses borders—Jama—but the being-in-the-world of the migrant—the structures and conditions of immigration that shape both how migrants move or don’t, and the ways in which migrant subject-positions are produced. Mohamed shows that the violence of colonialism creates dispersal, and in the same moment *interdicts*, redirects, and re-educates that very dispersal of peoples in and through late-imperial technologies managing movement. These technologies would then proliferate in the postcolonial present and would be taken up and challenged by other migritude authors.

Mohamed’s narrative begins in tandem with the rise of Italian colonialism in Africa and its invasion of Ethiopia in 1935. Jama’s mother migrates from Somalia to work in a coffee factory in Aden, Yemen, after Jama’s father, her husband Guure, leaves for Sudan to find work as a driver for the “ferengis”—an Arabic term for white Westerners—referring to white British colonial soldiers. The novel opens in Aden, Yemen, a diasporic port city and nodal point of colonialism and global capitalism. As the itinerant Jama wanders into the coffee factory that his mother works in, “the smell of tea, coffee, frankincense, myrrh swept up the hill and swathed him in a nauseating, heady mix.”

> As Jama reached the first warehouse, bare-chested coolies chanted while they pushed heavy wooden crates onto the backs of lorries. After standing outside Al-Medina Coffee Stores for a moment, Jama walked through the stone entrance and peered

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into the darkness. Sunlight splintered through the roof, illuminating the dust rising from the coffee beans as they were tossed to loosen the husks. A field of underpaid women in bright, flowery Somali robes were bent over the baskets full of beans, spreading them on a cloth and removing stunted ones before the coffee was exported.\footnote{Ibid.}

South Yemen had been a British colony since 1839 and thus Aden would have still been under British rule in \textit{Black Mamba Boy}'s 1930s. The British East India Company, also present since the seventeenth century, would have set up coffee factories like the one Jama's mother works in. Antony Wild notes that “by the 1620s [the British East India Company] were actively trading coffee from Yemen throughout the Arabian Sea.”\footnote{Antony Wild, \textit{Coffee: A Dark History} (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), 69.} It is unknown whether or not Ambaro, Jama’s mother, is employed in a British-controlled coffee factory. Yet, the factory Ambaro works in represents a microcosm of the global order of things and cannot be disentangled from the colonial project and its vast reach in international trade and conquest. An international nodal point, Aden was one of the many centers upon a grid of global capital, circulation, colonialism and conquest. It was a port \textit{city} partly because it represented a halfway point between Britain and its “crown jewel” colony, India.\footnote{This is perhaps why the novel references the Rupee as currency in Aden instead of the pound. \textit{Black Mamba Boy}, 45.}

There are three important points in the above passage that illustrate the phenomenology of movement and migration in the novel: 1) Like \textit{Banjo}, the passage describes commodities to be exported from the global South (a context narrated from the perspective of Africa and Yemen), to the North via colonial structures already in place, such as factories exploiting labor like the one above, or shipping routes and roads (both economic and military). Here, the conditions producing the possibilities of the narrative cannot be
separated from the unsetting sun of colonialism, 2) the workers’ bright flowery robes become a metonym for the Somali diaspora in Yemen. Reminiscent of McKay’s vibrant yet impoverished ditch and the black beach boys of Marseilles, Mohamed has already described the port city as fundamentally diasporic: “Market boys of all different hues, creeds, and languages gathered at the beach to play, bath, and fight.” In this way the narrative takes the condition of diaspora as its object. The novel itself is, then, a meditation upon the being-in-the-world of migrants; finally, 3) more specifically Mohamed’s picture of the coffee factory is clearly gendered as she describes fields of “underpaid women” providing the labor and surplus-value upon which world capitalism thrives. This representation of women in the diaspora not only corrects the absence of women from colonial histories and male-centered literature, it also strategically gestures towards our contemporary context of globalization in which workforces in the sweatshops of the global South for example—neatly erased from filiation with transnational corporations in the north via creative use of subcontracting—are predominantly young women.

Movement indeed guides the passage: from the winnowing of the coffee beans that will then be moved to the port by the “bare-chested coolies” from India where they will enter into the global circulation of commodities and capital, to the diasporic communities themselves having moved from Somalia or India to Aden and perhaps back again producing for the global North, to Jama’s own itinerant circulations around the city as the novel progresses. It is this kind of movement that Mohamed maps in her novel, what she elsewhere calls the “violence of dispersal,” picturing not solely individuals who cross-borders, the products of their labor, and the circulation of commodities, but also and

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381 Ibid, 7.
382 “Violence of dispersal” is Nadifa Mohamed’s phrase. Reading, Sept 25th 2012, The Graduate Center, CUNY.
necessarily the technologies of power producing and managing migrant movement. For example, Mohamed embeds colonial constructions like checkpoints, borders, and passports, into her novel as a way to tell the story of imperial-era black migrants. These nomads are analogous to McKay’s pan-African vagabonds yet from a different geographical and generational perspective—Jama for example lives through the Italian invasion of the Horn and is conscripted as a soldier.

Mohamed’s passage above demonstrates the articulation between the warmth and vibrancy of the diasporic port-city-slum and the violence of the global system constitutive of it. The “bare-chested coolies” slave away for the global North pushing “heavy wooden creates on the backs of lorries,” mirroring McKay’s “creatures of the warm soil, digging, plucking for the Occident world its exotic nourishment of life, under the whip, under the terror.” The picturesque description of Somali coffee women in bright flowery robes belie the execrable conditions under which they toil. The centripetal force of the colonial system indeed holds Aden in its constellation just as the piquancy of the passage itself is held together by the pull of the sentences describing the oppressing global forces at play—most immediately in terms of exports and “underpaid women” in Aden’s “port the world goes through,” to borrow McKay’s phrasing.

The book opens with “the black planets of Jama’s eyes [roaming] over Aden—industrial Steamer Point; Crater, the sandstone old town, its curvaceous dun-colored buildings merging into the Shum volcanoes.” Aden’s beauty exists in a tense relationship with its abject poverty as Mohamed documents working-class and poor groups in Aden’s

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383 Banjo, 67.
384 Black Mamba Boy, 3.
urban context, what Cecile Sandten calls “contemporary nomads.” Jama and his friends, as well as their parents, economic migrants, sailors in the port, the un- or underemployed, those living in or between the shanty-towns, townships, or slums of the global South all compose Sandten’s contemporary nomad: “the slum-dweller in various literary and medial guises: as a voiceless urban squatter, repressed political or economic migrant, or (rather more positively) ‘postcolonial flâneur.’” Playing upon Gayatri Spivak’s “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Sandten in “Contemporary Nomads, or Can the Slum-Dweller Speak?” urges us to think about postcolonial lumpenproletariat with limited access to received discourse or recourse to voice, like “subalterns” in the Spivakian sense. Yet the subaltern here is necessarily nomadic or moving, even if confined to one city, since stability is a luxury not afforded contemporary nomads like Jama and his mother.

As Ashley Dawson points out, “postcolonial scholars have been slow to address issues relating to urban space and society in the global South” specifically slums that make up the mega-cities in the global South like Lagos or Kolkata. Mohamed’s Somali “coffee women” in the excerpt above who migrate to Aden for economic reasons, illustrate urban entanglement with movement and the world. It is necessary delineate this first section of Mohamed’s novel in Aden not just in terms of diaspora and movements of people between nations but as representing the patchwork of slums providing the backdrop to a narrative

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386 Ibid.
in which the movements of people are structurally entangled with processes of colonialism, global capital, and requisite urbanization.\textsuperscript{388}

The tableau opening \textit{Black Mamba Boy} is devoted to Jama and his multi-ethnic and multi-cultural band of fellow street urchins, some homeless, all poor. Picturing Aden’s port neighborhood, the narrator describes “the black lava of the Shum Shum volcanoes looming over them when they reached the beach. Market boys of all hues, creeds, and languages gathered at the beach to play, bathe, and fight. They were a roll-call of infectious diseases, mangled limbs, and deformities.”\textsuperscript{389} Here, the vibrancy of the multicultural beach is tempered by the persistent symptoms of poverty: disease, deformations, and mangled limbs. Echoes of McKay’s port poetics in \textit{Banjo} sound here. “The quarter of the old port exuded a nauseating odor of mass life congested, confused, moving round and round in a miserable suffocating circle. Yet everything there seemed to belong and fit naturally in place. Bistros and love shops and girls and touts and vagabonds and the troops of dogs and cats—all seemed to contribute so essentially and colorfully to that vague thing called atmosphere.”\textsuperscript{390} Not in the global South yet of the global South McKay describes the urban space of Marseille, that “mass life congested,” as both connected to Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean, in the sense that its commodities and people flow through it, but also, like \textit{Black Mamba Boy} as a nodal point in the colonial constellation of capital. Mohamed though, rather than tracking “picturesque proletarians” or Banjo’s lumpenproletarian band of touts, traces the routes and lives of children as contemporary nomads.

\textsuperscript{388} Footnote on the depiction of slums or shanty towns in Buer migritude fiction such as \textit{Shanty Town Kid} by Azouz Begag and \textit{Tea in the Harem} by Mahdi Charif. Also reference Abani’s \textit{Graceland}, Uwem Akpan \textit{Say You’re One of Them} and Nuruddin Farah—postcolonial African lit and slums/megacities.

\textsuperscript{389} \textit{Black Mamba Boy}, 7.

\textsuperscript{390} \textit{Banjo}, 18.
Somali migrant children make up the most impoverished and thus voiceless of the Yemeni population. “Indian kids, Jewish kids, and Yemeni kids all lived with their parents, however poor they might be. It was only the Somali children who ran around feral, sleeping everywhere and anywhere. Many of the Somali boys were children of single mothers working in the coffee factories, too tired after twelve hours of work to chase around after boisterous, hungry boys.” These vagabonds are “feral,” boisterous, yet, as subalterns, voiceless and powerless. Jama’s aunt for example persecutes her “guests” when she finds that, after taking them in, they would not be her servants as she had expected. “I’m not surprised Somalis have a bad reputation, the way some of these newcomers dress, all naked arms with their udders hanging out the sides.” Mrs. Islaweyne, despite being a distant relative, wields her “superior” class position as a weapon against her “dirty Somali” guests.

Jama responds by taking flight, living out-of-doors, sleeping on roof tops, and running with the other “little vagrants” of Aden. He also dreams of literal flight: “...I would buy an airplane so I could fly through the clouds and come down to earth whenever I wanted to see a new place, Mecca, China, I would travel even farther, to Damascus and Ariwaliya, and just come and go as I wanted.” Like his erstwhile Father Guure, Jama has caught the spirit of the vagabond, and in McKay’s words was “gripped by the lust to wander.” Though this section of the novel in Aden merely sets the stage for Jama’s epic journey to follow, it does the important work of connecting migration and movement to urban centers and to the global nodal points of capitalism and colonialism in the inter-war and World War II era.

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391 *Black Mamba Boy*, 31.
392 Ibid, 12.
393 Ibid, 25.
Jama returns to his Aunt’s house in Aden after hearing his mother has taken ill, only to find Ambaro on her death bed. His aunt refuses to pay for a doctor and so his mother dies after giving Jama her meager savings with which he promises himself he’ll use to find his father in Sudan. He lives on the streets of Aden until his is called home to Hargeisa, Somalia by his great Aunt on his mother’s side. This section—Jama’s “homecoming,” the shortest in the novel—is not a modernist-return-from-exile narrative like those produced by earlier generations of African authors. From Chinua Achebe’s *No Longer at Ease*, Nuruddin Farah’s *Links*, to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s most recent *Americanah* these authors relate the pain of exile and the unease of return. Though Jama is too young to really know Hargeisa before he and Ambaro left, there is an affective reaction to Somalia when he returns, whether generated through actual or imaginary connection to his homeland.

Jama looked around him. Somaliland was yellow, intensely yellow, a dirty yellow, with streaks of brown and green. A group of men stood next to their heard of camels while the lorry over-heated, its metal grille grimacing under an acacia tree. There was no smell of food or incense or money drifting in the air as there was in Aden, there were no farms, no gardens, but there was a sharp sweetness he breathed in, something invigorating, intoxicating. This was his country, this was the same air his father and grandfathers had breathed, the same landscape that they had known.  

Like other exile-return narratives “home” is both foreign and familiar. Somaliland is not an urban center and so for Jama it doesn’t smell like Aden with its requisite smells of the compact lives of millions of people: foods, fish, incense, bodies, animals, and so on. But it is familiar on the other hand, as it represents the land of Jama’s ancestors; it is a place in which he breathes the same air as his family. Jama’s homecoming is conspicuously brief (under twenty pages in the novel).

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In Hargeisa Jama is still somewhat alienated among his mother’s clan as he is viewed as an uncouth street urchin and, though he finds thankless work carrying cow carcasses for a slaughterhouse, he is again forced leave his homeland after a dispute with his second cousin. Although Jama has made the decision to leave, "he only [knows] to walk away from Hargeisa... the desert terrified him, the silence, the boulders marking nomad’s graves, the emptiness."^395 Ironically what is most “Somali”—nomadism—is what is most foreign to Jama, who is inured to the bustling slums of Yemen’s port city.^396 And although Somalia is home, it is also terrifying as he does not have a home. This contradiction converses with novels of exile and return, some painting a picture of war-torn (colonized) Africa where home itself is not home but made foreign in myriad ways: the imposition of European institutions, economy, infrastructure, language, and ideology. Ngugi’s *Decolonizing the Mind* speaks eloquently to African homelessness at home in the colonial context. And though this is apparent in Mohamed’s novel, Jama’s homecoming makes up less than one-quarter of the narrative.

*Black Mamba Boy* shows rather that the anarchy of movement is traced upon the anarchy of Empire. The majority of the novel tells the story of Jama’s peripatetic journey (beginning in tandem with the 1935 Italian invasion of Ethiopia), around the Horn of Africa, Sudan, Egypt, then on to Palestine, France, Wales, and finally, the end of the novel leaves Jama on the cusp of a return to Eritrea. Mohamed chooses, in lieu of a narrative of return, to write a pan-African migritude novel in which movement upon a global colonial grid and the relationships between various and shifting groups of colonized people is

^395 Ibid, 72.
^396 Anthropologist Ioan Lewis notes that, “It cannot be emphasized too strongly that pastoral nomadism constitutes the economic base of the vast bulk of the Somali population, and manifestations of the nomadic lifestyle and traditions pervade almost all aspects of Somali life.” See: Ioan Lewis, *Understanding Somalia and Somaliland* (London: C. Hurst & Company, 2008) 56.
narrated; rather than the pain of one exile, the process of multiple exiles are woven into her narrative of movement. Take for example her portrait of Assab, Eritrea, an African port city in the novel. “The people were a ragbag of wanderers: Abyssinians looking for work, Yemeni fisherman following the shoals of the Red Sea, nomadic Afars with their teeth filed to points, Somalis on their way to somewhere else.”

Mohamed’s ragbag of wanderers illustrate the globality of the black migrant, inextricable from the repressive colonial material conditions of reality they daily meet, and the burgeoning pan-African relationships fomenting between them—often in response to the exploitative processes of European colonialism and racialized capitalism. Like the politics of vagabondage in Banjo which represents an ontology and a politics on the one hand, and a practice and movement on the other, the transnational nomadic in Black Mamba Boy offers an analogous engagement with colonialism and affective pan-African community re-sited in the Horn of Africa and its points of contact therein with the world.

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So Jama "only knew to walk away from Hargeisa.” The narrator describes a post-Berlin conference scene subtending the first footsteps of Jama’s journey: “His land had been carved up among France, Italy, Britain, and Abyssinia.” Italy had claimed Southern Somalia while Britain claimed the section above that. France took what is now Djibouti while Ethiopia (Abyssinia) conquered the ethnically Somali Ogaden area. Along with the colonial carving up of the Horn comes infrastructure. As Jama hitches a ride on a British lorry headed to Djibouti the narrator again traces Jama’s diasporic paths stenciled upon

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397 Black Mamba Boy, 104.
398 Ibid, 77.
colonial routes: “The British had built the road to ease their passage into and out of their possession, and now Jama trundled along it, making slow progress toward the artificial border between Somaliland and Djibouti.” Evoking founding Négritude author Léopold Sédar Senghor’s statement that “all borders are artificial,” Mohamed meditates upon what she calls the “violence of dispersal,” begging the questions: to what extent does the violence of colonialism create dispersal, and to what extent does the colonial interdiction of that very dispersal of peoples and things at or across borders represent a structure of violence?

Mohamed’s novel shows that the violence of colonialism creates dispersal, and in the same moment interdicts, redirects, and re-educates that very dispersal of peoples in and through technologies managing movement. As Jama rides on the lorry to Djibouti in the hopes of eventually getting to his father in Sudan, Mohamed pictures the structural colonial violence in the following passage in terms of the materiality of borders and European infrastructure, itself “picked up and dropped” onto its colony: In French Djibouti "European soldiers manned a checkpoint and were nearly taking apart the vehicles in search of smuggled goods... This town was conjured up from the fantasies of its conquerors, a home away from home despite the anti-European sentiment: a provincial French town picked up and dropped into the hottest place on earth.” Karim Mattar and David Fieni argue that “the checkpoint functions not only to control the flow of migrants, illicit goods, and insurgents/terrorists, but also to divide contiguous lands and to reproduce politically and legally encoded distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Thus performing sovereignty, the checkpoint appears to be symptomatic of fears of catastrophe, whether economic, political,

400 Senghor, On African Socialism.
401 Black Mamba Boy, 81.
or social, in various national and global contexts.” If the colonial and postcolonial checkpoint is symptomatic of national anxiety about the other beyond the pale, then borders themselves are symptoms of the European Nation-State picked up and dropped onto “the hottest place on earth”—in this case, colonial Africa. Throughout the novel Mohamed not only represents national borders and checkpoints but segregated cities and towns as well, such as the neighborhoods in Djibouti with French quarters and black shantytown counterparts. This follows for Italian and British controlled states.

In French Djibouti (read white), “palm trees grew by the side of the street, evenly placed out like guards. Buildings stood in the distance, with a style at odds with Somali or Adeni construction: they were curvaceous and tall, and built to last much longer than the edifices of the British in Hargeisa.” As Jama walks on and continues out of the pristine and “provincial” French neighborhood, which is interestingly “at odds” with African architecture, he finds an entirely different scene, “the street came to life, market boys argued and fought, young mothers with chains of copper coins over their foreheads sat outside chatting as their babies slept. Old women shuffled around barefoot, discreetly begging... Jama sat under a palm tree and scanned around for another lorry, but he was in the heart of a vast shantytown...” National borders then are striated by internal borders and checkpoints, shantytowns against neighborhoods, that under colonialism emit an apartheid-like hue. Later in the narrative, for example, when Jama reaches Asmara, Eritrea, the colonial Italian iteration of apartheid is pronounced. “After a few hours they finally reached the manicured avenues of Asmara. Everywhere new houses sparkled, the

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403 Black Mamba Boy, 81.
404 Ibid, 81/2.
paint on them barely dry. Large Italian villas were painted in mouthwatering reds, corals, pinks, yellows... Jama looked around and all the shops were run by Europeans, the town seemed to belong to the fat-bellied men with upturned moustaches sitting outside the shops... The only Africans he could see were street cleaners.”

In *I Didn’t Do it For You* Michela Wrong describes the violence of the colonial nation-state in Eritrea. “In Asmara, pride of Benito Musselini’s short-lived second Roman empire, the architects of the 1930s unleashed the full, incongruous force of their Modernistic creativity.” From Art-deco cinema “palaces” to “petrol stations that looked like aircraft in mid-flight” Asmara represented the folly of Italy’s Nation-Building project in Africa that would culminate in apartheid. “In modern-day Eritrea, popular memory tends to divide the Italian colonial era into two halves: the Martini years, time of benign paternalism when Eritreans and Italians muddled along together well enough; and the fascist years, when the Italians introduced a series of racial laws as callous as anything seen in apartheid South Africa... the assumptions of biological determinism that came to form the bedrock of both Fascism and Nazism were present from the first days of the Italian presence in Africa,” and one could argue, all nineteenth and twentieth century colonialism to a greater or lesser extent.

*Black Mamba Boy* indeed narrates colonial apartheid from Jama’s and other Africans’ perspective: “The driver found the way to the African reservation and slowed down. ‘Where do you want me to drop you off?’ he asked. ‘Farther down, where the Somalis

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407 Ibid.
408 Ibid, 45.
are’...”\textsuperscript{409} The term “reservation” eerily suggests the non-humanness of Africans from the perspective and practice of the colonists. Like the British concentration camps in Kenya during “the Emergency” poignantly depicted in N’gugi Wa Thiong’o’s \textit{A Grain of Wheat}, \textit{Black Mamba Boy} echoes Fanon’s description (and Césaire’s before that) of colonialism itself as Manichean and therefore apartheid-like. The violence of colonialism \textit{interdicts}, reifies, and hierarchizes sociality, as seen above, and at the same time \textit{creates} dispersal, redirects, and re-educates the movement peoples and things, again, represented by the displacements described above. In this way colonialism in the high-imperial era can be analyzed as a structure of violence whose function, above all, is the production and management of movement. Jama then becomes a conscript of migration.

Although Jama’s geographical errantry provides narrative thrust to the novel it is precisely what stops him—borders, lack of papers or passports, and always-already segregated colonial infrastructures—that proffers a postcolonial perspective or critique. For example, after a being conscripted as an askari (black soldier) in the losing Italian army, under which he is consistently subject to racism and squalid conditions at the hands of the ferengi soldiers, he sets off again towards Egypt in search of more gainful employment as a sailor on British ships. As Jama travels north through Sudan towards Egypt he is met with the contradictory materiality of the artificial constructs that are borders: “Crowds were walking toward the station, where uniformed policemen stopped and searched them. Jama had never needed identification before, he had no paper saying who he was and where he belonged, but from now on, his abtiris would not be enough to prove his identity. In this society you were a nobody unless you had been anointed with a stamp by a bureaucrat.”\textsuperscript{410}

\textsuperscript{409} \textit{Black Mamba Boy}, 110.

\textsuperscript{410} Ibid, 215.
His abtiris, a list of his grandfather’s names—a sort of memorized genealogy of kinship—no longer suffices as an identity marker within Fanon’s Manichean world of the colonizer and colonized, which produces Jama as an Other, as a non-citizen and thus a criminal to be deported. In other words, immigration law informs, manages, indeed conscripts, subjecthood.

Though Jama circumvents the police and Wadi Halfa terminal by walking into Egypt along the banks of Lake Nasser, he is soon caught in Alexandria. “At the end of the interrogation the policeman told Jama that he would be deported back to Sudan and banned from entering Egypt again… the whole carriage was full of Somalis who had also entered Egypt illegally, all roamers who had known only porous insubstantial borders and were now confronted with countries caged behind bars.” Jama is furious at this construction of otherness and remarks that “he hadn’t left Gerset just to be treated like dirt again,” as they are deported to a Palestinian border town. Jama’s bewilderment in the passage above belies the imaginariness of the nation form mapped onto geographical area of North Africa, while his anger is suggestive of the violent materiality of borders, passport checks, and deportations or imprisonment that Africans are subjected to. What is interesting about this description is that it not only asks us to question the “illegality” of diasporic movement insofar as the narrative names a foreign legal structure arbitrarily imposed upon a peoples and geographical area, but also metaphorizes the concept of the nation itself as a “cage… behind bars.”

The narrative therefore produces a transnational phenomenology of the nation: it historicizes and problematizes the violence of both the nation form as well as its concept.

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411 Ibid, 223.
412 Ibid.
and the ways in which it produces subjects via structures of immigration—exclusion, inclusion, citizenship, right to mobility, etc. Further, a town crier in Omhajer, Eritrea in the following passage calls into question colonial property rights, which in this context essentially sweeps away any native rights, expropriating resources, land, and even animals for the Europeans. This creates dispersal, refugees, and catalyzes economic migration, at the same moment as it legislates not just property, but the right to move. The town crier laments to a crowd that, “all possessions held by the natives of Italian East Africa will be adjudicated by colonial legislators... O people hear me, they are telling us we own nothing, and we cannot kill a thing for our mouths without asking them first.’ The crowd laughed uncertainly.” European liberal property rights, beginning with John Locke’s statement that land or raw materials mixed with labor equal property, are only observed in the African context with an absolute bias towards Europeans, which illustrates the arbitrary and violent dispossession of human rights afforded natives-as-others causing, as the novel shows, almost chaotic transmigrations.414

The following passage however narrativizes black resistance to white power showing that white power indeed constructs itself dialectically in terms of masters and slaves which then creates migration. "A group of [askaris] disguised themselves as Sudanese traders and snuck off in a truck, pissed off with the Italians and their stupid white-man, black-man laws. They want you to step into the gutter when they approach, say master this, master that... The longer you stay the less of a man you become."415 We will remember Fanon’s statement that "the 'thing' which has been colonized becomes man during the same process

413 Ibid, 147.
415 Black Mamba Boy, 123.
by which it frees itself” from the apartheid-like colonial system.\[^{416}\] As soon as the askaris toss away the racist labels of colonialism and leave—“the longer you stay the less of a man you become”—human being and anti-colonial resistance become possible. This thematic of anti-colonial resistance situated within the larger context of migration and movement becomes symbolic of an affinity between Banjo and Black Mamba Boy, two critical texts about colonialism and migration, separated by eighty years in time, a continent, and the Atlantic.

