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"Logiques métisses": *Cultural Appropriation and Postcolonial Representations*

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> If this weird, upside-down caricature of a country called America, if this land of refugees and former indentured servants, religious heretics and half-breeds, whoresons and fugitives—this cauldron of mongrels from all points on the compass—was all I could rightly call *home*, then aye: I was of it. (Johnson 179)

> Cependant, il n'y a pas de choix: il faut apprendre et avec ce dont on dispose: un savoir colonisé et un langage truqué. (Herrmann 9)

Francophone women writers in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Indian Ocean, as well as within France, where they or their families immigrate for various personal or economic reasons, have given us unique insights into what Renato Rosaldo has called the "border zones" of culture.[1] In those areas on the periphery of stable metropolitan cultural discourses, Rosaldo explains, there is an incessant and playful heteroglossia, a bilingual speech or hybrid language that is a site of creative resistance to the dominant conceptual paradigms. In border zones, all of our

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academic preconceptions about cultural, linguistic, or stylistic norms are constantly being put to the test by creative practices that make visible and set off the processes of adaptation, appropriation, and contestation that govern the construction of identity in colonial and postcolonial contexts.

These processes are the ground upon which contemporary global culture can begin to be understood, defined, and represented, as postcolonial writers encode the everyday realities and subjective perceptions of a numerical majority whose cultural contributions are still considered to be the products of minority voices. By reproducing the changing cultural practices of this majority as it negotiates the conflicts between tradition and modernity, writers create a space for themselves within the dominant discourses while simultaneously articulating a problematic that is increasingly becoming accepted as a quasi-universal process. The global mongrelization or *métissage* of cultural forms creates hybrid identities, and interrelated, if not overlapping, spaces. In those spaces, struggles for the control of means of representation and self-identification are mediated by a single and immensely powerful symbolic system: the colonial language, and the variations to which it is subjected by writers who enrich, transform, and creolize it.

Writers such as Maryse Condé, from Guadeloupe, Assia Djebar, from Algeria, and Leïla Sebbar, a Franco-Algerian, are part of an increasing number of astute interpreters of the postcolonial condition whose works, published in the 1970s and 1980s, have been redefining Francophone history and literature. They create new paradigms that represent, through innovative and self-reflexive literary techniques, both linguistic and geographic exile, displacements from the margins to a metropolitan center, and intercultural exchanges.

In order to understand the cultural and literary praxis of those writers, I want to make a brief incursion into the field of cultural anthropology, which has established some of the parameters within which we commonly understand negatively coded terms such as "acculturation" and "assimilation." My purpose in this paper is to develop, first of all, a theoretical argument about postcolonial culture. This argument is an eminently political one, and on one level it does address the current academic polemics about various forms of cultural fundamentalism. But my approach tends to be indirect. A term like "multiculturalism" takes on different valences in different linguistic and geopolitical contexts, that is, in countries where the relative power of hegemonic and subaltern groups shifts according to factors altogether different from the ones that obtain in the United States. That is why, in the second part of the paper, I draw my examples from the works of contemporary postcolonial Francophone women whose perspectives on multiculturalism differ from the ones we are most familiar with in this country. These writers' concerns and perspectives are an important contribution to these debates, because they echo and often predate those of cultural anthropologists whose theoretical approaches are nonetheless very useful for analyzing the processes at work in the women's novels.[2] My interest in using these novels to understand cultural configurations studied by social scientists is grounded in my belief that literature allows us to enter into the subjective processes of writers and their characters, and thus allows us better to

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understand the unique perspectives of subjects who are agents of transformation and hybridization in their own narratives, as opposed to being the objects of knowledge as in the discourse of social science.

Let me start with some simple, common sense definitions: "acculturation," *Webster's Dictionary* tells us, is "the transfer of culture from one ethnic group to another," whereas "assimilation" is "the act of bringing or coming to a resemblance; the merging of diverse cultural elements." Or, as the *Oxford English Dictionary* would have it, to assimilate is "to make like, to cause to resemble, to incorporate . . . To become conformed to." Already, we can see some liminal uncertainty in the semantic fields of these terms: is the "transfer . . . from one ethnic group to another" only a one-way process that causes one culture to erase another? Or could we infer that the transformation of both—or all—of the cultures in contact is extremely likely, if not inevitable, through this process of "acculturation" of one (or several) culture(s) to the other(s)? Is "the merging of diverse cultural elements" to be understood as the inevitable erasure of one element by another? Might it not also suggest that a more intricate and complex phenomenon is in fact taking place, as in those "border zones" where a complex syncretic cultural system comes to replace two or more ostensibly simpler cultures? In such a case, acculturation would not simply be the means of making one element conform to another, assimilate to it, in order to become like that other, but would more truly be a process whereby all elements involved in the interaction would be changed by that encounter. Dominant systems are more likely to absorb and make like them numerically or culturally "weaker" elements. But even then, these "inferior" or subaltern elements contribute to the evolution and transformation of the hegemonic system by producing resistances and counter-discourses.[3]