Embedded within Mohamad’s migritude narrative, like Banjo before her, is a sophisticated anti-colonial critique of the violence of dispersal. But in addition, Black Mamba Boy shares a certain “diaspora-ness” with 1920s and 30s pan-Africanist writers, Négritude authors, and more specifically, Claude McKay’s wandering protagonist, the eponymous Banjo. Just as Banjo’s vagabondage translates directly into a politics and mirrors McKay’s own wanderlust, so migration, diaspora, errantry, and nomadism constitute an identity for Jama which helps him negotiate questions of Somaliness. Jama’s friend Jibreel relates to Jama later in the narrative that “Everywhere I go I meet Somalis, always from the north, standing at the crossroads, looking up to the sky for direction… I think there are more Somalis at the bottom of the sea or lost in the desert than there are left in our land.”\[^{417}\] On October 30\(^{th}\) 2013 eighty-seven sub-Saharan African migrants perished in Niger’s Sahara desert. They were heading either to Europe or North Africa, most likely as economic migrants.\[^{418}\] Just a few weeks before this incident on October 3\(^{rd}\) 2013 a ship carrying Eritrean migrants (“refugees” to be more specific in this case) capsized

\[^{416}\] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 37.
\[^{417}\] *Black Mamba Boy*, 281.
\[^{418}\] *Al Jazeera America*, Oct. 31\(^{st}\), 2013, [http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2013/10/30/bodies-of-87-migrantsfoundinnigerdesert.html](http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2013/10/30/bodies-of-87-migrantsfoundinnigerdesert.html) Also see the Lampadusa Tragedy
near the small Italian Island of Lampedusa. This is a regular occurrence if one pays
attention to international news. Over 350 people drowned that night. Mattathias Schwartz,
reporting on the “Lampedusa Tragedy” notes that what was exceptional about this case was
not the number of dead migrants since, “in the past twenty years, more than twenty-
thousand immigrants have died on their way to Europe,” but that the ship sank just over
1,000 yards from land. An Eritrean priest named Father Mussie Zerai, who is embedded in
the immigrant cause, muses sadly that the tragedy “seemed like a manifestation of
Europe’s approach to African migration—a hardening of its borders coupled with a
disturbing indifference to human life.”419 Jibreel’s description of Somalis in movement
above then, whether migrants or refugees, is not simply a romantic metaphor for those
wayward souls who cross borders, but an accurate and tragic depiction of the everyday
material realities of those Somalis and African migrants in general from the greater global
South who move due to various colonial, postcolonial, and global factors. In this sense the
violence of dispersal is literal. However, dispersal, movement, vagabondage, and the
nomadic also figure dialectically into identity formation.

In response to Jibreel’s musings Jama responds, “It’s because we are nomads, land is
the same to us everywhere we go, we only care if there is food and water to be found.”420
Somali writer Yasmeen Maxamuud’s recent novel narrating the Somali diaspora in
America during and after the Somali civil war is called Nomad Diaries which is suggestive
of both narration (the writing of a diary) and Somali identity in movement (the nomadic).
At a reading in New York Nadifa Mohamed characterized Somalis as nomadic and, albeit

420 Black Mamba Boy, 281.
somewhat facetiously, quips “[we’re] not used to borders and passports.” Like McKay’s joking response with radical potential to the chaush in which McKay describes himself as a “bad nationalist,” Mohamed’s remark might also be read as an essentializing yet strategic move that offers a nomadic alternative to colonial Being. For Jama, Somaliness is movement, necessarily antithetical to the cage-like state-formations endemic of European colonialism.

The concept-aesthetic of nomadism Mohamed adopts as a challenge to colonial management of movement and geography is paralleled in Mohamed’s contemporary, Djiboutian migritude writer Abdourahman A. Waberi. Waberi similarly re-frames pan-Africanism and Négritude within meditations on the violence of dispersal set in the specific location of the Horn of Africa in his novel *Transit*. One of the central narrators Alice, for example, mobilizes the image-concept of the nomadic as a response to police brutality during independence struggles of the 1970s and beyond: “It is impossible for the police to contain the movement, its life, its protuberances, its transformations, its desires and its new needs, which come from afar, from very far. Silence, exile, and cunning. Crossing and re-crossing borders that make no sense for anyone: a surge of nomadic life, mobility, cooperation, exchange, sharing, the power to annoy.” In addition to the movement, movement itself subtends challenges to State power. The surge of nomadic life in this sense exists in excess of and as a challenge to, the violence of imposed colonial borders which “make no sense to anyone.”

*Transit*, for example, opens present-day in Roissy Airport in France as the main characters—also from Djibuti—witness a sort of African deportation pipeline from France

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to Africa: “ROISSY. Air France. Daily flight to Saint-Denis de la Réunion (on the island of Réunion next to Madagascar), via Cairo and Djibuti.” The flight from France to its former colonies enacts a sort of quotidian condition of postcoloniality and represents an appendage of structures of immigration. Our narrator notes that it is “boarding time for the Africans being deported ‘of their own free will’.” The ironic French double-speak in this passage, representing official French language on immigration policy, mirrors the colonial discourse represented in Black Mamba Boy couching oppression in terms of freedom. “Today’s deportee is a Congolese, supposedly a shopkeeper from Pointe Noire, and his fate seems to be sealed.” However, the well-worn routine reenacted is that deportee’s create a scene on the plane, which makes the tourists uncomfortable, which in turn causes the pilot to ask security to escort said deportee off the plane and back to the “retention center in the waiting zone of the airport. At least he’s alive” though, muses our narrator almost in parallel to Fatou Diome’s character the man from Barbés in The Belly of the Atlantic, who is “luckier than the ones who die of dehydration in the Arizona desert or freeze to death inside the undercarriage of some cargo plane.” Here Waberi references the publicized story of two young Guinean boys who died in the undercarriage an airplane headed from Africa to Brussels in 1998 and the note found on one of their bodies pleading for European aid to Africa. This heartbreaking image becomes however, symbolic of the everyday dangers and death that migrants and refugees face. In addition, Waberi references the U.S. context and the border between North America and Mexico—migrants dying in the “Arizona desert.” Like Teju Cole’s recent twitter poem about Mexican immigration to the

423 Waberi, Transit: A Novel, 5.
424 Ibid, 6.
425 Ibid.
United States and the border entitled “A Piece of the Wall,” Waberi parses global systems managing movement to and from the global South pointing towards the violence of dispersal—differing from elite cosmopolitan or Afropolitan narratives of travel, race, and identity.

Like other twenty-first century migritude writers, Waberi incorporates elements from the black radical tradition such as pan-African anti-colonialism, weaving them into his migritude novel, here symbolized by the Mau-Maus in Kenya. “One, two, three, WOWWWWW! We’re the Mau-Mau, a group of young musicians in love with whirling, turbulent music from the depths of the desert... To think we nearly called ourselves Hadji Didek, from the name of the man who signed the agreement with the French when they wanted to settle on this coast! Mau-Mau, that name down from Mount Kilimanjaro, was ideal... it’s a fighter’s name, inspired by the spirits of the Kenyan forest. An anti-colonialist, anti-imperialist, Third-Worldist warrior, and Pan-African to boot.”

The narrator here is Abdo-Julian, a young Djiboutian living between France and Africa. Like Dongala’s phrase ‘from Négritude to migritude,’ Waberi interweaves the contemporary experience of migrants to the black radical tradition illustrating the temporal movements and shifts in power structures as well as modes of challenge to those structures.

One mode of challenge is in the identification of nomadic identity—even already “mixed.” Abdo-Julien again muses that, “All blood is mixed and all identities are nomadic, Maman, would have said, talking about me, Papa, herself, or the whole wide world. This business of mixed blood is a very old story, she would add, raising her voice—so old the first traces of African migration in the Italian peninsula, to give just one example, date from the

427 Transit, 65/58.
conquest and the fall of Carthage.”

Like Mohamed’s nomadic wanderers in *Black Mamba Boy*, Alice’s (Maman) use of nomadism does not align simply with the ethnic nomads wandering the horn of Africa but the wandering and mixing of blood itself, of movement.

In Mohamed’s narrative, when Jama meets an old Somali man at a bus station in Gaza he describes a shared sense of physiognomy as markers of movement. “They shared with him the same mishmash of features, an awkward alchemy of eyes, noses, mouths, hair textures, and skin tone that belonged to different continents but somehow came together. Their faces were passports inscribed with the stamps of many places but in their countenances was something ancient, the variety of those who went wandering and peopled the earth.” Jama and the old man share a kinship in the textures of their faces, signifying their Somaliness, yet it is just as much symptomatic of Somaliness that they meet outside of Somalia, that they are of those variety of people who “went wandering,” those who perhaps, embody the “spirit of the vagabond.”

Further, it is important to mark Mohamed’s complex distinction between faces and countenances, passports on the one hand, and the ontological genealogy of those nomadic souls, perhaps the nomad’s abtiris, on the other. Faces here signify an external map weathered upon the traveler’s face telling a story of his or her journey. This is contemporary and ontic, to use Heidegger’s terminology. Passports are a symptom of colonialism and the modern nation-state. Countenance, which expresses mood or character, is temporal and ontological, more concerned with the Being and temporality of those who went wandering and their diasporic genealogy. Countenance in this sense contrasts the shallowness of a passport in that it represents an ontology or way of being-in-the-world.

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*Black Mamba Boy*, 232.
Although Somali features can be recognized, Mohamed’s biological metaphor in terms of shared facial features suggests that what makes Somalis Somali is not a unique biological origin of sameness but, like Waberi’s nomad in *Transit*, mixing and difference (same-ness *in* difference). In other words, the alchemy of features from different continents and different peoples constitutes what is shared between Jama and the old man, not a shared set of nationally recognizable features corresponding to the geographical location of the state (the ideal of the nation-state). Somalia is relatively unified in terms of culture and language but this passage does not, nor does the novel, suggest that national chauvinism therefore follows. Mohamed’s face/countenance complex marks an implicit critique of the ideal of the nation-state and an explicit engagement with the being-in-the-world of the black nomad via her literary phenomenology of movement.

Countenance can also denote a facial expression or *meaning* disseminated by the arrangement of features, a kind of expression *of* something, not in terms of voice but of communication, signification, or meaning-making. It is the representation of “something ancient,” something, ontological. Countenance as described by the narrator in *Black Mamba Boy* represents the bringing into of the black migrant, already conscripted by colonialism, through the genealogy of “those who went wandering,” the “contemporary nomad” or vagabond, who exists in Mohamed’s novel in a both locally specific and transnational way. In other words, the Somali nomad, moving upon colonial routes and global structures, bears the mark of both symptoms of colonial structures of violence identified upon the face as well as the more ontologically deep affective abtiris or genealogy subtending and expressed through countenance.

Brent Edwards has also theorized movement and diaspora in terms of the body, specifically the African diaspora and constitutive difference using the joint as a metaphor for the ways in which difference actually constitutes the diaspora and allows its movement:
“But the joint is a curious place, as it is both the point of separation (the forearm from the upper arm, for example) and the point of linkage... it is exactly such a haunting gap that allows the African diaspora to ‘step’ and ‘move’ in various articulations.”\(^{430}\) Though Edwards’ object here is black internationalism in the 20s and 30s and the various translations between groups and languages therein, his notion of articulation and difference helps unpack Mohamed’s literary depictions of Somaliness in *Black Mamba Boy*. There is a linkage between the three Somalis, the mishmash of features making a distinctly Somali face, and a difference or separation—that the *métissage* of features cull from different continents.

To this transnational play of sameness and difference consider also Awrala’s statement earlier in the novel. Awrala is a Somali woman living in Eritrea who houses Jama at one point during his journey. When Jama asks her if she’ll return to Somalia; she replies “Why should I? I’m not Somali anymore. The place where you are born is not necessarily the best place for you, boy. I’ve got too used to the rain, hills, and cool air of Asmara. I’ll be buried here.”\(^{431}\) Nationality is seemingly conflated with place, and being buried after one’s death represents the ultimate bodily identification with land and place (if one is lucky enough to have a choice in the matter). Perhaps Arwala’s leaving Somalia is indeed what contradicts her statement that “I’m not Somali anymore” since movement itself, nomadism, and *leaving* in *Black Mamba Boy*—and much of Somalian literature itself—is precisely what *is* Somali.

Awrala’s narrative proffers a postcolonial critique of the Nation-State, identity, and the violence of dispersal. Awrala is a migrant coming to Eritrea as a young girl from

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\(^{431}\) *Black Mamba Boy*, 113.
Somalia with her father. She farms with him and, as happened to many during the colonial period, they are subsequently dispossessed of their land by the Italian colonists. She is now “cleaning Italian villas.”\(^{432}\) Though she remains connected to and invested in the Somali diaspora as evidenced in her care for and interest in the itinerant Jama, she adopts Asmara as home. Further, she expressly disidentifies with the Somali nation or motherland—“I’m not Somali anymore,” reflecting not simply a separation but a link as well, a split or schizophrenic subject position.

We will be reminded of a moment in Somali author Nuruddin Farah’s novel *Maps* in which protagonist Askar’s uncle Hilaal philosophizes on identity and the Ogaden war: He tells Askar that “‘Somalis went to war in order that the ethnic origin of the people of Ogaden would match their national identity... Imagine, Askar. A nation with a split personality!’”\(^{433}\) Hilaal essentially describes the ideal of the Nation-State in which a people who share a language, culture, and ethnic origin also share a political entity in which borders represent an outward manifestation of essential geographical boundaries. Imperial Ethiopia, in this case, colonized the Ogaden area of Somalia (not to mention Eritrea). Since the people of Ogaden are ethnically Somali, for Hilaal, they should not be governed by the “foreign” Ethiopian State. This appears to be an argument against all colonization, yet one that accepts the (European) structure and idea of Statehood offhand.

Awrala in this sense would have a split-personality as her “national identity” of Eritrea (ethnically Tigrinyan) does not match up with her “ethnic origin” of Somalia. Yet she immediately discards this framework as she implies that one can, and sometimes should, cross into or between national identities—“The place where you are born is not

\(^{432}\) Ibid, 112.
necessarily the best place for you,” the “you” here seemingly movable as she identifies as Eritrean. Asmara’s transnational you proposes the following question: if the nation-state itself is a colonial construct and thus imposed from the “outside” isn’t it always schizophrenic in the colonized or formerly colonized world? Jama’s own luck with borders, themselves predicated upon the violence of exclusion, illustrates the not-always-salutary machinations of the nation. Riffing on Fanon’s important work on the psychological alienation stemming from what he calls the violence of the Manichean and compartmentalized colonial world Farah, Mohamed, and Waberi extend his critique to the idea and practice of the nation resonant in both the colonial and postcolonial world. Awrala’s affective identification echoes Fanon’s own adoption of and identification with Algeria—though originally Martiniquean, he proclaims “we Algerians” in *Wretched of the Earth*.

A schizophrenic subject-position or ontology such as Askar’s or Awrala’s, or even Fanon’s, if we can call it that, seems, though a “nervous condition,” suggestive or promising as it denotes an ontological postitionality that precludes the violence of ethnic nationalisms or chauvinisms—what Ray in *Banjo* calls “the poisonous seed” of patriotism, and promotes an openness to others and other places as well as movement: “The vagabond lover of life,” muses Ray, “finds individuals and things to love in many places and not any one nation... patriotism hides the beauty of other horizons.” But what it also does is suggest that modernity (and its Western emblem in the Nation-State), is predicated upon managing and re-educating—conscripting—the movements of the colonized or more generally the people of the global South. It illustrates the creation and production of what has come to be termed the “immigrant” in the world.

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434 *Banjo*, 137.
Like McKay’s *Banjo* Mohamed’s *Black Mamba Boy* indeed illustrates and interrogates the being-in-the-world of the migrant through showing the assemblage of structures conditioning and producing the “immigrant.” Passports, Nationality, borders, checkpoints, moments of exclusion and inclusion, are each tied not only to the machinations of capitalism and Empire, but to the production of the immigrant. In the following scene Jama is finally granted a passport near the end of the narrative. And though it affords him slightly better opportunities, it illustrates his embeddedness within this global and asymmetrical system. Again, his “abtiris was no longer sufficient.”

“Name: Jama Guure Mohamed
Date of Birth: 1/1/1295
Eyes: Brown
Hair: Black
Complexion: Man of Colour
Nationality: British
Place of Birth: Hargeisa

“This thin description of Jama in the dark green passport was all the Western world needed to know about him: he was subject of the British Empire. The passport determined where he could go and where he couldn’t, the ports where his cheap labor would be welcome and where it would not.”* Jama’s nomadic narrative shows that the materiality of immigration in laws, passports, checkpoints, etc, are tightly interwoven with the production of cheap labor through colonialism and racial capitalism—“his cheap labor” is welcome in certain places and not in others. His body is monitored, categorized, and his movement biopolitically re-educated through colonial structures and routes. That he is subject indeed shows his subject-position which, like other black migrants and nomadic wanderers, is monitored in terms of movement, where he can go is based upon where his cheap labor is

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*Black Mamba Boy*, 242.
needed; where it is not, he is not. Like his unlucky friend Mahmoud who gets deported from Port Said, Egypt seven times—“each time I walk they pick me up, I walk, they pick me up; my feet were cut to shreds!”—Jama is subject to national rules managing movement and populations not their own.

Shadowing or marking an alternative to colonial structures of movement and interdiction, are what Mohamed’s narrator calls “old nomad’s network[s]” where in the urban center of Alexandria, Egypt groups of Somali diasporics help each other out in terms of finding work or shelter. Like the Somali “coffee women” in Aden these groups exist within colonial structures but on the margins, unofficial and liminal. In some ways these groups are formed specifically to circumvent colonial structures such as borders by using fake passports or papers, the circulation of knowledge in terms of negotiating the system or who to seek and not seek out, and so on. This nomadic network then represents organic resistance arising out of the violence of dispersal and containment.

The relationship between these “old nomadic networks” and Jama and his friends mirror the relationship between black radical tradition and migritude writers. Further, migritude writers adopt and refashion literary and political workers from earlier generations of writers. Although Nadifa Mohamed has crafted a wonderfully pan-African novel that does indeed speak to movement and relationships in our twenty-first century, its central intertext is Claude McKay’s 1929 “story without a plot” Banjo. In the final section of this chapter I consider this relationship as well as providing a close-reading of characters from McKay’s novel in Mohamed’s and the productive implications and tensions therein.

Towards the end of the narrative of Black Mamba Boy, Jama, after having lived through the perils of immigration and war in in the 30s and 40s, receives a British passport and finds work as a stoker upon a British steamship. Jama stops in Marseilles, France and
is subsequently thrust into McKay’s world of “the Ditch” where, in a particularly interesting intertextual move, McKay’s characters from *Banjo* appear in Mohamed’s novel. In *Black Mamba Boy* Jama and his friends “ended up in the seedy Ditch, in an African bar run by a Senegalese man. An American named Banjo sat by them and played wild songs, ‘Jelly Roll,’ ‘Shake That Thing,’ ‘Let My People Go’. Jama danced Kunama-style to the strange music and the bar filled with black sailors from the West Indies, United States, South America, West Africa, and East Africa. Banjo introduced them to his friends Ray, Dengel, Goosey, Bugsy, and a pretty Abyssinian girl called Latnah, and Jama smiled as he shook their hands, wondering if Bethlehem would believe that there were Habashi girls in France.”

Here Mohamed recalls the promise of black transnational relationships in the 1920s-30s, that “magic” that McKay evokes opening *Banjo*. These relationships were forged upon and against the structures or paths of colonialism and thus constitute a politics as well as an affiliation, also depicted in *Banjo*.

Interestingly, Mohamed *adds* to the musical repertoire of *Banjo*’s beach boys in *Black Mamba Boy* as they do not play “Let my People Go” in McKay’s original. This signifies not a mis-remembering but a strategic illustration of *Banjo*’s emancipatory politics by using a placeholder in the African-American Spiritual, working here as a nodal point anchoring the discourse of black liberatory struggle. That is, “Go Down Moses” becomes a trope or image in the black diaspora easily mobilized as an emancipatory gesture. Mohamed’s pan-African “(mis)translation” indeed shares the emancipatory spirit of McKay’s original while updating it, in one way, by connecting the Horn of Africa to radical African-American liberation struggles.

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436 Ibid, 254.
Another strategic (mis)translation occurs as Latnah in McKay’s version is not Ethiopian per se but ethnically indeterminate. She has olive skin and Malty, a West Indian, confesses that “I don’t know if she is Arabian or Persian or Indian. She knows all landwiges.” McKay’s Latnah was born in Aden to either a Sudanese or Ethiopian mother and an unknown father, likely Middle-Eastern or South Asian. So why does Mohamed place McKay’s prostitute polyglot’s origin squarely in Ethiopia, which on the surface appears to limit the import of McKay’s original racial creolization? For one, it is possible that Mohamed gestures towards another black transnational nodal point in Ethiopia which, from Blyden’s citation of the biblical “and Ethiopia shall stretch out her hand unto God” as a pan-Africanist rallying cry, to Haile Selassie and the outcry in the African diaspora against the Italian invasion of Ethiopia beginning *Black Mamba Boy*, represents another meaningful discursive marker in the black diaspora and Africa.

For Europeans in the pre-colonial epochs Ethiopia represented all of Africa and Ethiopians all Africans, while in the colonial and postcolonial eras Ethiopia symbolized anti-colonial African struggle. However, early on in the narrative of *Black Mamba Boy*, Somalis in Aden discuss African-American reactions to Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia in seemingly startling ways: “‘Colored Americans raise money in churches but the rest of the world looks on’… [exclaims one Somali] ‘Good! They turned their gaze when the Abyssinians stole our land in Ogaden, handed over to them by the stinking English. If the Habashis can take our ancestral land then let the Ferengis take theirs’…” Far from an aggrandizement of Ethiopia as representative of “Africa” in anti-colonial struggle, Ethiopia gets called out, from a Somali perspective, as the semi-imperial power that it is.

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438 *Banjo*, 10.
439 *Black Mamba Boy*, 33.
Perhaps more importantly, Mohamed’s depiction of Latnah conforms to her political and aesthetic project of representing African women in the diaspora. Therefore it becomes important that among McKay’s cohort of transnational black males, the lone woman in his text be recuperated as an African migrant woman in hers. Mohamed’s text indeed represents communities of African migrant women in diaspora, from the Somali coffee women in Aden, to migrant women like Awrala, to her iteration of Latnah and the other “Habashi girls” in France. And her most recent novel, *The Orchard of Lost Souls*, tells the stories of three Somali women from three different generations. The subtle shift in focus or meaning, from *Banjo* to *Black Mamba Boy*, is suggestive of the ways in which migritude writers both borrow from the politics of early twentieth-century century pan-Africanist thought and literature, but *depart* from it, *shift*, or mistranslate its meanings for tactical effect, essentially updating the black radical and transnational politics of that epoch to their own, or as Dongala phrases it, from Négritude to migritude.

One final moment of mistranslation stands out: On a British ship Jama notices that Sidney, a fellow working-class seaman, who is white, has a picture of a “yellow hammer and sickle on a red background” in his cabin in addition to posters of naked women.440 “It means,” Sidney explains to Jama referring to his communist flag, that “I believe workers like you”—he poked his finger in Jama’s chest for emphasis and then pointed at himself—‘and me should unite, together, understand?’ His fingers were now knotted, caressing one another. The smile fell from Jama’s face. The intertwined fingers meant only one thing and he didn’t want that, but what about the naked women, perhaps they were just to disguise Sidney’s real intention?441 This comical moment of cultural mistranslation in which a white

440 Ibid, 264.
441 Ibid.
Marxist friend’s political ideals signified in his gesture of “uniting” workers is misunderstood by Jama, who takes them as sexual in nature and as a possible romantic advance upon him by Sidney. The white sailor’s interracial internationalism is clearly aligned with the ideology set forth in the novel as Black Mamba Boy represents poor, working-class, migrant, and refugee populations (specifically African) instead of bourgeois, wealthy, or Afropolitan classes. However, there is a gap or decalagé, to use Edwards’ term, as Sidney’s meaning wanders in translation and ultimately eludes Jama. But for Edwards this mode articulation as misunderstanding or mistranslating is representative of colonial era black internationalism between black groups and black and white groups, not exceptional. Internationalism, particularly African internationalism, indeed works this way in stops and starts, with breaks in the flow of meaning. And although Jama misses this particular radically internationalist signified as a suspiciously sexualized gesture, for him there are “enough humane farengis to make life interesting,” in other words, despite colonization, whites aren’t all bad.\footnote{Ibid.}

Black Mamba Boy, like Transit and to a lesser extent Banjo, can be read as a refugee narrative. The Somalis in Aden, displaced black soldiers of all armies, displaced villages, towns and cities ruined by the violence of colonialism and war, Somalis at the bottom of the sea are all representative of refugee groups in one way or another. But what is perhaps most interesting given its cultural and geographical coordinates is that Nadifa Mohamed, towards the end of the narrative also tells the story of the Jewish refugees of Exodus 1947. Jama’s ship docks just offshore of Palestine in 1947. “Five hundred gunners of the British marines stood longside tanks, trucks, military jeeps, their guns aimed at a broken-down steamship renamed Exodus 1947 and the unruly Jews on board it. Four
thousand refugees were trying to force open the British quota into Palestine and were in
sight of the promised land.” The narrator’s *mis-en-scene* pictures the treatment of the
refugees by the British: “Jama came on deck during this festival of violence, and he had
never believed white people could treat each other with such open violence…” I’m
interested not so much in the historical details of whether the *Aliyah Bet* (“illegal
immigration fleet”) was warranted or not given Israel’s abominable treatment of
Palestinians and African refugees, but rather the fact that the reader is made to empathize
with refugees and immigrants of *all* races and that this scene is narrated from the
particular perspective of a colonized African, one subjected to the worst colonialism does
out.

I also suggest that this is a pan-Africanist move, like one that had been made by
proto-pan-Africanist Olaudah Equiano in and through his paralleling of the African and
Jewish diasporas. In his 1789 *The African: The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah
Equiano* he sees a “strong analogy” between his native countrymen of West Africa stolen
from their homes during the reign of the trans-Atlantic Slave-trade. This analogy “which,
even by this sketch imperfect as it is, appears to prevail in the manners and customs of my
countrymen and those of the Jews, before they reached the Land of Promise... an analogy
which alone would induce me to think that the one people had sprung from the other.”
Blyden also uses this comparison. For Equiano and Blyden this association with the Jewish
diaspora gives weight to the African one in both a biblical and liberal humanist sense.

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443 Ibid, 247.
444 Ibid, 261.
Mohamed’s 2010 text indeed humanizes dehumanized groups: black migrants, African women in the diaspora, nomads, and other groups. More specifically Somalis themselves have been dehumanized from United States military interventions to depictions of starving children and Somali pirates. Her picture of Somalis is a sympathetic and realistic one, an answer perhaps to the latest Hollywood engagement with Somalia after *Black Hawk Down* in Tom Hank’s 2013 *Captain Phillips*, a grossly ignorant picture of Somalia. But the nomadic humanism in *Black Mamba Boy* is also an engagement with the project of Somali literature itself. Consider Nuruddin Farah’s *Links* which in the following passage also pictures conquest from the perspective of Somalis: “It was from the ocean that all the major invasions of the Somali peninsula had come. The Arabs, and after them, the Portuguese the French, the British, and the Italians, and later the Russians, and most recently, the Americans—here, Jeebleh remembered how the U.S. intervention to feed the starving Somalis became an invasion of a kind, hence the term ‘intravasion,’ frequently used at the time. In any case, all these foreigners, well-meaning or not, came from the ocean.” Mohamed also attempts to counter U.S. and European illusions about Somalia and ignorance in Anglo-European intervention in Somalia. Further still, I argue that in using nomads and conceptual nomadism throughout the novel, she creates a new or nomadic humanism.

After vagabondage, “nomadism” is another capacious term signaling movement and moving populations in general, it is specifically associated with “Somaliness.” Anthropologist Ioan Lewis notes that “It cannot be emphasized too strongly that pastoral nomadism constitutes the economic base of the vast bulk of the Somali population, and

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446 Ashley Dawson on *Black Hawk Down*, and footnote article critiquing *Captain Phillips* from *Africa is a Country*.
manifestations of the nomadic lifestyle and traditions pervade almost all aspects of Somali life.” In addition “Some 60 to 70 percent of the population [of Somalia] are nomadic or have nomadic affiliation, even though many today live in urban centers part of the time.”

So in literature as well: Yasmeen Maxamuud’s epic 2009 novel Nomad Diaries—Somalia’s 21st century answer to War and Peace—narrativizes the Somali diaspora in the United States. Nuruddin Farah, perhaps the most well-known Somali writer in English, “writes of a society in which nomadic values seem to been strongly enshrined as central to the national self-image…” Somali poet and scholar Ali Jimale Ahmed’s most recent book of poetry names the first section of When Donkeys Give Birth to Calves: Totems, Wars, Horizons, Diasporas “Nomadic” and includes a poem of the same name. In Black Mamba Boy Jama mulls over the trope of nomadic Somaliness “...we are nomads, land is the same to us everywhere we go, we only care if there is water and food to be found.” Yet, rather than overdetermining nomadism as “essential” to Somaliness, which elides the complex cultural and material histories of the region, I argue that Somali writers utilize nomadism as a hinge through which movement is troped, as a way of entering into the complexities and nuances of Somalia’s fraught history from foreign colonization, to the civil war and failed state, to sensational and often racist depictions of Somalia when piracy surfaces in the world press.

For Mohamed, the phenomenology of movement is a way to tell multiple stories: a Somali story, one of the European colonization of the Horn of Africa, and one of global

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448 Lewis, Understanding Somalia and Somaliland, 56.
449 Ibid, 3.
452 Black Mamba Boy, 281.
capitalism and the movement of people in the early to mid-twentieth century; it is both about Jama becoming nomad due to a confluence of outside forces, and a pan-Africanist challenge to a colonial world. In many ways he is a re-fashioning of McKay’s itinerant character Banjo. The authors Mohamed quotes in the epigraphs to her novel (Xasan and Tagore) attest to this engagement with movement and/as historical context as both were early to mid-twentieth century opponents of imperialism. Anti-imperialism then undergirds the choice of poems speaking to movement; the juxtaposition of these two poets suggests in some ways that for Mohamed, movement and colonialism are linked in complex ways—Tagore’s “vagrant” may have spoken to Mohamed’s desire to write a pan-African figure of the “nomad” as surly McKay’s “vagabond” did. Thus the politics of vagabondage reemerges as the nomadic in *Black Mamba Boy*.

*Black Mamba Boys*’s narrative ends with Jama on a ship as he begins to make the long journey back to Africa from Wales as fellow seaman dance to Louis Armstrong’s “Let My People Go.” “They would pack up their bags,” muses Jama as he imagines his future with his wife Bethlehem, “and move like nomads over Africa, over Europe, discovering new worlds, renaming them Jamastan and Bethlehemia if they wanted.”453 The African-American protest song furnishes the diasporic notes and movements upon which Jama’s imagined nomadic futures travel, between Africa and Europe, Jamastan and Bethlehemia. Echoing the reverberations of *Banjo* one final time “Jama let his legs move to the swinging jazz, let his hips whine a little, his shoulders shimmy, anything to free the music trapped within his soul.”454

453 Ibid, 284.
454 Ibid.
In close reading these two texts in terms of migration and movement, the first an odd “story without a plot” in McKay’s 1929 *Banjo* and the second a twenty-first century migritude text, I have tried to demonstrate four interrelated points in and through suggesting that McKay’s novel can be read as a (proto)migritude text and in arguing that Nadifa Mohamed’s *Black Mamba Boy* is pointedly migritude. Firstly, I have illustrated the theoretical underpinnings of “migritude” itself both as a body of contemporary African literature and as a politics. Secondly, I proffer a new way of reading McKay’s classic text arguing that it is fundamentally about migration and movement in both form and content. I additionally argue that migritude literature provides a necessary hinge through which to analyze immigration under global capitalism in the twenty-first century as entangled with colonial pasts. And finally, I detail the ways in which migritude, as its name suggests—a conjunction of Négritude and migration—is indeed predicated upon a sophisticated and complex relationship and engagement with historical-literary flashpoints in the black radical tradition, i.e., pan-Africanism or Négritude, and that this politics of intimate repurposing marks an important new movement or moment in African literature and the novels of recent African diasporas in global literature.
Chapter Three:

“We Carry Our Home With Us”

African Migritude in Italy in the works of Cristina Ali Farah, Marco di Prisco, and Fred Kuwornu

“We carry our home with us, our home can travel. It’s not fixed walls that make a home out of the place where we live.” -Barni, in *Little Mother*, Cristina Ali Farah, 2011, 226.

“A home is an impossible dream for a Senegalese illegal immigrant... for the immigrant whose skin is on the blackish side...” –Pap Khouma, *I Was an Elephant Salesman*, 2010, 52.

Fig. 1. “Hugging Hope” by Marco Di Prisco, 2014
African immigration to European countries such as France or Britain begins *en-masse* during the post-World War II and independence era. In Italy however, perhaps due to its relatively short-lived colonial project (save in Somalia), influxes of African immigrants arrive only in the 1980s. The global recession in the 1970s, the global turn by Western powers to neoliberal economic policies such as deregulation and liberalization of African markets, Western conditionalities imposed upon African states by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, as well as corruption and the detritus of structural colonial legacies all led to massive destabilization across Africa, which in turn led to conflict, war, and mass unemployment. It was therefore, in the 1980s that Europe, and Italy in particular, saw waves of African migrants arrive. Graziella Parati notes that over the past thirty years “Italy and other Southern European countries have experienced immigration;” subsequently, there have been significant new waves of African migrant literature published in Italy, some works cycling into world literature markets that would be translated into English and other languages. 1990’s *I Was an Elephant Salesman* for example, by Senegalese-Italian author Pap Khouma is considered one of the first great Afro-Italian migrant narratives. More recently, Somali-Italian author Cristina Ali Farah’s

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455 “While Italy’s colonial past in East Africa has meant that some Afro-Italians have lived in Italy since the immediate post-Second World War period, a wave of new immigration into *lo stivale* (the boot, as the country is often nicknamed) followed crushing postcolonial and often political persecution in North, West, East and Central Africa.” Christopher Hogarth, “Afro-Italian Literature: From Productive Collaborations to Individual Affirmations” in *Africa in Europe: Studies in Transnational Practice in the Long Twentieth Century*, eds. Eve Rosenshaft and Robbie Aitken (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), 162.

456 “Free-market policies might may be associated with democracy in the United States and elsewhere in the industrialized world, but in the Third World, they more commonly come with the disappearance of democratic rights, as in Pinochet’s Chile” Aviva Chomsky, *They Take Our Jobs!* and 20 Other Myths about Immigration (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007), 152.

2007 novel *Little Mother* (translated into English in 2010), parses questions of home and African immigration in both intensely personal and socio-structural ways.

The recently designed digital image “Hugging Hope,” pictured above (fig. 1), by contemporary Italian artist Marco Di Prisco, provides a poignant and almost uncanny parallel to the characterization of home and immigration in Cristina Farah’s above epigraph—“We carry our home with us, our home can travel.”458 “Hugging Hope” depicts a collage of African figures migrating across a gray sea on a wooden dhou. Referencing the thousands of African migrants and refugees arriving by boat, many of whom perish along the way, this work of digital art takes its place among the aesthetic and cultural production of Africa in Italy. In the foreground of “Hugging Hope” a large man, also on the small craft, clutches his miniature house while shedding a red tear. He carries his home with him; his home, as in Farah’s epigraph, travels. In contrast to liberal or elite cosmopolitan representations of travel, the African figure carrying his home in Di Prisco’s digital image has little earthly belongings and sheds a tear while grimacing along his perilous journey. This indicates a structure of feeling paralleling Farah’s illustration of the danger, “sadness,” and alienation that migrants face in her novel.

Pap Khouma begins *I Was an Elephant Salesman* by asking “how does it feel to be an illegal immigrant?” answering starkly in a one-word sentence: “Terrible.”459 Francophone writer Fatou Diome’s narrator equates “the condition of immigrants” to “contempt” or hardship while philosophizing upon the structures of immigration.460 Taageere in *Little*


460 See chapter one on Fatou Diome.
Mother, after having just arrived in America as a Somali immigrant relates to the (contemporary) sadness produced by the experience of being “immigrant.”

At that time I was overwhelmed by sadness, by a deep and shabby sadness, a crazy sadness that sprang from the cold and the disillusionment... And it was during this time that I saw how much sadness there is in the West, that there are many more homeless people in the streets than we imagine, in fact we can't even imagine how many homeless people there are here when we’re back home and hear of these countries that are doing so well. 461

Taageere’s monologue suggests both that immigrant experiences are not isolated to a particular nation but are global, and that the “immigrant experience” is not simply a matter of individuals but is a “condition,” or ontological: it is about the production of immigrants as such. The “sadness” of those who move has as much to do with national and international institutions put in place to manage movement, particularly in terms of their disciplinary, punitive, and racialized nature, as they do individual feelings of homelessness in diaspora.

Second generation and immigrant populations, whether citizens or not, are excluded from basic rights, a reality in deep conflict with the multicultural and democratic rhetoric of the United States and many European nations. 462 Migritude authors like Farah negotiate these issues—how institutionalized techniques of power managing movement such as checkpoints, borders, immigration control, residence permits, and others, impinge upon and shape existence itself. To negotiate, reflect upon, and challenge, these material processes by

461 Farah, Little Mother, 57/8.
462 Aviva Chomsky notes, in the U.S. for example, that “in every generation, people have found rationales for systems of social and legal inequality. Native Americans had no rights in the new country, so their land could be taken for white settlement. Africans had no rights, so it was all right to enslave them. Women had no rights, and their labor was generally unpaid. Contract workers had few rights so their labor was underpaid. Immigrants, as well as workers in other countries, have also been deprived of rights—yet their low-paid labor provides the cheap products that our economy depends on... a large and growing portion of our population [as in Italy] lives without the full rights of citizenship.” Aviva Chomsky, “They Take Our Jobs!” and 20 Other Myths about Immigration, xiii.
way of cultural production, to indeed live in immigration, is to engage with being itself. Further, Farah and di Prisco produce what I have called the phenomenology of movement.

Marco Di Prisco’s “Postcard from Rosarno, Italia,” pictured below (Fig. 2), subtly indicates the African immigrant experiences of exploited workers on orange orchards in Rosarno, Italy, as well as the objects constellating their world and, therefore, migrant being.

Fig. 2 “Postcard from Rosarno, Italia” Marco Di Prisco, 2014

Recently, Ghanaian and Nigerian immigrants in Rosarno have been subject to intense racism, physical violence, and ultimately were expelled from the area for no crime other than
being born elsewhere. “Postcard” pictures a black shirtless figure sitting down with his head on his knees and is mostly submerged by an orange-hued sea. Only a small part of his back and the back of his head rise above the water. His face rests immersed underwater. An orange slice sun peeks over the horizon as a few tiny tents and a tree rest upon the figure’s back just above the water line, making up a small encampment.

The submerged portion of the figure’s body spans the width of the piece. Coming to mind here are the final words of Caribbean poet and philosopher Kamau Brathwaite’s short 1974 book Contradictory Omens: “The unity is submarine.” Brathwaite suggestively images the connection between Africa and the Caribbean both in terms of slaves’ bodies drowned along the middle passage and the cultural and linguistic connections crossing the Atlantic submerged by colonial processes and history-making. Di Prisco’s “Postcard from Rosarno, Italia,” provides an incisive parallel to Brathwaite’s phrase, as the Mediterranean Sea connects Africa to Italy in this more recent of African diasporas. And just as the middle passage was strewn with submerged black bodies, so the Mediterranean Sea, between Africa and Italy, has more recently seen thousands of drowned African migrants. In Nadifa Mohamed’s novel Black Mamba Boy, for example, Jibreel notes, “I think there are more Somalis at the bottom of the sea or lost in the desert than there are left in our land.”

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463 It was reported in January 2010 by Al Jazeera that “Immigrants work in the area as day labourers picking fruit and vegetables, with some 1,500 living in squallid conditions in abandoned factories with no running water or electricity. Human rights activists say they are exploited by organised crime groups.” http://www.aljazeera.com/news/europe/2010/01/20101812051648430.html "At least 300 African migrants have been transported out of a southern Italian town rocked by two days of clashes between the migrants, police and local residents. Eight buses transferred the African fruit pickers on Saturday from Rosarno to a temporary shelter elsewhere in Calabria... Migrants blamed the attacks on racism and groups of protesters stoned police, attacked residents and smashed shop windows and cars.” http://www.aljazeera.com/news/europe/2010/01/20101918461937126.html Jan. 2010.

464 As migrant laborers in the orchards are primarily male I use the possessive pronoun “his,” however, the gender of the figure in “Postcard” is ultimately unclear.

465 In an email to me Di Prisco confirmed that he had been thinking about the Nigerian workers in the orange orchards in Rosarno as he began envisioning his piece.

466 Kamau Edward Brathwaite, Contradictory Omens: Cultural Diversity and Integration in the Caribbean (Kingston: Savacou Publications, 1974), 64.

467 Black Mamba Boy, 281.
Cristina Farah’s *Little Mother* narrates this continuing humanitarian crisis. Barni speaks to a woman working on a project about the Somali diaspora, musing, “Boats have been coming and unloading illegal immigrants across Italian coastlines for a long time now. The tides go in and out and the beaches keep filling up with garbage: tomato cans, shards of green glass, small tubes of medicine, clumps of tar, and plastic bags, more and yet more plastic bags. And, carried by the sea, lifeless bodies, wearing tattered clothes, their purplish skin blotched with white salt.”

What would it mean to envision these new paths from Africa to Europe as middle-passage-like, as a product of global domination by the Northern and its various apparatuses? Or to suggest that the relatively recent creation of “fortress Europe” bears the vestiges of a highly asymmetrical colonial system, perhaps producing the kind of material and affective migrant “sadness” of which Taageere speaks? This chapter argues that contemporary (neoliberal) economic policies of globalization have precedents specific to the management of movement (though varying) in colonialism, slavery, and the world economic processes of racial capitalism.

In addition to challenging contemporary global systems with structural ties to colonialism, Di Prisco and Farah’s work foster migrant ties and community. More abstractly, for example, “Postcard” points us towards black diasporic connection as the African migrant’s submerged body symbolically spans the length of the ocean. There is something profound in Di Prisco’s piece, particularly in the submerged figure’s bridge or island-like quality, especially in conversation with Brathwaite’s phrase “The unity is submarine.” If we think “Postcard” diasporically, the encampment upon the figure’s back would be populated by Africans coming from various places in Africa suggesting that the wealth of the global North was indeed built upon the backs of blacks—just as the figure bears the weight of the

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468 *Little Mother*, 14.
encampment and the orchard, represented by a single orange tree on his back. Alternatively, the very point that the black figure literally supports the migrant encampment, perhaps evokes black unity-in-diaspora.

Farah depicts unity, or the multiple connections in the black diaspora in Italy (in this case the Somali diaspora), as a “tangled mass of threads.” One of the main protagonists Dominica Axad opens *Little Mother* by addressing these threads in relation to identity in migration. “*Soomaali Baan Ahay* [I am Somali], like my half is whole. I am the fine thread, so fine that it slips through and stretches, getting longer. So fine that it does not snap. And the tangled mass of threads widens and reveals the knots, clear and tight, that though far from each other, do not unravel.” Farah’s tangled mass of fine threads represents the diasporic Somali community far from a Mogadishu originally called home, in which she, a single stretching thread, is interwoven among many other refugees and immigrants. In another digital piece Di Prisco images African figures (one of which carries an outline or cutout of Africa) walking on a single red thread that connects two cliffs (see Fig. 3 below). These migrants not only cross via paths as precarious as thin threads but indeed sustain cultural connections in diasporas. For Farah, in her novel, these fine threads do not snap.

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The three works of art I’ve briefly analyzed above included in Di Prisco’s digital quadriptych of African immigration to Italy and Cristina Farah’s novel *Little Mother*—which narrates the Somali diaspora in Italy—provide an illustrative if complicated window into issues of immigration in the geo-cultural and historical space of Italy, while showing the ways in which literature and art negotiate immigrant experiences, questions of home and movement, identity and gender. Given that they narrate and engage with larger structures, systems, and patterns of immigration, they continue the work of *migritude*. Importantly, *Little Mother* pays specific attention to *women in diaspora*. This chapter draws upon the history and politics of immigration in Italy and Italian imperial formations in Africa ultimately connected to contemporary immigration. It converses with other African-Italian migritude texts such as Pap Khouma’s *I Was an Elephant Salesman*, and
contemporary Afro-Italian filmmaker Fred Kuwornu’s illuminating film documenting the experience of immigrant and second generation young adults in Italy, *18 ius Soli*.

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**Migration Italy: Somalia as a Case Study**

In her illuminating chapter “Black Italia: Contemporary Migrant Writers from Africa” Alessandra Di Maio addresses African immigration to Italy beginning in the 1980s and proposes a re-thinking of diaspora studies. “The recent arrival of a plethora of migrants from the four corners of the world, many from African countries... has inscribed Italy as a site of the African diaspora, offering new perspectives and directions to the field of Black diaspora studies.”  

Indeed relative to Anglophone and Black Atlantic studies, Italy as a site of the African diaspora as well as Afro-Italian migrant writing has been, with exceptions, under-theorized. As I am concerned with broadening the categories of migritude literature, I consider the African-Italian experience, the literature thereof, and the politics of immigration in Italy including policy, law, discourse, and representation in art and narrative. In general, diaspora studies often falls short by privileging destination places, cultures, and migrant experiences in Euro-American metropoles. This ignores the material conditions of reality in homelands and the reasons behind the “why” of migration, the catalysts that shape movement. When left to the (Western) press, the answers to these questions often reproduce racist and uncritical depictions of Africa as the site of “failed” states, dictators, famine, tribal conflicts, and so on and so forth —essentially aggregating into a twenty-first century iteration of the “Heart of Darkness.”

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471 “There is no formal forum in Africa specifically for the discussion of migration matters by all stakeholders—in particular the media and the public—as a continuous process, in order to avoid the misrepresentations, ignorance and xenophobia that currently surround the issue of migration. Discourses on migration, especially from the receiving end, are full of anxiety, misconceptions, myths and prejudices, and are often fed on.
An African literary or diaspora studies that focuses not solely on destination countries but on the widely varying places on the continent from which people emigrate as well as immigration patterns is much needed; since focusing on these issues, re-centering or de-provincializing Africa, can tell us as much about the construction of immigration in Euro-American centers as it can about Africa and the global-local processes that create immigration. It would also tell the stories of those metropolitan centers themselves but not by themselves, highlighting their imbrication in global processes from colonialism to globalization. Contrary to depictions in the press of Africa as a homogenous center of chaos, corruption, or famine, which irresponsibly and speciously answers the question of why Africans leave, the real reasons behind emigration are much more complex from location to location, and often have as much to do with neoliberal economic policies imposed from the global North, colonial structures still in place, and foreign aid and intervention than with an essentialist view Africa itself as failure or victim. Cristina Farah’s novel is indeed about her own life as a Somali-Italian in both Somalia and Italy—two places historically intertwined and deeply connected.

Somalia was an Italian colony from 1888-1941 at which point Britain took control. Farah and many of the characters in her book speak Italian, given that Italian colonial structures like education were still in place during her childhood. Often, middle-class and elite Somalis would speak Italian. Somali novelist and thinker Nuruddin Farah notes that

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472 “In Somalia, Italian was the main language of instruction in the colonial system and remained so for many years after decolonization, even after Somali (until then an oral language) was finally transcribed in 1972” one year before Christina Ali Farah was born. Alessandra Di Maio, “Introduction: Pearls in Motion” in Cristina Ali Farah, *Little Mother*, trans. Giovanna Bellesia-Contuzzi and Victoria Offrudi Poletto. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011), xviii.
Mogadicio (“Mogadishu” is the English spelling) is the Italian name for the capital most familiar to Westerners. In fact, “Xamar” is the Somali designation for the once cosmopolitan pearl of the Indian Ocean. Nuruddin Farah begins a story that reveals Italy as responsible, in part, for today’s state of Somalia and a fortiori its peoples’ emigration.