It has of course been ideologically and politically convenient for the dominant cultures to entertain the fiction of "assimilation" as a means of incorporating—"civilizing"—those cultures viewed as too different and "inferior" to be comfortably accepted and integrated into their norms.[4] But in the long run, the more powerful system does incorporate elements of the weaker one, often to the point where certain of its patterns and practices become indistinguishable from those of the imported or inferior culture. Kwame Anthony Appiah has recently said, "there is, of course, no American culture without African roots" (354). But while it is commonly accepted that African Americans are "more or less" assimilated and acculturated to "white" American culture, we rarely hear the reciprocal formulation discussed in academic or popular circles.[5] As Toni Morrison forcefully puts it:

> Afro-American culture exists and though it is clear (and becoming clearer) how it has responded to Western culture, the instances where and means by which it has shaped Western culture are poorly recognized or understood. (3)

Similarly, South African anthropologists study the Westernization of blacks in Southern Africa, but not the Africanization of whites who adopt the culinary or

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musical tastes of blacks. Singer Johnny Clegg, the "White Zulu," and the white Southern African youths who have assimilated (into) black culture have not yet, to my knowledge, become the object of the anthropologist's scrutiny.[6] Here in the United States, a white rap singer named Vanilla Ice has been called "the Elvis of rap," whereas the black rap singer named L. D. Shore rose to fame as "the Black Elvis." But, as Patricia J. Williams recently pointed out, this is "divinely parodic: Elvis, the white black man of a generation ago, reborn in a black man imitating Elvis" (and one might add, reborn in Vanilla Ice, a white man imitating the black rapper imitating Elvis: a dizzying thought [see Bernard]). In all of these cases the point of reference remains "white culture," even if it is an already "mongrelized" white culture, to use Charles Johnson's formulation used as epigraph to this essay.

My quarrel, then, with terms such as "assimilation" and "acculturation" when used in the (post)colonial context, is a quarrel with history: the terms have acquired a negative connotation because they underscore the relation of subjugation that exists between the colonized culture and the hegemonic system. Rosaldo points out that "metropolitan typifications suppress, exclude, even repress border zones," that

> the model for cross-cultural understanding that produces immigration as a site of cultural stripping away is the academic version of the melting pot: theories of acculturation and assimilation. In this view, immigrants, or at any rate their children and grandchildren, are absorbed into the national culture. Above all, the process involves the loss of one's past—autobiography, history, heritage, language, and all the rest of the so-called cultural baggage. . . . The theory of assimilation appears to have the inevitability of a law of history. If it doesn't catch up with you this generation, it will in the next. ("Ideology" 87, 82)

In this view, the "assimilated" are seen as existing passively, not as creative agents capable of transforming the practices that they come to adopt. The message proclaimed by contemporary art and literature from Africa and the Caribbean, however, is quite different: it is not assimilation that appears inevitable when Western technology and education are adopted by the colonized, or when immigration to the metropole severs some of the migrants' ties to a particular birthplace. Rather, the move forces individuals to stand in relation to the past and the present at the same time, to look for creative means of incorporating useful "Western" tools, techniques or strategies into their own cosmology or *weltanschauung*.[7]

What is needed, then, is a new vocabulary for describing patterns of influence that are never unidirectional. Since the influence is usually mutual and reciprocal, however much that fact might have been occluded from the political consciousness and modes of self-representation of metropolitan cultures, a more appropriate term for describing this contact of cultures would be "transculturation." The Cuban poet Nancy Morejón has used this neologism (*transculturación*) to describe a process of cultural intercourse and exchange, a circulation of practices

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that creates a constant interweaving of symbolic forms and empirical activities among the different cultures that interact with one another. As she puts it, "*reciprocal* influence is the determining factor here, for no single element superimposes itself on another; on the contrary, each one changes into the other so that both can be transformed into a third" (23).[8] Rejecting the binarism of self and other, nationalism and internationalism, Africa and Europe, women writers like Morejón point to a third way, to the *métissage* of forms and identities that is the result of cross-cultural encounters, and that forms the basis for their self-portrayals and their representations of cultural diversity.

Cross- or transcultural exchange has always been "an absolute fact" of life everywhere, even if, as Edouard Glissant has pointed out, "the human imagination, in Western tradition, has always wished to deny or disguise" it (*Caribbean* 251; see also Lionnet, *Autobiographical* 9). The realization that "the melting pot" is no theory of social reality, but a necessary myth, or perhaps an enabling metaphor in the construction of an American national identity, is opening the way for a more cautious understanding of the dialectical and complex phenomena of ethnic interactions that have existed in this country since the beginning of colonial times. Similarly, French theories of cultural assimilation that aimed at turning colonized peoples—or, at any rate, the educated elites of the colonies—into acculturated *évolués* who could speak perfect French corresponds only to one aspect of a complex colonial picture: although the colonial linguistic enterprise is alive and well in the "départements d'outre-mer," it now coexists with a strong movement in favor of *créolité*, a movement that does not aim at the outright rejection of French, but at valorizing the multilingual and multiethnic character of creole cultures.[9]