In drawing arbitrary imperial borders, builders of empires create a network of political and economic tensions, with a legacy both explosive and implosive. I do not have to remind anyone of how in the Horn of Africa the implosive nature of the crisis helped engender tensions among the different nationalities in the region; how the explosive tendency of the conditions would every now and then prevail, bursting outward in a full-scale war between countries. The 1977 war between Somalia and Ethiopia claimed at least two and a half million lives...

Noted Ethiopian writer Nega Mezlekia also notes that “many of the present-day Somali problems have their root in the European scramble for African territories, not to mention Ethiopia’s own imperial ambitions. The recent bloody breakup of the country into five different pieces, for instance, stems from attempts to force a fiercely individualistic, clan-minded people, through colonial influence, into the mold of a nation.” The story of massive destabilization in Somalia culminating in the 1991 civil war therefore begins in Europe, at the dawn of colonization. Colonial destabilization would continue into the postcolonial period, much to the chagrin of newly independent nations hopeful for a new future. In addition to tensions that arbitrary imperial borders create, the 1977 Somalia–Ethiopia war was significantly exacerbated due to Cold War-era posturing by the U.S.S.R. and the United States, both of whom would not only pick sides, fund, and provide massive amounts

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474 Ibid, 52.
of weapons for their own political gain in the great battle between communism and capitalism, but would in fact switch sides!

Having first-hand perspective, Mezlekia remembers this period well. First, the Soviet Union backed Somalia, making Barre’s army “the fourth largest fighting force in Black Africa,” while the Americans had traditionally supported Ethiopia.\textsuperscript{476} However, after the military Junta in 1974—the Derg, which was clearly communist, “the Americans refused to send arms to Ethiopia… and offered its hand to Somalia,” which was then abandoned by the U.S.’s rival the Soviet Union, making Siad Barre furious with the Soviets for sending arms to Ethiopia.\textsuperscript{477} Somalia was then badly defeated. This brief foray into history simply suggests that Somalia’s civil war was not due to its own failure or retrograde “tribal” nature as racialized Western accounts would have us believe.

Alessandra Di Maio stresses the importance of more nuanced and historicized perspectives like Mezlekia’s and Farah’s. “Nuruddin Farah explains in an important work of nonfiction, \emph{Yesterday, Tomorrow: Voices from the Somali Diaspora}, that, unlike what the mass media seems to suggest, the [Somali] civil war cannot be explained merely on the basis of tribal violence and warlordism, nor exclusively by referencing clanism. Rather, it is the ultimate result of a historical process which began with Europe’s prolonged colonization, continued with brief independence, and was followed by Siad Barre’s oppressive regime (which received backing from powerful players in the international arena) until its eventual downfall.”\textsuperscript{478} It is important to engage with colonial and postcolonial historical moments wherein Western powers directly and indirectly interfere and or control African nations, in this particular case, Somalia. This goes a long way

\textsuperscript{476} Ibid. 201/201.
\textsuperscript{477} Ibid, 203.
\textsuperscript{478} Di Maio, “Introduction: Pearls in Motion,” xvi/xvii.
towards the deconstruction of popular discourses around Africa, immigration, and Somalia, and provides a solid first step towards understanding immigration in the global North and metropoles therein as well as diasporas past and present.

Yet, what N. Farah and Di Maio do not mention is that, in addition to colonial and neocolonial Western domination, Somalia, and other African nations, faced economic and social destruction by the neoliberal economic policies of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund beginning in the 1970s. In her article, “The Neo-Liberal Agenda and the IMF/World Bank Structural Adjustment Programs with Reference to Africa,” Gloria Emeagwali points out that some of the destabilization that led to Somalia’s 1991 civil war was indeed due to foreign economic and social control.

...when in 1981 the IMF forced the government of Somalia to liberalize the economy, privatize public services, devalue the currency and cut back in public sector spending, it actually laid the foundation for ruin and disaster. Somalia’s currency was devalued by 460% between 1987 and 1989. The cost of food and transportation skyrocketed. In keeping with IMF prescriptions, numerous workers were laid off, thus swelling the ranks of the unemployed... The IMF program exacerbated intra-clan conflict. Remarkably, Somalia, in that moment of economic crisis [on the eve of the Civil War], transferred 47.4% of its export earnings to its debtors...479

The “ruin and disaster” wrought by neoliberal economic policies of the global North—what Senegalese migritude writer Fatou Diome calls “economic bazookas,” or what Ann Stoler calls “imperial debris”—the very real detritus of the colonial system—as well as postcolonial Cold War policies, mismanagement and corruption by African leaders (aka dictators such as Siad Barre), indeed sets the stage for humanitarian crises that catalyze movement,

immigration, and the massive influx of refugees.\textsuperscript{480} Attention to these “imperial formations,” for Stoler, “rather than empire per se [registers] the ongoing quality of processes of decimation, displacement, and reclamation,” and “unlike empires,” imperial formations are “processes of becoming, not fixed things,” that then change and shift yet remain embedded in contemporary neoliberal and global structures.\textsuperscript{481} This is why for example, it is important, as Farah suggests, to view the Somali civil war diachronically, that is, to consider the historical detritus of imperial formations and the ways in which they impinge upon, and surface in, the present.

Given the history of Somalia and Italian colonialism, Nuruddin Farah notes that it is ironic however, that in Italy “the majority of Somalis do not qualify for refugee status, according to the Italian authorities’ close reading of the 1951 Refugee Convention and Protocol, because they have no tangible evidence that, as individuals, they are fleeing persecution in their land;” he also notes that “Where, in their homeland, the Somalis were seen as subhuman by the [Italian and later British] colonists, it appears that they are not doing much better in Italy, not after the collapse of Somalia. They are not classified as refugees.”\textsuperscript{482} As Fred Kuwornu’s documentary \textit{18 ius Soli} shows, even Afro-Italians born in Italy are denied citizenship and thus equal rights.\textsuperscript{483} Somalia is only one of many examples of African countries, each with varying histories, who share the experience of colonial, neocolonial, and global-neoliberal economic conquest. These are places across Africa and the global South that are originally called home by those who leave.

\textsuperscript{480} Stoler’s nuanced and temporal perspective is important for postcolonial studies and this project in particular: “Our focus is less on the noun \textit{ruin} than on ‘ruination’ as an active, ongoing process that allocates imperial debris differentially and \textit{ruin} as a violent verb that unites apparently disparate moments, places, and objects.” Ann Stoler, \textit{Imperial Debris: On Ruins and Ruination}, ed. (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2013), 7.

\textsuperscript{481} Ibid, 8.

\textsuperscript{482} Farah, \textit{Yesterday, Tomorrow}, 62.

\textsuperscript{483} \textit{18 Ius Soli}, dir. Fred Kuwornu, (Rome and New York: Struggle Filmworks), 2011. Film.
Aviva Chomsky, in her important and highly accessible work on immigration, relates the fact that there is always a “push/pull” dialectic in terms of patterns of migration. She notes that although immigrants come for individual reasons, “patterns of immigration have structural and historical causes... Poverty, lack of opportunity, and danger ‘push’ people to leave; opportunity, availability of jobs, education, and safety ‘pull’ people elsewhere.”484 In other words, for an individual there is a push to leave a geographical homeland ranging from a number of structural and historical factors and at the same time there exists the “pull,” imagined or not, of the destination nation—the desire for a living-wage or for a safe environment. These two forces are mutually constitutive. Above, I have outlined in the case of Somalia some of the structural forces or catalysts “pushing” Somalis to leave their home. There are, in addition, reasons why Italy or other places are considered a desirable destination by migrants. Graziella Parati, in her introduction to Pap Khouma’s important Italophone migritude novel, states that,

While social discourse immediately identified immigration as a ‘problem,’ it was a response to Italy’s own economic demands: migrants are still widely employed in the care of young children or the elderly, the very individuals that the welfare system in Italy should provide for but cannot. Immigration was also motivated by the demand for unskilled labor in agriculture both in tomato fields of the south and in the fruit orchards of the north. However, stereotypes of migrants as criminals, as intruders, as invading hordes, and as interlopers into superior culture multiplied in the press and in public discourse. [Subsequently] racist attacks against immigrants started to increase in the late 1980s.485

As Marco Di Prisco’s recent works of art analyzed above reveal, particularly “Postcard from Rosarno,” there is a double-bind of immigration—cheap immigrant labor is needed and

484 Aviva Chomsky, “They Take Our Jobs!” and 20 Other Myths about Immigration (Boston: Beacon Press, 2007), 121/122.
485 Graziella Parati, “Introduction” to Pap Khouma’s I Was an Elephant Salesman, xii.
often exploited, as on the orange orchards in Rosarno, at the same moment that Italy—its
government, media, and public—rail against immigrants, attempt to deport them, promote
ideological warfare, and even perpetrate and encourage racist attacks against immigrants.
Ironically, those that decry immigration are ignorant of Italy’s own implication in Africa’s
destabilization as outlined above, which created the very immigration lamented in the first
place.

In “Black Italia: Contemporary Migrant Writers from Africa” Di Maio continues, “as
an emigrating nation, Italy had neither laws nor social policies nor yet a language to
address its new immigrant reality... multiculturalism was countered by racism...
acceptance and solidarity [by] a relapse into nationalism... Newcomers were more often
than not forced to the margins by the ‘welcoming’ Italian society.” Pap Khouma’s novel
reflects this complexity as he highlights the passing of 1987’s law granting some
immigrants permission to stay. “In 1987 the new year brings us a special gift: the famous
law... In the end they really gave us the permessi di soggiorno [residence permits]. Here
they are, shiny and beautiful. Even our association is inspired with new courage;” but, he
asks, “have our troubles really ended?” Khouma answers in the negative: “I hate to say it,
but after we get the permessi di soggiorno the heavens are still not quite within our reach.
Our days as illegal aliens are behind us, but to live we have to keep selling and no one is
happy about this. We still work outside the law... In fact, thanks to the rights we have
obtained, our problems grow. Both local and state police are now very suspicious.”

Rights then, in the context of racist nationalism and neoliberal economic policy, can actually take

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488 Ibid, 124.
away rights—they can usher in their very opposite. Kuwornu’s 2011 documentary on children of immigrants born in Italy, *18 ius Soli*, shows how the permits “tie down” those able to get them and do not afford the same rights as citizens. Valentino, a young black Italian man born in Rome to Nigerian parents, states in the film that “having a residence permit means you’re a ‘third-class’ citizen... it means you can’t leave when you want.”

It seems that more than two decades after the law has passed things still have not gotten better for either immigrants or second generation children, born in Italy but to immigrant parents, perhaps given that, “rights” means something different for each group: for Westerners (white natives born of white natives) rights are unquestioned givens, while for immigrants or second generation children, rights are privileges doled out sparingly by the state.

Italian immigration scholar Alessandro Dal Lago echoes Khouma’s narrative in his 1999 *Non-Persons*. “After 15 years of migration flows that show a certain degree of consistency, immigrants still do not have the civil rights (not to mention the social and political rights) enjoyed by Italians and other foreigners, European or Western, present in Italy.” Like Aviva Chomsky’s work on the United States confronting popular and often racist myths, Dal Lago deconstructs the primarily spurious ideas and policies on immigration in Italy. “Nearly all of the dominant affirmations regarding the threat that migration constitutes are debatable, if not simply false. It is not true that Italy, since the mid-1980s has been invaded by foreigners, that its extensive borders enables the entry of illegal immigrants more than in other Mediterranean countries, that migrants demonstrate a higher propensity to commit crimes, or that they tend to take jobs away from our

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489 Interview with Valentino in *18 ius Soli*, dir. Kuwornu.
Although numerous scholars, public intellectuals, and activists have disproven these fallacies, they remain entrenched in the societies of the Global North.

I suggest that one successful mode of resistance to these myths and their attached iterations in law, if only partially, is the production of a migrant literature that re-affirms the humanity of immigrants while disclosing and challenging repressive and racist laws and xenophobic public discourse surrounding immigration. Di Maio, notes that, “Among these African migrants [in Italy] are a number of emerging writers whose increasingly flourishing literary production has been reshaping Italy’s contemporary letters, but whose voices, more often than not, have been excluded by the dominant literary discourse in ways that seem to reproduce the social marginalization to which the African Italian community has generally been subjected”

There have however been a number of popular African-Italian migrant texts (Pap Khouma, as I mentioned, Igiaba Scego, and more recently, Cristina Ali Farah). Khouma and Farah have been picked up by the world literature market as they have both been translated into English. In what follows I focus on Cristina Ali Farah’s novel *Little Mother* as a migritude novel engages and challenges the issues of immigration in Italy and emigration from Somalia outlined above while giving voice to women and mothers in the Somali diaspora, arguing that *Little Mother* contributes to the “reshaping of Italy’s contemporary letters” and ideally Italy itself.

*Little Mother* and Migritude:

As Di Maio notes in her introduction to *Little Mother*, Farah was born in Verona, Italy in 1973, to an Italian mother and a Somali father. Farah grew up in Mogadishu, Somalia,

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491 Ibid. 17.
492 Di Maio, “Black Italia,” 120.
until age 18 when she and her newborn joined a large number of compatriots fleeing the civil war in 1991.\textsuperscript{494} She wandered Europe until settling in Rome in 1997 where she began attending University. She published a book of poetry on migration in 2006 \textit{Ai confini del verso: Poesia della migrazione in italiano} and her first novel \textit{Madre Piccola} in 2007 which would be translated in English in 2011 as \textit{Little Mother}. One of the main characters in \textit{Little Mother}, Domenica Axad (who is also half Italian and half Somali) is involved in a film project documenting the lives of Somalis in the diaspora both in Italy and elsewhere. This parallels the novel itself, which, though following two main female protagonists and one male, each accorded three sections of the novel within an overarching narrative, represents a rich patchwork of the tales and experiences of many other migrants in the diaspora each interwoven into the novel as a whole set in and between Italy, Somalia, North America, and the Netherlands. In fact, Di Maio argues that the “the implicit protagonist” of Farah’s novel is the Somali diaspora itself.\textsuperscript{495} Farah’s character Domenica Axad uses the poignant metaphor of threading as a way to describe herself and others in the Somali diaspora in Italy. “I am the fine thread, so fine that it slips through and stretches, getting longer. So fine that it does not snap. And the tangled mass of threads widens and reveals the knots, clear and tight, that though far from each other, do not unravel.”\textsuperscript{496} The novel parses these tangled diasporic masses, immigration, and questions of identity that Di Maio describes.

As a migritude text, \textit{Little Mother} goes beyond narrating the stories of individuals and families who migrate, who cross borders; it also philosophically engages with the structures and conditions underwriting, creating, and shaping immigration from Africa to

\textsuperscript{494} Ibid. xviii.
\textsuperscript{495} Ibid, xv.
\textsuperscript{496} Farah, \textit{Little Mother}, 1.
Italy and the production of the “immigrant” subject-position. It analyzes and challenges the ways in which Italy has, through the use of both a discourse shaping public opinion and material law: the policing of immigrants; the construction of Africans as “other,” as criminal, as an undue burden, or as usurpers of jobs. These structures—both ideological and concrete—mark the conditions that immigrants face and which shape their experience and their identity as well as their dignity and well-being. *Little Mother* as a political project (among others) reaffirms Somali-Italian humanity by resisting oppressive Italian policies and publics by picturing the every-day lives of individuals, families, and communities, and is thus valuable both as a global novel of migration and contribution to the cultural production of black Italy.

As others have noted, it also narrates the embodiment of a dual or split identity in that both Farah herself, as well as protagonist Domenica Axad, is half Somali and half Italian, creating various complexities, racially, linguistically, and culturally. Indeed scholars have approached Farah’s novel in terms of hybridity or plural identities. Farah however, approaches this complex as a *structural-existential* one—as much a product of the condition of immigration as it is a psychological one. Axad uses the term “existential,” which comes out of Heidegger’s work and later Jean-Paul Sartre’s philosophical program that would be taken up by Négritude, for example, to express her condition as a mother and migrant, a Somali and Italian. I have re-appropriated Heidegger’s terms, including “Being-

497 I do not mean “humanity” or “humanism” in terms of liberal concepts inherited from the Western tradition, which, for Talal Asad “emerged in the nineteenth century with the consolidation of European nation states, the expansion of European colonial empires and the global development of capitalism” and that “the exercise of violence is intrinsic to the modern concept of the human .. the motives of humanitarians must traverse through imperial structures.” See: Talal Asad “Reflections on Violence, Law, and Humanitarianism,” *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. .? What I mean is postcolonial cultural production that *rehumanizes* in response to dehumanization.

in-the-World,” within the vocabulary of critical migritude as predicated upon an onto-structural analysis, and argued that these terms lend themselves well to such an analysis. I begin then, with Domenica Axad’s use of the term “existential” in the novel, demonstrating how Little Mother is both an intensely personal feminist-migrant narrative, and a larger and structural-phenomenological engagement with immigration and patriarchy.

Little Mother follows two friends, Domenica Axad and Barni, who, as cousins, grow up together in Mogadishu, Somalia; they lose touch, and finally re-connect in Italy as adults. The novel also tracks Taageere, Domenica Axad’s estranged husband, also from Somalia, who migrates to the United States. Each character is accorded three sections or chapters. Barni is a mid-wife, or a “little mother,” and narrates her experience in the Somali diaspora while attempting to solve the mystery of a mute Somali refugee who winds up in her hospital. This formal device allows Barni to sort through the “tangled mass” of Somali immigrants in Rome. Taageere’s chapters detail his experience in the United States while Domenica Axad’s represents both a working-through of her experience as a migrant via her friend’s film on the diaspora, and the melancholy sense of personal fragmentation (related to the actual structural fragmentation caused by structures of immigration) she feels as the child of an Italian mother and Somali father. She finally ends up reclaiming her Somali roots by choosing her Somali middle name “Axad” over her Italian first name “Domenica” and by reconnecting with the Somali language.

After fairly substantial mental issues Domenica Axad traces her genealogy at the behest of a therapist, allowing her to “rebuild the complex existential path” that she has since lost. She writes

Dear doctor:
...let me tell you that I deeply appreciated your willingness to work with me. I am sure this decision will help me rebuild the complex existential path that will enable me to assume with integrity the responsibility of motherhood that lies ahead. It is
much easier to narrate the events in writing since my relationship with words is still an emotional and fragmented one. It’s not unusual to digress or to follow the thread of a thought that ends up folding back on itself. As you have helped me understand, this is not unusual in people who come from a history of migration. Even if I’m not—technically—an immigrant, I fully understand your remarks about Domenica having lived through estrangements and readjustments that are typical of immigrants. The family tree you suggested I draw took days to prepare, surprising even me with its complexity. I don’t deny that such a wide-reaching tree is essentially a feeble attempt to reclaim family ties that I feared were too tenuous... I hope that writing down my story will help me become... whole.

Axad’s letter details fragmented identity, motherhood, migratory paths, and roots. Axad, who refers here to her “other” self Domenica in the third person, continues this section of the novel by describing her childhood in Mogadishu, her subsequent migrations, and the alienation she feels. The above passage highlights the ways in which the movement of people is shaped by the structures of immigration—the reasons why those “who come from a history of migration,” those who face “estrangements and readjustments that are typical of immigrants” develop existential complexes contributing to their subject-positions; some like Domenica Axad, develop almost schizophrenic split personalities, fragmentation, and identities that are not “whole.” Her relationship with language even, the precariousness of spoken words along with the comfort in writing, is perhaps symbolic of the split or alienation embedded in her unconscious as a symptom of the material alienations produced in part by immigration as a system within which the pain of a dual identity is exacerbated.

It is not movement itself, suggests Little Mother, but the ways in which movement is managed—immigration—that re-educates both the movement, identity, and even desires of migrants themselves in variously repressive ways (both physically and mentally), hence

499 Farah, Little Mother, 193/4.
Domenica Axad’s fragmented self. Interestingly, since she has dual citizenship, she is “not technically an immigrant,” but as we well remember for Valentino and others in *18 ius Soli*—in the words of Salman Rushdie, even native-born blacks “are thought of as people whose real ‘home’ is elsewhere.” Thus Domenica Axad is still subject to being-immigrant and so she writes her story and her genealogy in order to name and thus come to terms with the being-in-the-world of the migrant, that “complex existential path.”

This chapter attempts to show that immigration dehumanizes. The price of the ticket to Italy for Axad would be costly given the requirements expected of immigrants. For her “the move to Italy [had] implied the complete erasure of my short past.” To survive, to fit in, she abandons “Axad” (the Somali part of her) for “Domenica” (the Italian part), and forgets the Somali language as well as the cultural signifiers she was brought up with as a child. Conversely, as “well-trained” immigrants do, she adopts the Italian language and culture. “My dear Barni,” she writes, “there’s nothing left of the person I was when you knew me... I quickly erased the Somali language. That’s what our mind does: it removes things, it locks things up in closets.” Euro-American policies of assimilation were and continue to be dehumanizing since “assimilation” not only calls for an abandoning of one’s self (the erasure of “Axad”) but also categorizes the migrant within a valued hierarchy wherein the top tier is reserved for old white males.

And so with immigration automatically comes what Frantz Fanon names in *Black Skin White Masks*, a “psychoexistential complex.” His important work analyzing colonialism and race, I have argued, is inextricable from questions of immigration and

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502 Ibid, 86/7.
503 Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks*, 14.
diaspora given that some of the complexes he sees alienating the black man stem from the colonial assimilation policies that the colonized are confronted with in metropoles of the North. His goal is “the disalienation of the black man” with reference paid to both economic and psychological realities. When Domenica Axad reflects that “being an emigrant in both directions is quite exhausting, especially for those who, like us, lived in economic circumstances that necessitated daily sacrifices,” she reveals both the psychological effects of transmigration as well as economic ones. The daily economic sacrifices are by and large representative of immigration and represent one side of the mutually constitutive dialectic of material realities and ideological “superstructures” or “epistemes.” Refashioning a Fanonian critique in the context of twenty-first century globality and in terms of women in diaspora, Farah takes her place, I would argue, within the black radical tradition(s) that Fanon contributes to over a half century earlier.

Looking back upon her migratory “peregrinations,” and alienation (the condition of immigration), Axad muses: “Exist, one could exist anywhere. For me, for all of us, it didn’t matter where. You simply had to get used to a different set of store signs, different prices, and draw up a new map: a map of your links to the others, and of the junctions of places where we could meet... By alienating ourselves we continued to live.” To “exist anywhere” in migration necessitates the separation of the self from itself, or alienation, and thus, to “draw up a new map,” to become inured to a repressive situation like Luul in the novel, to really alienate one’s self from one’s self. The beauty of Little Mother is that, like Fanon’s dialectic of the material and ideological, it confronts the myriad structures of immigration

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504 Ibid, 13.
505 Ibid, 204.
506 Ibid, 87.
507 Ibid, 100.
in terms of both personal-psychological issues shaping immigrant subject positions, and the material, economic, and legal institutions, of immigration that also shape and re-educate migrant subjects as well as the “maps” migrants must make.

The Italian government does not recognize Taageere and Shukri’s divorce leading Axad to think about the consequences of immigration in a systemic way as conventions not only do not travel but are erased by an ironically inhospitable “welcoming” society: “What happens to laws and conventions without a government, without a legal system? They remain in our minds. Vague principals that we no longer know how to use. They seem to matter only to us Somalis, scattered all over the world... I, too, was married once a long time ago, and I decided not to register my marriage. How could I trust a system that didn’t recognize ours?” The above quotation makes an interesting parallel to the epigraph I began this chapter with—Barni’s statement that “we carry our home with us,” which becomes even more precarious here as we see that laws and conventions, even languages and cultures often do not survive the journey. Further, Little Mother shows the reality of a dire situation in which many migrants and refugees leaving Africa themselves do not survive the journey.

Migritude authors show that immigration is institutional, systemic, and that there are historico-structural causes that shape patterns of immigration in addition to psychological and identity-based concerns. This perspective is ontological, which is for Heidegger, what marks the difference between existential and the solely ontic or individual. Heidegger ontologically analyzes Being with a capital “B” by assessing what he calls structures or modes of being that then make up Being-in-the-World. My argument is somewhat analogous here as I suggest that, for our purposes, people who move do so within

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508 Ibid, 29. My emphasis.
overdetermined structures of immigration including being subject to its symptoms and the ontological conditions it produces. Further, I necessarily approach the structures and symptoms of immigration ontologically, with a situated and postcolonial phenomenology of movement.

Immigration, like other institutions, is managed. Borders, checkpoints, passports, and so on, are all symptomatic of larger modes of managing movement (such as questions of citizenship and nations wherein movement and territory are foundational concerns) and thus the construction and production of being immigrant. The checkpoint specifically, for Karim Mattar and David Fieni, “functions not only to control the flow of migrants, illicit goods, and insurgents/terrorists, but also to divide contiguous lands and to reproduce politically and legally encoded distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Thus performing sovereignty, the checkpoint appears to be symptomatic of fears of catastrophe, whether economic, political, or social, in various national and global contexts.”  

As Little Mother shows, checkpoints impinge upon the being of migrants.

In Little Mother Barni tells the story of Luul, Taageere’s sister, characteristic of many migrants’ experiences, and shows the conditions subtending migration. A Somali refugee Luul “had come from the desert, from the sea” and “after having lived for years in a refugee camp in Kenya, after having tried her luck on a series of trucks, she got as far as Libya.” As Matthias Shwartz notes in his illuminating article on African immigration to Italy and the Lampedusa tragedy of October 2013, “In Libya, human smuggling is called ‘the Lampa-Lampa business’.” From Libya Luul finally lands on Lampedusa, an island off

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the coast of Sicily used as an immigrant holding center. Lampedusa marks an interesting socio-geographical locale between Africa and Italy. Shwartz describes it as a kind of migrant purgatory with a colonial history.

Lampedusa is a seven-mile flyspeck of limestone and arid soil. Along with nearby Lampione, it is the last of Italy’s footprints on Africa’s continental shelf. Most of its southern shore is forbidding terrain, where the sirocco pushes breakers onto bare crags. In 1843, Ferdinand II claimed Lampedusa for the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies; during the Second World War, the Allies bombed it heavily. After the war, it enjoyed sixty years as a sleepy enclave of fishermen and tourists... In 2009, as Italy’s tolerance for new arrivals declined along with its economy, Silvio Berlusconi’s government renamed Lampedusa’s eleven-year-old reception facility the Center for Identification and Expulsion. Today, along with Spanish Morocco, Cyprus, Christmas Island, and Nauru, Lampedusa is a zone of global limbo, where developed nations decide who is most deserving of a new life on the other side of the wall. More than two hundred thousand people [coming from Africa] have landed on the island in the past fifteen years.512

Lampedusa as a zone of “global limbo” embodies an odd articulating link between a continent ravaged by colonial and neocolonial programs and Italy, one of the countries of the global North benefitting from those programs, subsequently a “destination.” Luul’s story is representative of thousands of other migrants caught between the Scylla of postcolonial Africa and the Charybdis of “fortress Europe.”

Michelle M. Wright states that “some will be familiar with the phrase ‘fortress Europe,’ which refers to the explicit attempt to ahistoricize Europe as a ‘whites-only’ enclave that must protect itself against the ‘invasion’ of non-white hordes [similar to] increasing hegemonic aggression espoused and practiced by the United States.”513 Further,

511 Little Mother, 36/38.
in the Mediterranean context, Alessandro Dal Lago notes that “An eloquent illustration of the closing of Europe’s borders to foreigners is evident in the migration politics of the new countries of immigration, Spain, and Italy, who, together with Greece, have played the role of sentinels for the Mediterranean in the ‘fortress Europe’ codified by the Schengen agreement... For Southern European countries, closing their borders to migrants is undoubtedly a prerequisite for being accepted into the European club politically and financially dominated by France and Germany.”\(^{514}\) *Little Mother* describes and therefore challenges Europe in these terms.

For Domenica Axad “I do not deny that during my childhood [in Mogadishu] I had the most conflicted feelings for that armored fortress [Europe] where I imagined there was an abundance of delights and forbidden luxuries.”\(^{515}\) Once she has dual citizenship she is able to “pass-borders” as her mother is Italian. “At the airport, I went past the checkpoint walking backward. I could see Taageere frozen in that position, he who wanted so much to come with me. I and my pass for the fortress were going to meet Luul, who had arrived as an illegal immigrant.”\(^{516}\) Because Taageere does not have a European or American passport he is not unable to pass through security and into the fortress. Domenica Axad laments that “it’s not easy to cross borders with Somali papers.”\(^{517}\) Further, she embarks upon a more existential take on the “value” of a European passport. “Do you know, Barni, what it means to possess something you take for granted? The idea that no one can refuse you entry to any country, that at most it’s a matter of paying for a visa? A passport, a pass-borders. Without this thing that you take for granted, a journey over the desert or over the


\(^{515}\) *Little Mother*, 195.

\(^{516}\) Ibid, 118.

\(^{517}\) Ibid, 112.
sea, a long and dangerous journey, is much more expensive than a full-fare airline ticket."\textsuperscript{518} This passage suggestive of both the asymmetrical value accorded certain passports in particular geographical locations and shows that migrating as an emigrant or refugee is much more costly than a plane ticket both monetarily and in terms of physical safety.

For Luul, relatives finally arrange for her to come to Rome from Lampedusa as their guest and she is able to enter Italy, where she lives with other migrants. But once inside fortress Europe she is subjected to its anti-immigrant apparatuses managing movement. For example, Barni considers sending her to the U.S. to join her brother Taageere but thinks better of it as “She would not have been able to pass the checkpoints. They would have checked her fingerprints and sent her back.”\textsuperscript{519} The fingerprinting and checkpointing of Luul is an example of biopolitical management of the movement of those excluded from the rights and protections of citizenship. At one point Luul lives in an abandoned warehouse with other Somali migrants and gives birth in an abandoned car which, later, catches fire. Maxamad X the mute attempts to enter the burning car as he doesn’t know Luul has escaped already and is badly burned landing him in Barni’s hospital, which begins Barni’s narrative. It is stories like these in the novel that intertwine to illustrate the condition of immigration. \textit{Little Mother}, and migritude literature at large, attempts to negotiate the issues and challenges concerning global mobility and citizenship within what Emily Apter calls the “darker side of globalization.”

In a chapter in her most recent work, 2013’s \textit{Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability}, Apter discusses postcolonial authors and artists that challenge

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{518} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{519} Ibid, 39.
\end{itemize}
the violently nationalist and xenophobic nature of the checkpoint and who use something of a politics of untranslatability to reveal checkpoints, borders, and sovereignty as such (Azmi Bishara’s novel *Checkpoint* is one example). In a lecture and conversation with Senegalese philosopher Souleymane Bachir Diange, Apter describes this “darker” side to globalization. *Africa is a Country*’s Eliot Ross paraphrases her argument against “the bourgeois fiction that globalization has turned everybody into ultra-mobile cosmopolitans, a myth that’s proved especially seductive to those involved in the project of writing and institutionalizing so-called ‘world literature,’ with its array of glamorous airport-hopping protagonists. Instead, Apter points to the phenomenon of ever-intensified ‘checkpointization’ (the word ‘checkpoint’ has been creolized into most languages) and the way in which so-called ‘illegal’ residents are harassed and deported even as ‘multi-culturalism’ is lauded.”

*Little Mother*, and migritude literature at large, challenges the bourgeois fiction that globalization has nurtured cosmopolitan movement (it has but for the elite and for capital) by illustrating the “checkpointization” that the majority of the world’s migrants, especially in the global South, face, the every-day racism they negotiate, and at the same moment that governments’ self-congratulatory “multiculturalist” rhetoric is shored up in the media. Barni, for example, sees a story on the news that depicts the prejudicial nature of the Italian government and media. Barni recalls of the story that “they didn’t really feature it much, something about two Egyptians arrested for suspected terrorism. They found a map of Rome in their pockets with all the most strategic spots circled in red... but there was hardly any mention at all of the fact that these circles indicated where the

Caritas food distribution centers for the hungry were located... it was really ridiculous, that there was paranoia everywhere, that everyone had it in for the poor and that you could be sure the big shots would never get caught." The “paranoia” that Barni picks up on indicates the national anxiety created via anti-immigrant “fortress Europe” and the checkpointization of the North. Secondly, Barni’s phrase “everyone had it in for the poor” showcases the extent to which poor and working class migrants are not only relegated to the abject margins of society but are indeed targeted.

Emily Apter also notes that the checkpoint can also be viewed as a “figure of performative sovereignty.” That is, the checkpoint claims and demarcates a specific geographical area while simultaneously constructing a valued ‘us’ and ‘them’, which then justifies repression and aggression. Simon Faulkner notes, for example, that “in her discussion of the Israeli checkpoint system, Ariella Azoulay has suggested that to suppress the possibility of a proper Palestinian border the occupation regime has created multiple points of division that often have the appearance of a border... that ‘the border passes wherever a Palestinian body stands’ ...every time a Palestinian seeks to travel, Israel takes advantage of the opportunity to reassert its sovereignty.” In the context of Israeli apartheid then, the Palestinian’s body itself becomes a checkpoint, through which it is targeted, harassed, and managed, which in turn, reasserts or “performs” Israel’s sovereignty, much like the passbooks in South Africa under white apartheid rule, or “residence permits” [permessi di soggiorno] in Italy which still exist today.

In the context of Italy, *Little Mother* provides something of a parallel by showing how Italian police target black men in Italy simply because they are black—their bodies

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522 *Little Mother*, 32/3.
523 *Against World Literature*, 106.
become checkpoints upon which the border always falls. The Somalian Taageere describes one instance: “We were all sitting on a wall, me, the Sicilian, a Vietnamese friend of mine, and a Jamaican. Then along came an Indian, an old man, not a young one. The others were smoking a joint... The old Indian man, all happy took the first drag. We were ready to burst with laughter and, I swear, I’ve never seen anything like it. First his feet then his legs began to twist. Like someone doing a breakdance.” At that point the Italian police appear, accusing them of “unauthorized gathering... [and that they must leave, and] that these are the rules and that if we want to live in this country we have to abide by them.” In response Taageere shouts sarcastically that “This is the land of multiculturalism!” Symptomatic of the insidious apparatuses that manage movement and thus the bodies of immigrants themselves, this ‘multicultural’ group of men actually become checkpoints themselves as they are targeted and forced to move and disperse. In other words, wherever a non-white person stands the border “passes over” them justifying harassment by the police, which, in turn, reasserts (white) Italian sovereignty.

The above scene parallels Claude McKay’s *Banjo* as it depicts a multi-racial, multi-cultural gathering of diasporic men of color and the danger perceived by their levity and socialization by the police. Interestingly it would seem by these two moments separated by almost ninety years shows that the treatment of immigrants has little changed from the colonial to the postcolonial period. One could also parallel the treatment of young black males and females in the United States by the police—Ferguson, MO, being the most recent example in a long history of racial targeting and abuse. In other words, for American blacks

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525 *Little Mother*, 191.
526 Ibid, 192.
527 Ibid.
in the twenty-first century, the body is a checkpoint (see United States-based rapper Jasiri X’s “Checkpoint”).

Another apparatus within the structural management of movement is the passport itself. Axad in *Little Mother* again illustrates the valued hierarchy in which Northern passports are the gold standard against which those from the global South become useless or even incriminating. “Libeen was traveling with fake documents and I wasn’t supposed to think about it. My documents, Italian documents, were accepted anytime, anywhere. They are rock solid documents. Libeen? Different picture, different face. I kept thinking, they will notice. But to Customs officials black faces are all the same... try to imagine each border crossing. I was afraid as well.”

Axad, who is lucky enough to have one white Italian parent and thus an Italian passport, highlights the embedded racism custom officials are socialized to perform as well as the hierarchy of passports, some providing fluid, cosmopolitan movement, and others its opposite, movement interdicted.

Souleymane Bachir Diagne’s response to Apter’s lecture on checkpoints parallels the arguments made in *Little Mother* above. “Diagne respond[s] by recounting his own experiences of many decades traveling under his Senegalese passport. His passport, he said, is ‘a passport that does not pass ports’ — it is a devalued document whose bearer is generally to be considered suspect.”

Diagne and Libeen’s shared experience shows simply that contrary to making national borders more fluid and the world a more open place, globalization has actually generated the proliferation of borders, checkpoints, and apparatuses that (repressively) manage the movement of the world’s poor, working-class, and non-white population; that only global capital, information, and the elite roam the

528 89.
world more freely than in previous eras. The irony, is that the material realities of twenty-first century structures like fortress Europe, the U.S.-Mexico border, the Wall in Gaza and Israel’s apartheid, and the U.S.’s consistent targeting of African-Americans seem so out of place given the rhetoric of a more fluid, open world that proponents of globalization, and even World Literature, have vaunted for the past few decades.

The reality is, that capital in the global North shores up its borders and walls, girds its markets, and exploits those markets and people it hasn’t already drained of life, e.g. immigrants and workers in the global South, particularly women. Sonali Perera, for example, argues that “in the contemporary historical moment, the ‘new proletariat’ is best represented by the figure of the woman worker in the periphery. Separate from organized labor in industrialized countries of the North, the occluded agent of production in this ‘postindustrial’ age is the super-exploited worker in postcolonial, ‘developing’ countries with extraverted, rather than autocentric, economies.”530 Migritude literature shows this darker side of globalization under neoliberal capital and it does so by focusing on the hinge of movement and immigration, as well as gender, which I analyze subsequently.

Diagne’s remarks above illustrate Apter’s characterization of globalization and he continues by addressing the Lampedusa tragedy in October of 2013 in which 300 migrants/refugees from Africa drowned not far from land and while boats patrolled the area. He is critical of the way African migrants are portrayed in the media and takes a pro-migrant stance.

The story of African migrants entering the Eurozone by sea is basically indecipherable as it is told in global and national media reports, because they are described only as helpless victims, without taking into account the sophisticated understanding they have developed for negotiating

international legal frameworks and European state bureaucracies. When you know long before you get there that the Europeans will want to deport you on arrival, it is imperative you do all you can to flummox them. Why risk the perilous crossing? Because if you come by sea there is no single national border across which to expel you. Why travel without papers? Because that passport won’t pass ports; it will only answer the question of where you should be deported to... Why stand in silence when questioned by officials? Because the language in which you reply will give them a clue where you may have come from. If you speak a word of French you might be flown ‘back’ to Niger even though you’re from Mali. Say nothing at all and there is nothing to translate.  

Deportations to anywhere regularly happen in Italy. Fred Kuwornu’s documentary, in which he interviews a number of second generation young adults, attests to as much. Georgiana for example, in an interview about the precariousness of life as a second generation child, muses that with the residence card regime “you’ll always be terrified they’ll deport you to some country you’ve never been to.” A young Italian woman with parents from Sierra Leone named Dorkas remarks that, “If someone asked me for example to go to Africa, I would be completely spaced out,” as she has grown up in Italy and considers it home. However, since Italy makes it nearly impossible for young adults like Dorkas and Georgina to gain citizenship and thus equal protection under the law, they are in constant fear of jail or deportation, and even though many have permessi di soggiorno they are prevented from working.

*Little Mother* shares Diagne’s assertion that not only does the media parrot problematic representations of immigrants, but contrary to these representations in the media and elsewhere, immigrants indeed have a sophisticated understanding of the global apparatuses managing movement and a technical understanding of how to negotiate them.

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531 Diagne, “The Passport that does not Pass Ports,” *Africa is a Country.*  
532 Kuwornu, *18 ius Soli.*
For example, in *Little Mother* a friend of Domenica Axad’s, Sacidd Saleeban and his girlfriend demonstrate this working knowledge concerning levels of stringency and immigration policy between nations as they attempt to board in Bulgaria for strategic reasons: “They were planning on getting on a plane in Sofia, where it was rumored that immigration controls were less rigorous.” Like in *Banjo* where McKay’s cast of wandering black migrants were well aware of the differences in colonial immigration policy of each European nation as well as America, in the post postcolonial “global” period, migrants in *Little Mother*, demonstrate, as Diagne has it, a sophisticated awareness of differences in the national apparatuses of Europe that manage movement. In *18 Ius Soli* Valentino makes somewhat of a parallel argument. “If you ask a police officer how to get a residence permit,” he relates, “one will say A and the other will say B. The best knowledge comes from other immigrants.” Later in this chapter I will analyze the ways in which Farah subtly shows that this “migrant awareness” can and has shifted into a kind of solidarity and that her character Domenica Axad reclaims her Self and her sanity by reclaiming her Somaliness within the Somali diaspora; that it is the diaspora-community itself, the “protagonist” of the novel, that represents not only her ultimate psychological renewal but a mode of political and collective resistance. These migrant collectivities, however, are clearly gendered and thus differing in character, necessitating a closer look at Farah’s project as it relates to women in the diaspora.

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533 *Little Mother*, 112.
534 Kuwornu, *18 Ius Soli*. 
In her article entitled “Beyond Words: Mirroring Identities of Italian Postcolonial Women Writers,” Moira Luraschi describes migrant women’s writing in Italy identifying a combination of socio-cultural and identity-based reflections in their work.

The most striking characteristic of postcolonial literature written in Italian is the substantial presence of women writers. Their status, derived from their origins and gender, places them at the margin of any power position... It is often women, among the post-colonized migrants, who begin speaking about their identity. This particular theme is one that brings literature and social sciences closer. In their work, these women authors define identity as mobile and negotiated. Obviously, this vision of identity comes from their personal experiences as migrants.\textsuperscript{535}

This insightful remark also seems to double as a vaguely stated description of migritude literature in the context of Italy. Gender roles, as Graziella Parati notes in the contemporary Italian context, are clearly visible as “men have migrated and become visible by selling in the streets. They have supported each other, living and travelling in communities. Women, who were among the first immigrants to Italy, responded to the need for domestic workers and caretakers and experienced migration dispersed in native familial spheres.”\textsuperscript{536} Barni is a “little mother” for example—a midwife and works as a nurse in a hospital. Despite Italy’s restrictive immigration law, Alessandra Di Maio notes, there is “a large Somali community in Italy. Moreover, there is a recent group of Somali-Italian writers, many of whom are women, who have used their powerful voices to tell their often inconvenient stories.”\textsuperscript{537} These “inconvenient” stories are productive. Women's voices in particular can, as the inimitable Maryse Condé claims, “displease, shock, or disturb.”\textsuperscript{538}


\textsuperscript{536} Parati, \textit{Migration Italy}, 67.

\textsuperscript{537} Di Maio, “Black Italia,” 136.

Migritude women writers not only challenge and philosophize upon the conditions and structures of immigration, both in a materialist sense and a psychological one, but indeed speak to heteropatriarchal power and conventions symptomatic thereof in both host and home countries. Women’s migritude writing shows that the biopolitical management of immigrants’ bodies target and interpellate women’s bodies in various and distinct ways. Remember Italy’s refusal to recognize Shukri’s divorce, for example.

If the protagonist of Farah’s novel is the Somali diaspora itself, it is more narrowly about women in migration. Domenica Axad, Barni, Luul, Caasha, Shamsa, Ayan, and Aunt Xalima, for example, are all diasporic female characters in the novel. In terms of a politics, Farah subtly situates her two main and female characters within a feminist genealogy. Domenica Axad remembers her school in Somalia named after Xaawa Taka heroine of the Somali independence movement. “As a child I attended Xaawa Taka Elementary School, one of the largest in the downtown area. Xaawa Taka, a heroine of the Somali independence movement, was famous for having convinced women to finance the League of Young Somalis through the sale of their jewels. This gave vital impulse to the struggle for autonomy.”

Although the Somali Youth League, which was Somalia’s first political party, was all male, Taka’s organizing empowered women and thus provides something of a signpost for Domenica Axad as she wades through her identity and genealogy.

Yet, complicating the concept of the “heroine,” Domenica Axad proclaims earlier in the narrative that, “the woman who knows she has no value without a man is the best of heroines.” This is stated in the context of describing another woman in the diaspora Caasha. “Caasha who never lost sight of her goal. Who walked from Mogadishu all the way

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539 Little Mother, 195.
540 Ibid, 110.
to Kismaayo to flee from the killers. Who arrived in Nairobi by car, and who thanks to funds from her relatives, left for Syria a few months later. Caasha who, with a fake passport, flew to Germany with her four children, ages one, four, five, and six. Who was locked up in a German refugee camp and was able to escape thanks to a ruse... Caasha who, adrift in the world, never forgot her husband and dedicated her life to rescuing him. Caasha reunites with her husband after “eight years of sending him money,” causing Axad to remark bitingly, “The woman who knows she has no value without a man,” that is, the one who subscribes to this particular heteropatriarchal more, “is the best of heroines. Caasha.” Many women in the diaspora are unrecognized and devalued next to men, yet heroically survive anyway.

Condé’s above point is illustrative. She adds that “Whenever women speak out, they displease, shock, or disturb. Their writings imply that before thinking of a political revolution... a psychological one” is needed. The patriarchy of the postcolonial era does not go unchallenged by Condé here or by Farah above as a psychological “disidentification” from patriarchy is necessary before “political revolution.” As a counterpoint to the unsuccessfully autonomous Caasha, Ayan, in Little Mother represents a “liberated” Somali woman. Domenica Axad describes how Ayan’s relationship with her fiancé changes after they get married. “Just imagine. After they got married he began to act like a traditional man. He had expectations. Ayaan, an independent woman who supported herself, was supposed to wear a veil and have children... She was a liberated woman; she enjoyed pleasure and her own body without any taboos. There was no vulgarity in her carefree

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541 Ibid.
543 I analyze the term “disidentification” in the Caribbean context, though relevant here, in: Christopher Ian Foster, “The Queer Politics of Crossing in Maryse Condé’s Crossing the Mangrove,” Small Axe 43 (March 2014), 117.
lifestyle.”

After their marriage he reverts to a more traditional-patriarchal world-view. Much to the reader’s joy, Ayan soon drops him as fast as she would a veil. Ayan then disidentifies with the intersecting patriarchal systems (at home and in the diaspora) that she exists within, resisting from the inside while providing a model for negotiating such a system. Although Caasha demonstrates true grit she apparently does not disidentify with the systems she negotiates.

The bond between Barni and Axad is described as an “elective sisterhood” and is forged in movement. I’ve noted that Sonali Perera describes the writings of working-class women in the global South as something of a non-revolutionary socialism of the everyday. For Perera “Too often, in literature and criticism alike, the working class is seen and represented as masculine, metropolitan, and revolutionary. Women’s texts of nonrevolutionary socialism, however, present us with new figures and concepts for thinking unorganized resistance, everyday experience, and the shape of the ethical within globalization.” Perera’s nonrevolutionary socialism seems conversant with migritude politics and Little Mother. Barni, for example states that, “Because you see, for us women, in the end, those fixed points, our home, our daily life, motherhood, the intimacy of our relationships, they are like little signposts that save us from getting lost.” Just as women workers (including the care industry such as little mothers like Barni) in the global periphery are less visible than men, the idea of a politics of the everyday, or in Barni and Axad’s case, an “elective sisterhood,” becomes a productive hinge towards collective autonomy, patriarchal critique, and challenging or negotiating the biopolitical apparatuses

544 Little Mother, 97/8.
545 Ibid, 207.
546 Perera, No Country, 80.
547 Little Mother, 30.
that manage movement. Farah above metaphorizes signposts as a way to describe women’s
everyday lives in the diaspora but the word also functions as a metonym signaling
movement and immigration—signs guide those who move.

For Domenica Axad it is her elective sisterhood with Barni that allows her to begin
to piece together her identity—in—migration via a reclamation of her Somali “half.” She
states, “I reclaimed Axad, the name that you, Barni, had picked for me, and every time
someone pronounced it, I thought of you.”\textsuperscript{548} She refers here to their childhood in Mogadishu
in which her older cousin Barni acts as somewhat of a guide and friend. As she remembers
Barni and her past, one that she erases early on after her move to Italy, she begins to, as
Barni describes it “loosen some of the knots.” Ironically, Axad finally returns to a Somalia
that represents the becoming-whole of her Self on the eve of the Somali civil war, a war
that would tear the country apart. She becomes, like her compatriots fleeing the country, a
refugee. This chaos of movement however, allows her to reconnect with the Somali
diaspora, to claim it in a way, and thus work towards “reconnecting the threads” of her
identity. “As a refugee I followed the flow of a diaspora that was only marginally connected
to me. I internalized its makeup, the absence of a vision, its lack of goals. I wandered
around between Europe and the United States for almost ten years, following the trends
that drove the masses of young people my age from one continent to the next, from a worse
welfare system to a better one... I became a polyglot: I exhumed my Somali and the ancient
proclivity for the nomadic life. I reconnected the threads and strengthened them.”\textsuperscript{549} She is
only “marginally connected” to the Somali refugees as she has lived in Italy for some time.
Axad however “internalizes its makeup” as a nomadic and goalless mass surviving in

\textsuperscript{548} Ibid, 113.
\textsuperscript{549} 217.
movement. This passage is also suggestive of Diagne’s comment above concerning migrant
gnosis—the production of a migrant epistemology; which, for Axad, is represented in the
effective understanding of which welfare systems are better or worse.

The word “system” here illustrates my general point about migritude literature and
its structural, conditional, and *systemic* perspective on, and politics of, immigration. Axad
re-valorizes the Somali part of her that she represses in Italy due, among other reasons, to
its racist discourse and laws targeting black immigrants, both female and male in different
ways. *Little Mother* is somewhat ironically about the continued process of becoming whole
in fragmentation; of threading and unthreading ties in diaspora; of materially and
psychologically negotiating systems aggregated into what we know as immigration.

“Soomaali Baan Ahay [I am Somali], like my half is whole. I am the fine thread, so fine that
it slips through and stretches, getting longer. So fine that it does not snap. And the tangled
mass of threads widens and reveals the knots, clear and tight, that though far from each
other, do not unravel.”

Fred Kuwornu's *18 ius Soli and Africa in Italy*

As a diasporic refugee Domenica Axad “wanders around and between Europe” attempting,
to use the cliché, to ‘find herself’. Interestingly, the goal that allows her to move forward
parallels that of the conceit of Farah’s novel—documenting the diaspora: “After London: a
complex web of different places. Letting things go I lived... I met Saciid Saleeban in
Germany. He was fixated on his video camera and an interesting project. The crazy idea of
filming the Somali diaspora... Barni—how can I explain it—his project became my

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project.” Although the film does not get made in this novel, there is something of a parallel in contemporary filmmaker Fred Kuwornu’s documentary *18 ius Soli*. His film documents the children of immigrants from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East born in Italy as well as young adults who, though immigrants, have grown up in Italy; it illustrates the daily challenges they face in a primarily anti-immigrant and racist society.

Like other migritude texts, the film *18 ius Soli* begins by connecting the colonial period to our twenty-first century global era. The film opens with the background sounds of a soccer match in 2010 in Italy. As Ghanaian-Italian superstar Mario Balotelli takes the field fans begin to chant “there are no black Italians.” It then segues into the experiences of second generation children of immigrants and the daily repressions they deal with including white racism as above. A vignette follows telling the story of famous Congolese-Italian boxer Leone Jacovacii, conceived in colonial Congo and raised in Italy by his father, who, after winning a title in 1928 was met with the following headline in the newspaper: “A negro cannot represent Italy.” The nearly verbatim slogans from 1928 and 2010 provide a haunting image of the similarities between colonial and postcolonial era Italy, mobility, race, and citizenship. The film also provides background on another historical example in a young Afro-Italian soldier in WWII, Giorgio Marincola, who was born in Somalia “at the height of the Italian Fascist colonial experience in Somalia” and who would grow up in Italy. Despite being considered, and treated as, subhuman in Italy he joins the Italian army. When asked about his seemingly contradictory decision he states “homeland doesn’t

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551 107.  
552 222.  
553 Kuwornu, *18 ius Soli*.  

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mean a color on a map but freedom and justice for all the peoples of the World.”
Kuwornu here subtly provides an alternative world-view to the racist-nationalist Italian one reflected by the above refrains from 1928 and 2010. Although African immigration to Italy doesn’t begin en masse until the 1980s, these two early, colonial examples of African immigrants in Italy in a documentary focusing on twenty-first century second generation children of immigrants, their experience and treatment, provides a striking illustration of the vestiges of colonial mentality in the structures and ideologies of contemporary Italy—those “imperial formations” that Ann Stoler and others describe as a way to describe the “imperial debris” of the present and its process of “ruination as an active, ongoing process that allocates imperial debris differentially and ruin as a violent verb that unites apparently disparate moments, places, and objects.”

18 ius Soli similarly explores the long history of the present by focusing on black Italia and the repressive techniques of power managing citizenship and movement.

The documentary consists of a series of interviews with young second generation children of immigrants from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East as well as some immigrants who’ve grown up in Italy. These young folk do not have equal rights and they daily struggle with life as second generation or immigrant. 18 ius Soli includes vignettes, as above, as well as musical interludes including a song by Valentino, a young biotechnology student and aspiring hip hop artist, called “I Was Born Here.” This song near the end of the documentary details how Valentino and a number of other interviewed youth in the documentary are treated poorly, denied citizenship, and afforded little of the opportunities those children lucky enough to be born of (white) Italian parents have. The film’s subjects

554 Ibid.
555 Stoler, Imperial Debris, 7.
relate how they are made to stand in long lines to re-up their residency permits, short term, which, along with other form of documentation, they must carry with them at all times, again similar to South Africa’s passbooks under apartheid. Valentino tells an interesting and telling story as he renews his permit. “They write ‘born at Nigeria’,” on his form when, he states, “in correct Italian they should write ‘born in Nigeria’ and anyway I wasn’t born in Nigeria I was born in Rome.”556 Ironically, the Roman with the better and native grasp of the Italian language is identified as Nigerian by the white, grammatically challenged, government worker, when, by merit and by birth Valentino for all intents and purposes should be a citizen and afforded attendant rights. The narrator of the film notes, near the opening, that “900,000 kids born in Italy are obliged to live with residence permits... Italian law doesn’t permit their rights.”557 Although Kuwornu’s activist documentary doesn’t solely document the Somali diaspora but a much wider diaspora from the global South—many born and raised in Italy—it converses with the Somali-diaspora film project in Little Mother and thus I read it as parallel and with a similar migritude politics and philosophy.

It is a migritude film because it explores the condition of being migrant by exposing the multifarious (and nefarious for that matter) apparatuses, managing movement. Georgiana relates her experience of being fingerprinted, paralleling the almost biological management of Fatou Diome’s protagonist at immigration control (see chapter one) and Luul’s in Little Mother; Valentino paints a picture of “third class” life with a residence permit, while Anastacio and Aziz relate the constant experience of having to renew their permits while being in long lines and how it is a demeaning experience that never ends. Dorkas and Georgiana also relate their fear of the ever-present threat of deportation,

556 18 ius Soli, italics mine.
557 Ibid.
possibly “to some country you’ve never been.” All these instances aggregate into a scary illustration of Apter’s “checkpointization” of the global North wherein the immigrants’ and even the native-born children of immigrants’ bodies are produced as a checkpoint, as a signifier of otherness and foreign, despite all evidence to the contrary.

We will remember the doublespeak Valentino deals with wherein although he was born in Rome and not Nigeria, he is always already hailed as Nigerian. This attests to the varied biopolitical management of any nonwhite populations in “fortress Europe” or the U.S. and Israel (in the colonial period all Africans were hailed as black—often by worse epithet—whereas in the era of globalization racial categories have subtly proliferated, thus Valentino’s interpellation as “Nigerian” or even the fact that “immigrant” itself is racialized in various ways). We will remember Foucault’s statement in 1976 that I have used to theorize the ways in which the former colonial powers of the global North administer and regulate non-white movement: "The old power of death that symbolized sovereign power was now carefully supplanted by the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life. During the classical period, there was a rapid development of various disciplines—universities, secondary schools, barracks, workshops; there was also the emergence, in the field of political practices and economic observation, of the problems of birthrate, longevity, public health, housing, and migration. Hence there was an explosion of numerous diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations, marking the beginning of an era of 'biopower'."


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an ideological anxiety among “native” (white) section of the population which in turn, then, creates instances like the chanting of “there are no black Italians” in the soccer stadium in 2010.

The documentary ends on a hopeful note: it highlights various multiethnic schools, the proposal of the “Modified Ius Soli” law that would empower second generation-ers, as well as arguments in favor of a society in which equal rights are better disseminated. Italian professor of Sociology Mauro Valeri states near the end of the documentary that “thanks to the second generation we’ll have our pensions paid, we’ll have a country that can develop, we’ll have the capacity to deal with the challenge of global competition.”

Tellingly, Aziz essentially implores to Italian society that “I’d like to make a contribution in any way I can;” however, if he is “always tied down to a residence permit,” he would “not be allowed” to make that contribution. This both shows the willingness to invest and contribute to Italy by the second generation children of immigrants and more recent immigrants, and the corollary fact that repressive Italian laws and its racist and anti-immigrant zeitgeist actually prevent the realization of those contributions to Italian society— thus ultimately harming it.

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**Conclusion:**

Contemporary Italy is an understudied site of Black Europe, black and African diasporas, Italophone African literature, and black Italian literature. Alessandra di Maio points out that African immigrants in Italy, and following Fred Kuwornu I would add the second generation children of immigrants in Italy, have “inscribed Italy as a site of the African diaspora, offering new perspectives and directions to the field of Black diaspora

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559 ibid.
560 Ibid.
Italy must therefore also be further studied as a site of migritude literature. Christina Ali Farah’s *Little Mother*, narrating the Somali diaspora in Italy, Marco Di Prisco’s digital quadriptych of African immigration in Italy, and Fred Kuwornu’s film locating a “black Italia,” not only provide an illustrative window into issues of immigration in the geo-cultural and historical space of Italy showing how literature and art negotiate immigrant experiences, questions of home and movement, identity and gender; but also as migritude texts, they (ontologically) narrate and engage with larger structures, systems, and patterns of immigration. They warrant something like a phenomenology of the networks of techniques of power used to produce and manage non-white populations in Italy and, in particular, their movement. Valentino’s statement in *18 ius Soli* shows that under the residence permit regime he cannot *leave* when he wants to leave and thus the interdiction of and re-education of his movement. *Little Mother* shows this as well via its illustration of the checkpoint system, as does Di Prisco’s piece “Men on a Wire” showing Africans moving across a tightrope, an almost impossible limitation of freedom of movement. These disclosures foment a politics, catalyze a speaking-out against dehumanization.

Furthermore, migritude texts argue that the colonial system is organically antecedent and indeed lives on in this global moment. *18 ius Soli* for example gives us an example of colonial era Congo and its relationship with Italy, as well as Somalia’s relationship to Empire-building Italy in the stories of Leone Jacovacci and Giorgio Marincola respectively. That iterations of these formations are not only visible but have proliferated and shifted in various ways illustrates the tenacious temporality of these

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imperial *cum* global twenty-first-century formations but illustrates my argument about the
work migritude literature does, exposing what Stoler calls the “imperial debris” and
“ruination” of imperial formations in the present by using the hinge of immigration.”

One then, as Nuruddin Farah suggests, cannot look at the Somali diaspora in Italy, cannot read
works like *Little Mother*, without looking at the long durée or “slow violence” of imperial
formations and their iterations in the present.

Chapter Four:

“A Matter of Timing”
Temporality, Materiality, and Same-Sex Love in Migration in Diriye Osman’s *Fairytales for Lost Children*

“[Yassin] was Somali first, Muslim second, gay third. But perhaps that hierarchy was a matter of timing: born Somali, raised Muslim, discovered gay.”

-Fairytales for Lost Children

It was only in 1990 that the 1952 immigration policy restricting “homosexual” immigration to the United States was lifted. In a recent article on Caribbean immigrant LGBTQ literature I ask the following, related, question: If Thomas Glave’s work and other pieces in his collection of literature and essays titled *Our Caribbean: A Gathering of Lesbian and Gay Writing from the Antilles* articulate precisely the mixing of diaspora and desire, immigration and sexuality, does it therefore follow that sexuality and processes of gendering are entangled with institutions that manage immigration? I answer in the affirmative, arguing that immigration as a national and international system instituted by the global North not only manages and polices movement and immigrant populations in a

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563 Diriye Osman, *Fairytales for Lost Children* (United Kingdom: Team Angelica, 2013), 137.  
way that racializes and genders the objects of its control, which I have shown, but heterosexualizes them as well, and that immigration as a system is inextricable from heteropatriarchal modes of domination, while queer [white] capital on the other hand, is granted free passage under neoliberal capitalism. Secondly, I argue that analysis of LQBTQ migritude literature indicates this heteropatriarchal management of movement as well as its racializing and gendering formations, and finally, that these authors challenge and engage with immigration and sexuality in implicit and explicit ways. Somali-British author Diriye Osman’s *Fairytales for Lost Children* is indeed substantially critical of the condition of immigration and explicitly attentive to gay and lesbian sexuality in diaspora. Further, given that conceptions of “home” and “freedom” remain substantial tropes throughout *Fairytales* as well as in interviews with Osman, this chapter parses these weighted terms from Osman’s migrant African, Muslim, and gay positionalities.

Diriye Osman’s collection of short stories *Fairytales for Lost Children* (2013) pictures life in twenty-first century *banlieues*—or racialized “ghettos”—in South London and Nairobi for Somali “lost children,” those who have grown up as diasporic subjects peopling transnational flows both on the continent and between African and Europe whether as refugees, international students, or economic migrants. At the heart of these narratives lies the being-in-the-world of African immigrants who desire alternatively and for most of whom, Islam is an abiding element of their identities. Osman struggles with the complexities of both external and internal negotiations of home and freedom in the lives of his queer diasporic subjects in postcolonial Kenya and London. Further, he tracks the ways in which neocolonial-global structures of immigration, heteropatriarchy, and racialization temporally and materially condition processes of self-making for his cast of characters.

Yassin, for example, a young Somali-British protagonist in the short story “The Other (Wo)Man,” uses the terms “hierarchy” and “timing” in describing his identity. “He
was Somali first, Muslim second, gay third. But perhaps that hierarchy was a matter of timing: born Somali, raised Muslim, discovered gay.”⁵⁶⁶ Here, “hierarchy” calls to mind “structure” or “condition,” on the one hand, and “timing” denotes temporality on the other, perhaps suggesting that it takes time to come to or to fashion one’s self. Temporality conditions both Yassin’s experiences and his struggle to fashion a sense of himself as he negotiates the meaning of his own being as an immigrant in London, a place, in-and-through-which, his various subject positions battle (including the very fact of his being gay, Muslim, and Somali). Structures condition Yassin’s experience: from anti-immigrant laws and rhetoric to banlieue life and the continued marginalization of gay subjects. The word “matter” in Yassin’s phrase is suggestive of an “issue” as in “a matter of timing”—and materiality itself, while also signaling that which is worthwhile or important as in #Blacklivesmatter. Yassin’s use of “hierarchy” and “timing,” therefore, reconfigure the ways in which materiality and temporality situate identities particularly in regards to immigration and alternative sexualities.

There are eleven short stories in Osman’s Fairytales for Lost Children each followed by an illustration along with Arabic script created by the author. All but the first short story focus on the lives of gay or lesbian Somalis who have migrated to either Kenya or London, and their experiences in these transnational diasporas. The first story “Watering the Imagination,” is the only short story set in Somalia; it frames the collection by introducing themes of migration and displacement, same-sex desire, home, and freedom. The narrator is a Somali mother who loves and supports her lesbian daughter, (she is the only parent in the book who accepts her/his gay child). “I respect her privacy,” she muses,

⁵⁶⁶ Ibid.
“and I allow her to live.” Like Diriye Osman himself, this Somali mother is a story-teller. “While the boat people, those who are hungry for new homes in places like London and Luxemburg, risk their lives on cargo ships, I stand firm on this soil and I tell stories.” Osman’s Fairytales tells the stories of refugees or nomads hungry for new homes, while refashioning the notion of home and freedom precisely through his project of mattering diasporic lives and alternative sexualities. Osman suggests, for example, that black gay migrants can be “homed” in their own bodies, constituting a self-fashioning or self-materializing in movement. “Homing” in this transnational and queer context, as we will see, can be unfaithful to various heteronormative and neocolonial techniques of power and intolerant traditions. Alternatively, “queer,” in terms of elite white gay and lesbian capital, for example, can be conventional, repressive, racializing, or nationalist.

If the overarching theme of this manuscript is movement and the various conditions in which movement takes place, both in time and in space, Osman’s Fairytales then represents a keen intervention into theories and experiences of diaspora, sexuality, and modes of racialization. As a counterpoint, I examine instances of queer liberalism and liberal (in)tolerance of queerness in Somali writer Nurrudin Farah’s Hiding in Plain Sight (2014). Building on Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Robert Reid-Pharr, and David Eng I argue that neoliberal globalization and the management of movement—immigration—cannot be disentangled from discourses and laws circumscribing sexuality, whether they be conservative or liberal; and that queer liberalism and liberal toleration of queerness both

567 Ibid, 3.
568 Ibid.
569 Osman states that “ultimately, I realized that I am my own home. Everything [in my home] is minimalist and basic because I’m satisfied with the fact that I’m ‘homed’ within my own body.” Neelika Jayawardane, Interview with Diriye Osman, Africa is a Country, online. 12/8/2014. http://africasacountry.com/somali-british-writer-diriye-osmans-fairytales-for-lost-children/
practice and promote *intolerance* in terms of racialization and homophobia respectively, particularly visible with respect to systems of immigration and treatment of immigrant populations.

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The penultimate story in *Fairytales* titled “The Other (Wo)Man” illustrates the ways in which narratives of non-normatively desiring subjects in diaspora offer a hinge through which to critically examine immigration and sexuality. The short story follows Yassin, a young Somali immigrant living in an impoverished South London *banlieue*, who meets an older Jamaican-British gentleman on the dating site “Gaydar.” Like other migritude narratives in this study, “The Other (Wo)Man” speaks to the *condition of immigration* in terms of geography, institutions, discourse, and migrant subjects. Geographically for example, Osman illustrates the segregation of immigrant neighborhoods (I call *banlieues*—or “ghettos”—a term coming out of the French context but no less applicable to Britain), and the denial of rights and resources to those populating them. Yassin lives in Peckham, the site of the 2011 “riots,” which paralleled the clichy-dubois uprising in Paris 2005 and Ferguson 2014 in the United States.

Yassin describes the vibrant yet impoverished neighborhood: “One could hear an imam’s call to prayer at the local mosque or high-life blaring from Nigerian barbershops. There was a startling contrast between poor minorities and rich white folks, and even though the physical distance between their worlds was small, that proximity only served to emphasize the larger social and cultural divisions between them.”

Osman here describes an unofficial or *de facto* apartheid in which poor and racialized *banlieue* neighborhoods border and exist in tense and unequal relationship with wealthier white neighborhoods.

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570 *Fairytales*, 128.
The Economist describes Peckham as an “intensely African neighborhood,” which Osman’s prose illustrates from particularly African perspectives.⁵⁷¹ This is an important corrective against the view from “above,” which is often irresponsibly characterized and racialized by both conservative and liberal media and political discourse.

Although the banlieue is teeming and multicultural, Osman describes it in dystopian terms. “Yassin’s estate was an ugly mass of greyness and rot. Outside the windows of each flat deteriorated drainage pipes dripped nastiness onto the heads of pedestrians passing below.”⁵⁷² By describing the conditions of immigrant life in dystopian terms—as immigrants are geographically herded into banlieues and thereby marginalized from British life—Osman challenges the neocolonial order of things. In Imaginary Homelands Salman Rushdie similarly uses a dystopic tone to describe British banlieues as akin to a “new colony.”⁵⁷³ For immigrants, or “the citizens of the new, imported Empire,” as Rushdie calls it, and “for the colonized Asians and blacks of Britain, the police force represents that colonizing army, those regiments of occupation and control.”⁵⁷⁴ Osman’s depiction of banlieue apartheid evidences Rushdie’s characterization. Stokely Carmichael and Charles V. Hamilton have described the lived experience of black Americans in a similar way as early as 1967. “Black people are legal citizens of the United States... Yet they stand as colonial subjects in relation to the white society. Thus institutional racism has another name: colonialism.”⁵⁷⁵ Osman’s description of the structural inequalities in Britain between

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⁵⁷² Fairytales, 132.
⁵⁷⁴ Ibid.
“poor minorities and rich white folks,” along with his dystopian *mis-en-scene*, underscores Carmichael’s and Rushdie’s commentaries about ghettos, *banlieues*, and immigrant neighborhoods as a kind of colony for non-white folks.


In the 1980s climate of growing xenophobia, the French state revised its nationality laws. French-born children of foreign nationals no longer received automatic citizenship, family reunification policies were suspended, illegal immigrants were regularly arrested and deported. Everyday surveillance and harassment of Africans residing in France, especially in the *banlieues*, intensified against the backdrop of vitriolic public debates about national identity, republican values, multiculturalism, French decline, and colonial nostalgia. As extreme right political parties with explicit anti-immigrant platforms received larger percentages in municipal, parliamentary, presidential, and European elections, mainstream republican politics became more hostile to immigrant communities. Another set of anti-immigrant measures, the Pasqua Laws, were passed in the early 1990s.576

As Rushdie, Hall, Gilroy, Stuart and others have shown, Britain has a similar track-record in terms of treating its black British citizens and its immigrant and second-generation populations. As Rushdie notes, in London, even native-born blacks “are thought of as people whose real ‘home’ is elsewhere.”577 Above, Gary Wilder makes the compelling argument that, had Léopold Sédar Senghor’s dream of a French-West-African federation, in which Africans of the former colonies both in France and in formerly French West Africa been realized, then both the formerly colonized West Africans in France and in Africa would have become citizens with, ideally, equal rights and privileges commensurate with white

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French citizenship. The repressive postcolonial context of the banlieues then might have looked different. This is a poignant and utopian argument and perhaps one that Osman’s dystopian description of postcolonial reality in the metropole, and his reconfiguration of freedom and home, story-telling and imagination, work towards imagining.

As Yassin watches Somali cab drivers chewing khat in Peckham, they remind him of his present dystopic reality out of which utopic “other ways of being” can be imagined and practiced. “He was reminded that his people were a traumatized community who didn’t realize they were traumatized: by war, dislocation, poverty, miseducation and a general rift between young and old; by the tear between the past and future. It was a kind of collective psychosis, each sufferer oblivious to the fact that they were paying for the sins of their fathers and father’s father… Yassin would not make the same mistake they had… he would find other ways of being.”

Although Yassin seemingly misplaces blame on migrant individuals, the “father’s fathers,” rather than on an intolerant and (neo)colonial British society, he incisively calls out the temporal “collective psychosis” of the community, the rift between past and future, as well as the need to “heal” and to organize and advocate for change. Osman conflates freedom with the struggles inherent in being gay, Muslim, and African in London, that “the crux of the book is about sexual identity, within the context of being gay, Muslim, African. It is fundamentally a book about freedom.” Freedom itself then, to put it another way, must come from other ways of being. Further, the above passages illustrating banlieue life from an African migrant’s perspective also suggests that “home” itself is an important concept and practice for Osman. As Rahul K. Gairola rightly insists, “The stakes are high for engaging questions of sexuality in the frame of home to

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578 Fairytale, 138.
begin with[.] [E]liding questions of sexuality from notions of home,” and I would argue, of freedom, “risks naturalizing heterosexuality as the commonsensical sexual paradigm of home and nation.”

_Fairytales_ foregrounds _explicit_ erotic and loving (homo)sexuality within its diasporic collection of narratives.

**On Conceptions of Home in Migration:**

Diriye Osman affectively and materially reconfigures the notion of “home” in his queer migritude narrative. In an interview with Neelika Jayawardane for _Africasacountry.com_ Osman describes the process of writing about home in dislocation.

> When I was writing the book, I was engaged in the kind of magical thinking that arises out of trauma and dislocation... Ultimately, I realized that I am my own home. Everything [in my home] is minimalist and basic because I’m satisfied with the fact that I’m ‘homed’ within my own body. That’s the ultimate gift. I have found the freedom to be comfortable within myself... We can’t choose the families we’re born into but we can choose the families we decide to make our own. Mine is the kind of alternative family that Alison Bechdel described so wonderfully in her seminal comic strip, _Dykes To Watch Out For_.

Paying _homage_ to both Alison Bechdel and Audre Lorde in _Fairytales_ and interviews, Osman creates a queer literary genealogy while donning Somali and Muslim cultural identifiers refashioned in migration. The kind of “magical thinking” that arises out of “trauma and dislocation” might also refer to the tradition of magical realism in the global South, of which Négritude is integral. Osman assembles these accoutrements in something like a curation of home embodied. If Osman’s practice of homing himself within his own body leads to the discovery of “the freedom to be comfortable within myself,” it also must necessarily point to myriad processes of alienation that he is subject to from systems of

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580 Gairola, “Capitalist Houses, Queer Homes.”
581 Jayawardane, _Africasacountry.com_.

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immigration and their racializing techniques of power to the heteronormative scripts that marginalizes and dematerializes gay and lesbian lives both at “home” and in diasporas.

In the short story “Ndambi” in Fairytales the narrator Samira narrates her exclusion from Islam due to her lesbian sexual orientation: “The prophet once said that dreams are a window into the unseen. I have been told many times by family, friends, colleagues and strangers that I, a black African Muslim lesbian, am not included in this vision; that my dreams are a reflection of my upbringing in a decadent, amoral Western society that has corrupted who I really am. But who am I, really? Am I allowed to speak for myself or must my desires form the battleground for causes I do not care about?”

Samira describes her lesbian desire and identity as a battleground for “causes” outside herself illustrating the ways in which structures and discourses, or “tradition” and heteronormative national identity, operate to “manage” and police her sexual and religious practice in racialized and gendered ways. It also calls into question the spurious claim that same-sex desire is somehow “un-African.” Black gay migrant existence becomes a “battleground” both in the home and host country as well as in the in-between. As a mode of identification and survival Samira creates home in ways that differ significantly from conventional ways of making a home.

Sometimes home takes the shape of my ex, Adrienne. I like to think that the memory of her beautiful Afro, spiky attitude and sweetness is sacred, that I worship at her altar. Other times, I regard Somalia, my birthplace, as home, as the land where my soul will be laid to rest. Many times home is Kenya or London. But none of these places or people truly embody home for me. Home is in my hair, my lips, my arms, my thighs, my feet and hands. I am my own home. And when I wake up crying in the morning, thinking of how lonely I am, I pinch my skin, tug at my hair, remind myself that I am alive... Remind myself that

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582 Ibid, 73.
it's all about forward motion... change... that elusive state.
Freedom.  

Initially home is represented by Samira’s lover Adrienne in terms of her recognition and reciprocation of Samira’s desire, her “spiky attitude” or way of being in the world, and her beauty—described through her Afro. Home is also initially described in terms of place. First, Somalia as homeland, then Kenya, a site of Somali refugee camps and Somali diasporas, and finally London. Yet, as none of these locales “embody” home for Samira, they are perhaps substantial markers on her temporal journey towards the construction of self and home, represented by her statement “I am my own home.” Is Samira’s home, as Yassin puts it, “a matter of timing?” Certainly for Heidegger, and existentialism itself, being is constituted by temporality, and so Samira’s home is both a matter of timing and an always-already temporal making. If we refer to the epigraph preceding the short story “The Other (Wo)man” which cites French existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre’s “freedom is what you do with what’s been done to you,” being is also shaped by the conditions (including societal structures or institutions), or matters of existence. Both Négritude and later migritude, I have argued, are fundamentally ontological and yet always situated.

In “Capitalist Houses, Queer Homes,” which marked an important intervention into conceptualizations of home and alternative sexualities in postcolonial studies, Gairola notes that, “perhaps one of the most salient issues to engage current dialogues on postcolonial, diaspora, and transnational studies is the relationship of diasporic subjects to the diffuse notion of ‘home.’” Further, he argues convincingly that “in surveying the many ways that

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583 Ibid, 74.
584 Ibid, 137.
diasporic subjects have dealt with experiences of home (ranging from the ostensibly failed assimilations of racialized subjects in their new homes to the nostalgia and trauma of exile felt in relation to former homelands), it is clear that conceptualizations of home have too often, in their privileging of racial formations that underpin Western racism, elided questions of (homo)sexuality.”

Gairola’s article tracks the ways in which racism, capitalism, and heteronormativity combine in 1980s London and how queer characters in Hanif Kureishi’s 1985 film *My Beautiful Launderette* challenge these oppressive apparatuses and discourses while reconfiguring notions of home. Diriye Osman’s characters in *Fairytales* can be seen perhaps as heirs to Gairola’s 1980s queer protagonists as they negotiate London in the early twenty-first century while addressing the problem of home for black LGBTQ and Muslim diasporic subjects. Furthermore, Osman fashions a black international literary genealogy by both furthering on the one hand, and reshaping on the other, conversations about race, home, and freedom.

In *Black Power* Wright states that although “I am a rootless man... I can make myself at home almost anywhere on this earth.” Yet, he cannot, or chooses not to, make a home in the context of the United States’ racial apartheid. For Wendy W. Walters in *At Home in Diaspora: Black International Writing*, Wright’s rootlessness is “one born of the experiences of racial exclusion... Wright thus locates the very source of his global wandering in the psychological distance, the political exclusion, and the racial violence he experienced growing up in the United States.” Similarly, diasporic subjects are often met with apartheid-like conditions in Northern metropolitan centers. Brian Keith Axel argues

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586 Ibid.
that diaspora is always already predicated upon violence. His model of theorizing diaspora “is intended to foreground violence as a key means through which the features of a people are constituted. Second, it is intended to account for the creation of the diaspora, not through a definitive relation to place, but through formations of temporality, affect, and corporeality.” Both Richard Wright’s capacity to make a home almost anywhere and Diriyе Osman’s process of making himself a home, are constituted not just through diasporic movement but of the undergirding violence of diaspora.

There is a difference between Richard Wright’s “I can make myself at home almost anywhere” and Osman’s “I am ‘homed’ within my own body,” presumably anywhere. Wright seems to suggest that home is exterior and can be made outside of one’s self while Osman implies the opposite, that home is on the inside. Wright already seems to be more confident in himself than does Osman or his characters, hence the different turn of phrase. Inasmuch as they both share the experience of existing in a world conditioned by white supremacy, Osman connects sexuality and gender to the being of that experience.

Richard Wright’s experience of institutionalized racism in the United States and Osman’s experience of the Somali Civil War (the historical makings of which I cover in chapter three) and his experience of both racial and sexual violences in the diaspora (Kenya and London), shape their experience of home on the move. In linking Osman to Richard Wright I posit the need to think in terms of an African literary internationalism. What then, about a queer black internationalist antecedent for Osman? In the first of two epigraphs beginning Fairytales, Osman provides an answer: “When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important
whether I am afraid.” Osman’s citation of Audre Lorde here is suggestive of his own fashioning of a black diasporic LGBTQ genealogy in terms of both home and freedom.

Lorde’s 1985 *Apartheid U.S.A* is an example of her black internationalist writing wherein she compares black existence in America with black South Africans struggling under apartheid. She argues that, “the connection between Africans, and African Americans, African Europeans, African Asians, is real, however dimly seen at times, and we all need to examine without sentimentality or stereotype what the injection of Africanness into the socio-political consciousness of the world could mean.” Calling out American apartheid while protesting the situation in 1980s South Africa represents both Lorde’s global understanding of blackness and oppression, as well as her particular pan-African politics or ethics of “injecting” Africanness into the consciousness of the world.

Lorde’s *Zami: A New Spelling of my Name* is both a diasporic text and one that theorizes “home.” As a second-generation child of Caribbean immigrants, Lorde begins *Zami* by illustrating structures of immigration shaping her parents’ experience. “My mother and father came to this country in 1924 [from Grenada and Barbados respectively], when she was twenty-seven years old and he was twenty-six... She lied about her age in immigration because her sisters had told her that Americans wanted strong young women to work for them, and Linda was afraid she was too old to get work.” Furthermore, Lorde situates being and existence in terms of African diasporic communities, particularly women. She observes: “Grenadians and Barbadians walk like African peoples. Trinidadians do not. When I visited Grenada I saw the root of my mother’s powers walking through the streets. I thought, this is the country of my foremothers, my forebearing mothers, those

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590 *Fairytales*, front matter.
Black island women who defined themselves by what they did.” For Lorde, temporal agency—acts of doing—indeed constitute oneself. This Caribbean iteration of existentialism’s ‘existence is essence’ relates to conceptions of freedom and home as a kind of (collective) self-making from the perspective of black women.

When Lorde was a child her mother’s island of Carriacou was still not on American maps and “home was still a sweet place somewhere else which they had not managed to capture yet on paper, nor to throttle and bind between the pages of a schoolbook.” Black history, and by extension black home, would be throttled by Apartheid U.S.A.’s system of education. Lorde comes to realize though, as would Osman, that home is not necessarily a place. In the epilogue of Zami—the word “Zami” describes groups of women in Carriacou who worked and loved together—Lorde reflects that, “once home was a long way off, a place I had never been to but knew out of my mother’s mouth. I only discovered its latitudes when Carriacou was no longer my home.” Lorde’s “Biomythography” marks a kind of making a home of one’s self with others, particularly meaningful as a black lesbian writer under American racial and heteronormative apartheid. Twenty-first century migritude writers like Osman who conceive of home (particularly queer homes) can be viewed as both heirs to Lorde within what I have called an African literary internationalism and as furthering their own various projects.

Christina Ali Farah’s character Barni, for example, in Little Mother (2010) negotiates the notion of home in movement but from the intersecting positionalities of Somali-Italian immigrants. “We carry our home with us,” Barni reflects, “our home can

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593 Ibid.
594 Ibid, 14.
595 Ibid, 256. Lorde’s emphasis.
travel. It’s not fixed walls that make a home out of the place where we live.” Perhaps Barni here signals the few belongings refugees and economic migrants travel with or the people, family, kin, community with whom they move. Perhaps she also signals the intangible elements that mark the difference between a home and a house: traditions, cultures, languages, rituals, or memories. Renowned postcolonial poet Meena Alexander writes that “home for me is bound up with a migrant’s memory... The making up of home and indeed, locality, given the shifting, multiple worlds we inhabit, might best be considered part and parcel of an art of negativity, praise songs for what remains when the taken-for-grantedness of things falls away.” Alexander’s poetic reflections parallel Barni’s passage on home while signaling movement and temporal fashioning: that is, physical homes and lives can be made and remade in diaspora precisely because “our home can travel. It’s not fixed walls that make a home out of the place where we live,” but rather it is, in part, what remains when the “taken-for-grantedness of things falls away.”

Fatou Diome, writing at the same time as Farah, similarly reconfigures home temporally through writing. Her protagonist Salie in *The Belly of the Atlantic* is statedly “always in exile, with roots everywhere, I’m at home where Africa and Europe put aside their pride and are content to join together: in my writing, which is rich with the fusion they’ve bequeathed me.” “Writing” as her home is a temporal making, existing in-between Africa and Europe. Ayo Coly, who also writes on *The Belly of the Atlantic*, disputes the “celebratory obituary of postcolonial nationalism” and attendant dismissals of “home.” Coly’s important feminist intervention demonstrates that African migrant women construct “geographies of home [that are] in constant negotiation with nationalist discourses of

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home... that home remains an emotionally, politically, and ideologically loaded matter for postcolonial subjects."\(^{599}\) Coly argues that Diome produces both a nationalist narrative of home and a “bounded homelessness” in which Salie, neither African nor European but inbetween, is not yet home. Although geographical and national aspects of home figure into Osman’s narrative, home is neither a place nor a nation, and still less a homeland. Home is *fashioned* both literally, in terms of the sartorial-aesthetic choices of characters as well as Osman himself, and *practiced* or lived. In other words, it is the practice of making a home of oneself.

**The Matter of Freedom:**

In an interview with the BBC upon the publication of *Fairytales for Lost Children* Osman describes the “the crux of the book [as] about sexual identity, within the context of being gay, Muslim, African. It is fundamentally a book about freedom.”\(^{600}\) Interestingly, Osman conflates freedom with the struggles inherent in being gay, Muslim, and African within various twenty-first century diasporas. This gesture provides an alternative to, and challenges, abstract and Western conceptions of freedom, often mobilized at the very moment of the enslavement or colonization of Africans, Muslims, and gay subjects. For Orlando Patterson argues in *Freedom in the Making of Western Culture*, “the social construction of freedom was made possible by the relation of slavery. Slavery had to exist before people could even conceive of the idea of freedom as value, that is to say, find it meaningful and useful, an ideal to be striven for.”\(^{601}\) Susan Buck-Morss reminds us that “by the eighteenth century, slavery had become the root metaphor of Western political

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philosophy, connoting everything that is evil about power relations. Freedom, its conceptual antithesis, was considered by Enlightenment thinkers as the highest universal political value. Yet this political metaphor began to take root at precisely the time that the [European] economic practice of slavery was intensifying.⁶⁰² Further, “the paradox between the discourse of freedom and the practice of slavery marked the ascendancy of a succession of Western nations within the early modern global economy.”⁶⁰³ African literary internationalism addresses freedom, since Olaudah Equiano in 1789, as substantially situated within material and historical conditions: the problem of racial capitalism, slavery, colonialism, to globalization and neoliberal policy.

In 1935’s *Black Reconstruction in America 1860-1880* for example W. E. B. Du Bois locates conceptions of freedom within the movement to abolish slavery and, like Osman, describes it as a kind of fashioning or making. If slavery in the American South was "the reduction of a human being to real estate [and therefore] was a crime against humanity," what was demanded was "ordinary human freedom."⁶⁰⁴ For Du Bois “this philosophy of freedom was a logical continuation of the freedom philosophy of the eighteenth century which insisted that Freedom was not an End but an indispensable means to the beginning of human progress...”⁶⁰⁵ Freedom as a “means” perhaps converses with Osman’s freedom as a practice of making a home of one’s self within material global contexts. Du Bois’s humanism also placed freedom and emancipation in a larger global context that attends to the world-scale problem of slavery and colonialism. “Here is the real modern labor problem... Out of the exploitation of the dark proletariat comes the Surplus Value filched

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⁶⁰³ Ibid, 23.
⁶⁰⁵ Ibid.
from human beasts which, in cultured lands, the Machine and harnessed Power veil and conceal. The emancipation of man is the emancipation of labor and the emancipation of labor is the freeing of that basic majority of workers who are yellow, brown and black.”

Referencing the colonization of Asia, both South and East, as well as Africa and the Americas, Du Bois situates freedom within modern material world contexts. Almost two decades later, Aimé Cesaire’s poem “The Time of Freedom” would mark another example of black international writing situating itself within, and speaking to, material conditions of reality, while attendant to freedom as a means or practice within historical contexts, in this case, decolonization. As Gary Wilder notes, the poem “commemorated the Cote d'Ivoire protests, indicat[ing] that he understood the violent character of the [colonial] French state.”

Césaire writes:

> History I tell of Africa as it wakes up
> of men
> When under the heterogeneous memory of chicotes

Both the “history” the narrator tells of Africa as well as its awakening are constituted by temporality while the nuanced “memory” of whips recalls metonymically European slavery and colonialism. For Osman’s character Yassin, like Cesaire’s anticolonial poetics, freedom is a matter of timing.

Osman uses Sartre’s phrase “freedom is what you do with what’s been done to you,” as an epigraph for the penultimate story in the collection. Not surprisingly, Sartre’s formulation has a temporal quality as it suggests a kind of fashioning of being in time and in the context of material reality. Sartre’s phrase comes out of the existentialistist tradition,

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609 *Fairytales*, 119.
following Heidegger, and Sartre vocally supported Négritude and anti-colonial movements in the Third-World. He was an ardent critic of European colonialism and, I think suggestively, described Négritude as the “Being-in-the-World of the black man.” However, received moments of racialism seep into Sartre’s philosophy and politics. Robert Reid-Pharr incisively critiques Sartre’s misrepresentation of black Americans, for example, as a “mass” whose grandparents had “no hand in their own manumission,” a belief that Du Bois’s *Black Reconstruction* shows to be incorrect. Reid-Pharr compellingly argues that Sartre “simply reiterates the centuries-long tradition of writing black individuality out of narratives of Western modernity.” Frantz Fanon takes umbrage with Sartre’s totalizing and somewhat patronizing view of the third-world, as well as his relegating of Négritude and by extension blackness, to the “antithesis” of colonialism, only to be swept away in the syntheses of dialectical historical movement. Yet, for Reid-Pharr, “by rejecting the racialism that invades the existentialist project we might just gain access to the radical humanism” of Sartre, de Beauvoir, and others, that has yet to come. There is indeed a kind of existentialism or “radical humanism” in Diriye Osman’s migritude *Fairytales for Lost Children*, necessarily refracted through the lenses of diaspora, queerness, and being Muslim (which becomes doubly precarious as same-sex desire is forbidden within the religion, and secondly, Osman and other immigrants are continually targeted by the Islamophobia of the West). Osman’s text then gets to the being-in-the-world of queer and Muslim immigrants, not as a totalizing characterization, but one that engages every-day existence while foregrounding black individuals. It pushes migritude writing itself into the

612 Ibid.
613 Ibid, 98.
realm of alternative desires and the subsequent repression of being via heteronormative conditions as a reconfiguration of home and freedom in the context of the neocolonial and neoliberal world order.

Yassin’s story, for example, discloses the hidden privileges within heterosexual migrant narratives that can rely on normative notions of gender, the family, and the domestic sphere while at the same time substantially critiquing the racialization of immigrants. For Yassin, “In Somalia and Kenya, the countries he was born and raised in respectively, homosexuality was something to be hidden for fear of violence... After immigrating to London he had slowly allowed the mask to slip as he became more comfortable in his new surroundings. But despite the city’s myriad possibilities here he was, four years later, lonelier than ever.” The question becomes, what is the constitutive difference between East Africa’s conventional intolerance of same-sex love and London’s ostensible liberal “tolerance”? For Yassin as a non-white, non-elite, immigrant subject the question becomes complex and illustrates not least that London’s claim of tolerance or multiculturalism is questionable at best. Despite London’s cosmopolitan glamour, Yassin is “lonelier than ever.”

Yassin therefore takes to Gaydar and eventually meets Jude, an older (married) Jamaican-British man. They meet in a café in South London where Jude brings Yassin a plant. Eventually Yassin invites Jude back to his apartment. Yet tension arises when Jude wants Yassin to dress up in women’s underwear during foreplay. An offended Yassin exclaims, “So now you want me to dress up like a woman for you? ...You don’t want a man and you certainly don’t want a woman. You just want someone inbetween who you can foist

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614 Ibid, 127.
Eventually Yassin decides to try on the role Jude asks him to play, donning panties and silk during sex. Although he is curious and feels “free” in the stockings, Yassin is also “slightly repulsed by it all.” Yassin’s ambivalence here, in terms of the complexities of gender identity and sexuality, is symbolically constructed in the title of the short story, “The Other (Wo)Man,” where Osman parenthetically sections off the feminine prefix while still keeping the sum its parts. This is suggestive of the fact that, at this point, Yassin is still unsure of his own desires, and so he decides to don the identity Jude has fashioned for him outside in the world.

Before a night at a local gay bar Yassin buys an outfit from the women’s section at a nearby store and wear women’s make-up. “Yassin felt he was creating himself, bending the pages of the rulebook back until the spine split and the leaves came loose.” As he applies his make-up he muses, “With a few deft strokes of a brush he hoped to unshackle the person locked in his head who was no longer a slave to social convention.” The constricting rulebook that he attempts to bend back until the spine splits is of course the gender and heteronormative “script” embedded in various societal structures and discourses around the world. Yet the script for Yassin is not something that he wants to completely reject tout court, given that, he feels somewhat comfortable in his “male persona.”

Yet “for this night at least he was willing to erase his male persona and squeeze into the butterfly jeans and tight blouse to complete his transformation into a (wo)man.”

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615 Ibid, 136.
616 Ibid, 140.
617 Ibid, 144.
618 Ibid.
619 Ibid, 145.
He didn't just want to become a (wo)man, he wanted to become a Muslim (wo)man, or at least his playful idea of a Muslim (wo)man. It was ironic that for all his wanting to break free of social strictures he should choose to wear a garment that embodied the very essence of fitting into the mould. He felt that since he was a Muslim he would retain the most conspicuous marker for women of his faith but use it to his own subversive ends.  

Initially he feels reticent to wear a head scarf, which seemed for Yassin, to represent “tradition,” and yet in his wearing it, he finds, it represents something else, something subversive. In Western metropoles the head scarf is frowned upon by conservative anti-immigrant sentiment. It has even been banned in France as it had come to signify “improperly” assimilated populations and thus does not represent the ideal (meaning white) national citizen. In this context—one predicated upon migration—Yassin’s Muslim headscarf becomes subversive, doubly so on a gay black man in drag as he represents multiply intersecting improprieties. Like Claude McKay’s iconoclastic “bad nationalist,” Yassin is “unfaithful” to the strictures of normative racial, gender, sexual, and religious practice. With a quick reference to Paris is Burning no less, Osman has Yassin head out on the town for a night of dancing at a dyke bar. Unfortunately, yet perhaps unsurprisingly, the night does not end well. And, although it does not end in the normative national-individual self-fashioning of the bildungsroman but rather with the deferral of what Yassin calls “true liberation,” it does not end hopelessly.  

On the dancefloor Yassin is hit on by “one of the pimp-looking young men he had seen by the bar,” who after dancing somewhat intimately with Yassin, is angered upon realizing that Yassin is “a fucking bloke.” I don’t know what you’re chatting about,”

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620 Ibid.
621 Ibid, 151.
622 Ibid.
retorts Yassin, “’You’re a straight guy fishing for chicks in a dyke bar!’ ‘You arsehole,’ said the guy in his prepubescent voice before lifting his T-shirt to flash a firmly-bandaged chest that showed the faintest outline of flattened breasts. ‘I am a fucking dyke!’”\textsuperscript{623} 

Ashamed, Yassin storms out and tears off some of his more feminine garments in an alley, asking himself what he had hoped to gain from this most recent “experiment of the body.”\textsuperscript{624} “Such experiments,” he philosophizes, create “a desire for something more fulfilling. It was a hunger born of rootlessness but he couldn’t see that. He couldn’t see that true liberation was a strictly DIY process, frightening in both its intensity and limitless scope.”\textsuperscript{625} Yassin’s “rootlessness” is not solely due to his gender-sexual positionality, unmoored from traditional social strictures, but of his immigrant status as well. Alternative desires can therefore be viewed themselves as migrations since they require leaving normative avenues of sexuality. And just as outside forces impinged upon Yassin, so “his interior landscape was in transition.”\textsuperscript{626} Perhaps Yassin’s queer DIY version of Richard Wright’s “rootlessness” represents the possibility of “true liberation,” one that is fashioned and remade in context like Sartre’s “freedom is what you do with what’s been done to you.” It is the \textit{practice} of doing it yourself, a phrase with punk-rock and alternative connotations, both against and with repressive societal scripts and repressions, that represents “true liberation” or freedom. The short story itself enters and exits \textit{in media res} highlighting Yassin’s struggles to fashion a home of himself, armed not just with conceptions of freedom, but its practice.

As Yassin leaves the bar ashamed, not necessarily of his failed disguise but of his sense of homelessness, he meaningfully grapples with the fact of being excluded from

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{623} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{624} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{625} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{626} Ibid, 152.
\end{itemize}
various communities given his sexual orientation: “He didn’t belong to just one society: he was gay, Somali, Muslim, and yet all these cultural positions left him excluded. It was Somaliness, the pure beauty of being a part of a proud, distinctive, culture that glued all his other selves together.” Osman’s use of Somaliness as a “proud, distinctive culture” to glue himself back together is not a nationalism that celebrates ethnicity at the often brutal expense and construction of others, but is one that is DIY, punk-rock, and “radically” queer.

It is here, at the end of the story, that he inaugurates a phenomenology of time and being. “He was Somali first, Muslim second, gay third. But perhaps that hierarchy was a matter of timing: born Somali, raised Muslim, discovered gay. And now he was venturing out into the world without a sense of his place within it and this frightened him.” Home, and by extension freedom, is deferred. Perhaps for Osman, like Diome’s Salie, home is created through the act of writing itself which is always already a process of critical thinking, reading, and revising. And perhaps it is Osman’s incisive pairing of home and freedom within his queer migritude cache of fairytales that represents a new phenomenology as he delineates the world of objects that, both materially and discursively, repress or alienate him while others sustain or shape his self-fashioning. The final words of the short story read: “This night had been a dystopian fairytale but now the spell had been broken and he had awoken. He licked his wounds and started walking home.”

Facing an abyssal homelessness, Yassin tactically owns his “Somaliness,” as way to reassemble his other selves, shattered in and through the system of immigration and institutional and epistemic responses to desiring otherwise, back together. Again, this is not however, nationalist, given that he is exiled in part, from Somali national culture due to his sexuality.

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627 Ibid, 137.
628 Ibid.
629 Ibid, 152.
(as are the other characters in *Fairytales* whether in Kenya or London). The “Somaliness” he utilizes is rather a queer “DIY process,” a temporal and spatial making a home of himself as a practice—rather than an achievement—of freedom.

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**Subjects of Toleration: “Our hearts are not where our papers are”**

Nuruddin Farah’s most recent novel *Hiding in Plain Sight*, a title that refers to both closeted “homosexuality” in Africa but also invisible Somali refugees in Kenya, intervenes in queer global literature and new diasporas. Specifically, Valerie and Padmini, two bourgeois lesbian characters, one white and British, and the other South-Asian-Ugandan, represent a kind of “queer liberalism,” while another character Bella, who is straight but polyamorous, represents a kind of “tolerant” liberalism towards queerness. Farah portrays both variants of liberalism as ultimately problematic despite positive elements. Farah touches upon queer sexualities in Africa, racialization of Somali immigrants in the Kenyan diaspora, colonial histories, and the neocolonial present. *Hiding in Plain Sight* does not, however, represent a queer migritude narrative like Osman’s *Fairytales*, which celebrates migrant queerness as a practice of freedom and home, but rather paints an incisive picture of the casual racism of queer elite subjects (Valerie and Padmini), and the problematic “tolerance” mobilized within liberal attitudes towards queerness (Bella). Finally, like Osman’s narrative, it indeed engages questions of freedom and home in diasporas. Therefore, I detour here briefly to analyze this newest of works from the godfather of the Somali novel.

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The novel begins with a Somali man named Aar who has two children, Salif and Dahaba, with a white British woman Valerie. Aar and the children live in Kenya, while his twin sister Bella lives in Italy. Aar is killed in Somalia by Al Shabab terrorists who deem his work with the United Nations in Somalia undesirable. Bella must return to Kenya to care for her niece and nephew while dealing with Aar’s erstwhile ex-wife Valerie (white and British), who is now in a relationship with Padmini, a South-Asian-Ugandan woman who Valerie meets in Britain. As Bella and Valerie vie for guardianship of the children, Farah illustrates the experience of Somali refugees in Kenya, both poor and middle-class.

Salif, Aar and Valerie’s teenage son, reflects upon his condition as a diasporic subject in another nation. “Our father obtained Kenyan citizenship through bribery after living here for decades as an undocumented refugee... [Somalis] were declared stateless when they first arrived, along with all the other Somalis fleeing the civil war [1991]. Eventually, they got Kenyan papers, but I do not think of myself as a Kenyan since I am not welcomed as such.” Like Osman’s picture of the Somali diaspora in London and Kenya, Salif paints a picture of immigrant life in a society that “tolerates,” yet does not welcome its guests, and where toleration can include various repressions and discriminations. Salif’s responds, as if speaking to Kenya, with the defiant “our hearts are not where our papers are.” This could perhaps become a migritude rallying cry. Bella also documents the being of Somali diasporic subjects in Kenya. She muses, “Kenyan Somalis, who account for nearly six percent of this country’s population, have remained third-class citizens here, disenfranchized and marginalized. If they behave badly, that is undoubtedly in part a result of their poor treatment by other Kenyans.” It seems as if, the world over,

632 Ibid, 244.
633 Ibid, 245.
634 Ibid, 173.
anti-immigrant rhetoric elides the repressive conditions of reality producing this “bad behavior,” and where racists exhume tired stereotypes as if to confirm their own dusty colonial ideas.

Similarly, migritude writer Fatou Diome defamiliarizes the concept of “toleration” as naturally positive. The following passage is set on the eve of Senegal’s soccer team’s victory over France in the 2002 World Cup. For the majority of African migrants in France, Senegal’s triumph would be bittersweet. “Even those who were afraid to go home [to Africa] with their suitcases stuffed with failure, humiliation and disappointment came out of their cramped tower blocks to shout about their pride regained in France. They managed to forget that no one ever spoke of gratitude towards them or even simply citizenship, but only of tolerance and integration into the mould of a sieve-society in which they are the lumps.” Here, being subject to toleration is both alienating and fundamentally bereft of both gratitude and citizenship as Senegalese migrants are forced, through the sieve of assimilation, to abandon all things Senegalese without receiving rights in return. As they celebrate the revelers are overtaken by their “condition of immigrants and its corollary, contempt. The Arc de Triomphe isn’t for negroes!” Toleration and its twin, intolerance, are, I will argue, mutually constitutive for a variety of reasons, not least due to the ways in which formerly colonial powers grasp the formerly colonized.

Indeed an underlying yet fundamental condition of reality that shapes immigrant existence is marked by various colonial pasts that haunt the present whether in Britain, France, Italy, Kenya, or Somalia. For example, in *Hiding in Plain Sight* Bella notes that “...Nairobi has never enjoyed much stability; right from the get-go, a concentration of

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635 Ibid.
636 Ibid, my italics.
British colonists occupied the best land and the Africans were pushed into the slums to live in shanties knocked together out of sheets of zinc, earning no standing in the colonial scheme as the city became a hub for business and, eventually, international organizations. The instabilities, which are of a piece with the African neocolonial city, have continued till this day, making Nairobi one of the most violent cities on the continent.637 In addition to connecting the future of colonial pasts to neocolonial presents, Farah pays homage to strains in urban African fiction that do a similar work, from Mongo Beti’s 1954 *Cruel City* to Chris Abani’s 2005 *Graceland* and Lauren Beukes’ 2011 *Zoo City*. I have outlined the devastating effects of neoliberal economic policy on places like Somalia and Kenya marshalled in by the global North—IMF, World Bank, etc, that have direct links to colonial policy. Both Diriye Osman’s work and Nuruddin Farah’s novel speak to these issues yet through the prism of immigration and alternative sexualities.

How then are liberalism, neoliberal globalization, and the management of sexuality connected? Citing Jodi Melamed, David Eng outlines this question. “Today, under the shadows of a U.S.-led globalization—capitalist development as freedom—the politics of colorblindness employs the depoliticized language of what Jodi Melamed describes as ‘neoliberal multiculturalism’... In the final analysis, neoliberal multiculturalism portrays racism as nonracialism and neoliberalism as the key to a multicultural, postracial world order of freedom, opportunity, and choice,” while naturalizing systems of global capital accumulation that “grossly favor the global North over the global South.”638 Neoliberal “freedom,” or capitalist development, means the freeing of formerly colonized peoples in the global South (or the North) up for direct or indirect exploitation (structural adjustment

637 Ibid, 66.
programs or free-trade zones, for example), all while lauding abstract values such as the free market, privatization, even individualism (none of which represent much value for those unlucky enough to be on the wrong side of capital). Similarly, Lauren Gantz describes Eng’s queer liberalism as “a form of neoliberalism that allows for the enfranchisement of certain homosexual citizen-subjects. This enfranchisement manifests itself within the realm of the domestic, via increasing rights to sexual privacy, adoption, and same-sex marriage. While such developments have been greeted as progressive, Eng urges his readers to be circumspect about queer liberalism’s hidden costs.”

For Eng, the hidden costs are uncovered by assessing processes of the reeducation of queer subjects in and through enfolding them within the heteropatriarchal institution of marriage, capitalist consumerism, and its attendant racisms.

I read Farah’s *Hiding in Plain Sight* as illustrating the racialization of Bella as an apparatus of queer liberalism. Valerie and Padmini, for example, though queer subjects, adopt a kind of casual racism as members of an upper-middle class that happens to look down upon (and refuses to understand) Africa. In a conversation about sex with Bella, a Somali woman, “Padmini asks, ‘Do you enjoy sex?’ ‘What a stupid question to ask,’ says Bella. ‘Haven’t they chopped yours off?’ Valerie adds, ‘That genital thing, she means.’”

After Bella answers no, Valerie states, “I thought you were... I imagined every Somali woman underwent infibulation.” At the same dinner a Kenyan waiter is surprised Bella, as a Somali woman, even goes out to restaurants, a practice that does not conform to his notion of what a Somali woman is or does. A resigned Bella is not surprised about both European and Kenyan “generalizations about Somalis... After all, Valerie, who was

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640 Farah, 132.

641 Ibid, 134.
married to a Somali man and gave birth to children who are part Somali, has just
demonstrated that she knows next to nothing about Somalis." After Valerie commends
her son Salif for learning to speak Somali (Valerie has been absent for many years having
“abandoned” Aar and the children for Padmini), Dhaba remarks, “Our best friends are
Somali’... Valerie responds ‘I hope your Somali friends here do not teach you to use guns
and stuff!’ Bella recoils at the stereotype, but Dahaba says only, ‘Actually, they’re very
nice’.

The narrator of Hiding in Plain Sight problematizes Valerie’s stereotyping as we
are made to “recoil” along with Bella. Further, these conversations represent a kind of
retained cultural chauvinism constituting liberal colonial racism, yet in the neoliberal era.
The Hollywood blockbuster Black Hawk Down and the more recent Tom Hanks film
Captain Phillips do a similar colonial-neoliberal work, for example, with reference to
Somalia, by wielding the specious whites-as-saviors and Somalis-as-barbarians narrative.
Historically speaking, from devastating colonial to neocolonial policies, whites have been
the driving force behind the destabilization of Somalia. To recite Shailja Patel, “Enter the
barbarian. Imperialism.”

Conversely however, Bella, who is also middle-class, demonstrates a kind of
problematic liberal “toleration” towards queerness (particularly toward Valerie and
Padmini). It is ambiguous as to whether or not the reader should identify with, or “recoil”
from, Bella’s (in)tolerance as the following passage in particular is ensconced within
seemingly progressive statements. Bella “knows that Aar, unlike most Somalis raised in the
urban centers in the south of the country, had no issue with male homosexuality and
couldn’t be bothered about lesbianism. As for herself, while the platitude is true—many of

642 Ibid, 135.
643 Ibid, 151.
644 Shailja Patel, Migritude, 5.
her best friends are gay, and some are in openly gay marriages—she acknowledges that maybe she is not quite as advanced in her attitudes as she likes to think. But with her three lovers, she knows that she lives in a house of glass and cannot afford to throw stones at anyone in a similar position.\textsuperscript{645} Bella only accepts gay and lesbian desire and practice then because of her own polyamorous “derivation” from normative proscriptions of domestic decorum, not as an ally, and further still, she admits that maybe she isn’t “quite as advanced in her attitudes as she likes to think.”

And herein lies the point: whenever tolerance is evoked, particularly within various strands of liberal discourse, its relationship to intolerance is uncomfortably closer to it than proponents admit. Tolerating something is not to love it or even like it, but to, at best, put up with it: further, putting-up-with and the acts of shunning, casual repression, and hate, are not mutually exclusive. The next sentence in the novel, interestingly, finds Bella lauding both the liberal notion of freedom, and a more socialist or populist one. “ Freedoms are a package deal, she thinks, useless unless you value them all. Freedom of expression, freedom of religion, freedom of association with whom you please—all of these are as important as the right to education, to food, to clean water...”\textsuperscript{646} The first three, liberal notions, are followed by the last three, a more progressive or socialist triptych. These notions of freedom are put into conversation with, by either Bella, Nuruddin Farah, the narrator, or all three, alternative sexualities in Africa generally speaking. “In Africa, gay men and women are seldom open about their sexual preferences. In many countries homosexuality is a crime, and even where it is not, people talk as if it were alien to the culture, even though, of course, there are gay people in every society everywhere.”\textsuperscript{647}

\textsuperscript{645} Ibid, 156.
\textsuperscript{646} Ibid, 156/7.
\textsuperscript{647} Ibid, 157.
Although the tone is a bit didactic, it is a relatively rare occasion in African literature (there are more and more exceptions) to find gay or lesbian protagonists, and so it is nonetheless an important intervention that Farah makes in broaching these topics.

To further unpack these characters and statements in Farah’s *Hiding in Plain Sight* and to connect them to Osman’s *Fairytales for Lost Children*, I cite David Eng and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. In *The Feeling of Kinship: Queer Liberalism and the Racialization of Intimacy* David Eng states:

> To take a critical page from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s monumental book on the persistence of homophobia in the age of sexual toleration, contrary to popular opinion, ‘advice on how to help your kids turn out gay, not to mention your students, your parishners, your therapy clients, or your military subordinates, is less ubiquitous than you might think. On the other hand, the scope of institutions whose programmatic undertaking is to prevent the development of gay people is unimaginably large.’ In a similar vein, while the law no longer criminalizes interracial marriage, advice on how to promote interracial union is less ubiquitous than our colorblind pundits would have it.

This insightful critique uncovers the intolerant material institutions (homophobia and racialization) that subtend liberal notions of “sexual toleration” and “multiculturalism.” Undoubtedly Valerie would have benefited from the latter form of advice (on antiracist interracial union), as she, a white British woman, is ignorant of her own husband’s (and children’s) Somali culture and subscribes to racial stereotypes, while Bella, on the other hand, might have benefited from the former (on how to *create* alternative desires rather than suffocate them), as she is statedly “not quite as advanced in her attitudes as she likes to think,” despite her protestations of “tolerance,” and the platitude of “I have gay friends.” I am inclined, then, in comparison with Bella, Valerie, and Padmini, to call Diriye Osman’s

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648 Eng, 7.
queer migritude narratives radically democratic; or, to reiterate Robert Reid-Pharr’s important term, they embody a radical humanism. In the last short story of *Fairytales* “My Roots are Your Roots,” for example, the ownership of lives and bodies is announced through prosaic yet poetic transnational black gay love.

I am Jamaican and Korfa is Somali. Neither of our families knows that we’re two men who love each other... I forget that by loving Korfa my life is in danger. In those sticky summer nights in South London our windows stay open and our tiny apartment becomes our secret garden... no limits no borderlines. The secret garden leads to the marigolds of Mogadishu and the magnolias of Kingston and the heat turns us sticky and sweet and unwilling to be claimed by defeat[;] we own the night. We own our bodies. We own our lives.649

The final two lines of *Fairytales for Lost Children*, “We own our bodies. We own our lives,” are really quite radical given that the preceding stories are populated by gay and lesbian African Muslim individuals who have immigrated to London or Kenya from Somalia, and who are not elite, nor are they jet-setting Afropolitans, or even still “liberals” in the above senses—queer or otherwise. They are workers, students, refugees, dancers, writers, artists, and lovers; they are those for whom merely being tolerated is simply not enough.

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In this chapter I argue that national and international systems of immigration and various national policies, discourses, and treatment of immigrants is not only racial, gendered, and classed in nature but heteronormatively constituted as well. In other words, I attend to the matter of whether or not heterosexual immigrants have different experiences from those diasporic subjects who desire alternatively and practice same-sex love. Global black LGBTQ authors and artists like Diriye Osman, Thomas Glave, Audre Lorde, as well as those with queer diasporic affinities like Maryse Condé, indeed picture a

649 *Fairytales*, 156.
different kind of immigrant experience in addition to differential repressions in movement
and in migrant communities elsewhere. I have detailed the ways in which Diriye Osman
not only illustrates queer migrant experiences, but in doing so, rearticulates conceptions
and practices of home and freedom that can reshape western notions from within by
drawing upon black radical and international writers from previous generations. I’ve also
shown how contemporary African literature, including Osman’s texts and Nuruddin
Farah’s recent novel, speak to and challenge queer liberalism and liberal notions of
toleration. To put it another way Osman’s *Fairytales* does indeed *matter* “the lives that
have not mattered,” as Judith Butler speaking on the #Blacklivesmatter movement puts it,
and names those who, she continues, struggle “to matter in the way they deserve.”650

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Conclusion:

African Literary Internationalism
and the Phenomenology of Mattering Lives

The #blacklivesmatter movement revealed a shocking yet downplayed reality in the United States wherein some lives matter more than others. Black incarceration, a racializing police force, and structural racism all indicate a kind of apartheid state that historically has, and continues to, impinge upon black lives in America. #Blacklivesmatter also illuminated the differential ways in which black lives are policed, encoded, and grasped by various technologies of power (such as the police practice of “stop and frisk” in New York City which primarily targets black and Latino males or various black and immigrant voter disenfranchisements). But mattering black lives is also a polemical intervention, highlighting the importance of mattering lives as such. Judith Butler recently remarked that, “It is true that all lives matter, but it is equally true that not all lives are understood to matter which is precisely why it is most important to name

the lives that have not mattered, and are struggling to matter in the way they deserve. It is therefore perhaps incumbent upon contemporary humanistic inquiry and social justice to indeed name the lives that have not mattered, to seriously theorize the question of mattering the lives that do not count as lives.

Immigrant lives are rendered both invisible and fleeting, or temporary. Often, migrants’ or refugees’ ‘real lives’ are often considered ‘elsewhere.’ Black Migrant Literature, New African Diasporas, and the Phenomenology of Movement joins the philosophical project and movement of naming the lives that have not mattered and learning from those who are struggling to matter in the way they deserve. I examine the engagement with structures of immigration and new diasporas in late-twentieth and early twenty-first century international African literature, particularly works that narrate the conditions of immigration for those economic migrants, student workers, or refugees whose lives matter only as much as the value of their labor power within, for example, “fortress Europe” and the United States, or to transnational corporations under neoliberal global capitalism.

Senegalese-French novelist Fatou Diome argues that the corollary of the “condition of immigrants” is “contempt,” and that citizenship for black lives in Paris is only incidental—“you’re black first” she tells her brother Madické. I argue that contemporary African migrant writers like Fatou Diome indeed matter lives through what I call the phenomenology of movement: the substantial engagement with the conditions of migration and its conditioning techniques of power that often racialize, gender, and class migrant subjects; the parsing of the world of objects constellating immigration such as passports,

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checkpoints, and borders, and the national and international system within which they exist; and, conversely, the narrative re-mattering of migrant lives within and through what I describe as an African literary internationalism. Lives have always mattered. Yet some lives have been categorized and targeted as immaterial, insubstantial, and sometimes even inhuman.

For Dermot Moran, phenomenology itself is best understood as a “radical, anti-traditional style of philosophizing, which emphasizes the attempt to get to the truth of matters, to describe *phenomena*, in the broadest sense as whatever appears in the manner in which it appears, that is as it manifests itself to consciousness, to the experiencer.”

He notes that Heidegger, another proponent of phenomenology (if not a controversial one), also uses the term matter to describe phenomenology. For Heidegger, phenomenology makes “it possible for thinking to attain the ‘things themselves,’ or to put it more clearly, to attain the matter of thinking.”

African literary internationalism can both be described as a phenomenology of movement and as necessarily politicizing this “radical” style of philosophizing in ways that its forbearers cannot. The term “attitude,” which in one sense describes an orientation directed towards the world, a mode of being, already shapes the term “migritude,” for example. But the term migritude is materially and historically situated within the structures that shape and police black movement—immigration.

Immigration out of Sub-Saharan Africa has increased massively in the past quarter century even as Europe and the United States have responded with increasingly harsh methods of controlling movement. Migritude writers therefore critically focus on migration within the context of globalization, often emphasizing that the “past” of immigration is

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655 Ibid, 195.
irreducibly entangled with colonial processes. They thus speak to the paradox of mattering movement, both in terms of a phenomenology of the objects that constellate migration, and as the material and phenomenological project of mattering migrant lives that have been constitutively de-mattered. Salie, for example, in Fatou Diome’s *The Belly of the Atlantic* spends her nights creating the narratives that re-humanize her and other migrants’ experiences, she solders “the rails that lead to identity. Writing is the hot wax I pour between the furrows dug by those who erect partitions…” Salie negotiates the specific experiences within immigration, referencing partitions, which signal borders, checkpoints, passport control—she writes in protest of anti-immigrant milieus in her twenty-first century context just as she and others’ are shaped by them. If Balibar called for a counter-phenomenology of mobility under globalization, I argue that migritude, and more broadly African literary internationalism, give us just that.

Black Migrant Literature, New African Diasporas, and the Phenomenology of Movement argues that although there have been incisive colonial and postcolonial African migrant narratives since the nineteenth century, often embodying important political, literary, and ethical standpoints, there is a distinct body of twenty-first century African literary work that substantially and critically engages, parses, and challenges the conditions and structures of immigration as a system. I borrow the term “migritude” to describe this body of work. Migritude represents a new way to assess neoliberal capitalism from the perspective of movement and the ways in which globalization is predicated upon the unrestricted and often exploitative movement of capital at the same time as it relies

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656 *The Belly of the Atlantic*, 182.
upon the national and international control and management of the free movement of (non-white) peoples. This racialization, as migritude asks us to think it, has colonial pasts. Further, as a challenge to these technologies of power, migritude literature borrows political and literary elements from earlier generations of black radical writers, necessitating the thinking-together of disparate and discontinuous historical and literary moments such as the high colonial period and the era of globalization in the twenty-first, or of Négritude to twenty-first century African literary internationalism, respectively.

Although *Black Migrant Literature, New African Diasporas, and the Phenomenology of Movement* primarily analyzes and historicizes migritude literature, it can also be read as a text about African literary internationalism given that I have mapped out not only the various terrains of migritude literature but also the heterogeneous and complex constellations of black radical and international texts it circles as literary-historical referents. Virtually every text in this manuscript I refer to, pause on, or substantially analyze, is both international and broadly African. African literary internationalism provides another, perhaps more general, way of describing the texts in this manuscript—from Claude McKay’s migrant pan-Africanism in his 1929 classic *Banjo* to African migrant literature in twenty-first century Italy; from Négritude defined as a literary movement for which immigration is central, to France’s black diasporic writers in our third millennium. Contemporary migritude literature embodies new African literary internationalism as a counterpoint to the colonial, racialized, and neoliberal-capitalist “global” in what we think of as “globalization.” Literary responses to new economic and cultural configurations also and necessarily complicate received modes of literary categorization that, despite decades of important interventions, still favor narrow national distinctions.
For example, today there exists a new and exciting cohort of twenty-first century United States-based African authors such as Chris Abani, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, NoViolet Bulawayo, Maaza Mengiste, Dinaw Mengestu, Taiye Selasi, Binyavanga Wainaina, and others, who reshape the boundaries of African (American) literature. These authors narrate new diasporas from Africa, negotiate U.S.-led globalization, and often challenge American perceptions of Africa. They also name the lives that have not mattered, and are struggling to matter in the way they deserve. This cohort of transnational African writers converse with and create new literary-international genres such as migritude, Afropolitanism, and new pan-Africanism, each complicating received notions of literary categorization—creating “new names.” Some of the more radical writers that I’ve discussed in this manuscript like Fatou Diome in *The Belly of the Atlantic*, highlight the devastating effects of neoliberal policies mobilized against Africa in the 1980s and 1990s, structural adjustment programs to name one, that continue to haunt the present.

NoViolet Bulawayo’s 2013 *We Need New Names*, for example, reconfigures both the boundaries of narrowly national understandings of the “American” novel and totalizing perceptions of “African” writing by foregrounding twenty-first century African immigration to the United States and the problem of neoliberal globalization, particularly “the second scramble for Africa” and the failure of NGOs in Zimbabwe. Chimamanda Adichie’s *Americanah* embodies at the same moment a *bourgeois* Afropolitanism and a withering critique of particularly American racism. These twenty-first century texts, the migritude texts I’ve covered in this manuscript, and many others, all represent a new African literary internationalism that is only just beginning to be studied. These texts are all the more necessary as anti-immigrant rhetoric in Northern metropoles such as France, Italy, the United States, and Britain is on the rise again, police violence against black people everywhere continues unabated but not unchallenged, and continued islamophobia in the
West creates a repressive and regressive global atmosphere. As hundreds of migrants drown in-between Libya and Italy (seemingly there is a new report every month), migrant literary internationalism and the move to *re-humanize* or *re-matter* already dehumanized migrants who are disallowed a country or a home, becomes all the more important in thinking post-national futures in addition to the necessary critique of “fortress Europe” or the United State’s segregationist practices, for example.

Gary Wilder notes in *Freedom Time* that Aimé “Césaire likened their youthful attempts to revalorize black African traditions to making ‘a claim on inheritance without designated heirs.’” It seems to me that Césaire’s phrase is profoundly post-national and cosmopolitan in a radically democratic sense. Nationalism is precisely predicated upon designating heirs (and excluding others), as is racial capitalism, and colonialism. Just as Négritude makes a claim both on black African traditions and Western ones, exploding the notion that there are correct and incorrect heirs to, say, European enlightenment, so new African internationalist writers make a claim upon the “West” as well as Africa; they re-fashion anti-colonial anti-racism as a way to address profoundly anti-cosmopolitan twenty-first century racism against immigrants within Northern nation-states and the exploitation of a sizable portion of the populations of the global South by a racialized neoliberal globalization. Furthermore, if we are to take Césaire’s remark seriously in terms of the practice of *not* designating heirs, Négritude, as a literary and political movement, would open up the possibility for post-national, cross-racial, even transsexual futures; it would entail the radical re-thinking of movement and hospitality, home and freedom, and

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mattering immaterialized lives *without* delimiting the future or setting the boundaries of who or what gets to “make a claim on inheritance.”
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