That is why the concept of transculturation proves so useful: the prefix "trans-" suggests the act of traversing, of going through existing cultural territories. Its specifically spatial connotations demarcate a pattern of movement, across cultural arenas and physical topographies, that corresponds more accurately to the notion of "appropriation," a concept more promising than those of acculturation and assimilation, and one that implies active intervention, rather than passive victimization. It is easy to establish how useful this concept can be for our analysis. Abdelkebir Khatibi has shown, in his novel *Amour bilingue*, and his collected essays entitled *Maghreb pluriel*, that for Francophone writers whose mother tongue may be Arabic, Berber, Wolof, or Creole, the French language is a means of translating into the colonizer's language a different sensibility, a different vision of the world, a means therefore of transforming the dominant conceptions circulated by the more standard idiom (see also Lionnet, "Of Mangoes"). To write in French is thus also to transform French into a language that becomes the writer's own: French is appropriated, made into a vehicle for expressing a hybrid, heteroglot universe. This creative act of "taking possession" of a language gives rise to the kind of linguistic *métissage* visible in many contemporary Francophone works.[10]

Acts of appropriation will produce a greater degree of cultural complexity than the standard anthropological categories (metropolitan vs. colonial, developed vs. primitive, or civilized vs. aboriginal) would tend to suggest. Indeed, the notion

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of culture has itself become quite controversial among some anthropologists. Rosaldo contextualizes and summarizes the issues:

> Anthropologists hold contradictory notions of culture. The discipline's official view holds that all human conduct is culturally mediated. In other words, people act in relation, not to brute reality, but to culture-specific modes of perceiving and organizing the world . . . No domain of culture is more or less culturally mediated than any other. . . . [But] if official [anthropological] view holds that all cultures are equal, an informal filing system, more often found in corridor talk than in published writings, classifies cultures in quantitative terms, from a lot to a little, from thick to thin, from elaborate to simple . . . Culture in this view is defined by difference. Difference . . . makes culture visible to observers. (78)

If "difference" is what makes culture visible to observers, then the emphasis on difference has the merit of underscoring specificities which would be muted and ignored otherwise. But an overemphasis on dissimilarities is likely to lead from racial and biographical determinism into an essentialist impasse. In this erroneous view of culture wherein difference is rigidly valorized for its own sake, or for the sake of identifying authentic and "pure products" (see Clifford 1–17), any process of acculturation or transculturation (however real, inevitable, and reciprocal it may have been) is automatically labeled as merely assimilationist. Hence, assimilation is (mis)construed by the dominant system as the elusive means of retaining or creating a fictive purity and authenticity within which the colonized "people without culture" can be absorbed; in opposition to this tendency, the subaltern group, on the other hand, will seek to retain a sense of its own cultural authenticity by advocating a return to precolonial traditions, thus contrasting the past to the present and mythifying its own original ethnic or cultural purity. Difference then becomes—on both sides of this binary system—the reason for exoticizing, "othering," groups that do not share in this mythic cultural purity.

The issue of defining identity in a colonial context has always been a highly charged one: the first generation, represented by Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi (*Portrait*), and Edouard Glissant (*Le Discours*), has examined with some anxiety the processes through which the colonized internalize a vision of themselves projected by the colonizer, a vision which promotes a form of mimetic idealization of, and identification with, the colonizer. To a degree, these formulations remained dependent upon a Hegelian view of the master-slave dialectic, and of the importance of recognition as the means of self-validation for both colonizer and colonized. By contrast, during the last two decades, writers have largely engaged in a painstaking redefinition of the paradigms of decolonization, thus seeking to undermine any simplistic understanding of the process of assimilation, and the concurrent presuppositions regarding "authenticity" in either dominant or native cultures. As Rosaldo points out,

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> the view of an authentic culture as an autonomous internally coherent universe no longer seems tenable in a postcolonial world. Neither "we" nor "they" are as self-contained and homogeneous as we/they once appeared. All of us inhabit an interdependent late 20th century world, which is at once marked by borrowing and lending across porous cultural boundaries, and saturated with inequality, power, and domination. ("Ideology" 87)

The texts and voices of Francophone women map out and interpret for us the complex interweavings of traditions that philosophers and anthropologists are beginning to theorize and propound in their own disciplines. As Appiah puts it, "if there is a lesson in the broad shape of this circulation of cultures, it is surely that we are already contaminated by each other, that there is no longer a fully autochtonous *echt*-African culture awaiting salvage by our artists" ("Is the Post-" 354). He is echoed by Swedish anthropologist Ulf Hannerz, who has pointed out that "the world system, rather than creating massive cultural homogeneity on a global scale, is replacing one diversity with another; and the new diversity is based relatively more on interrelations and less on autonomy" (qtd. in Clifford 17). What these writers and thinkers—"from all points on the compass"—increasingly underline is the dialectical tension that exists between local variations and a world-wide system of interdependent cultures, between diversity and resemblance, between relativism and universalism.

In a controversial book, *Logiques métisses: Anthropologie de l'identité en Afrique et ailleurs*, French anthropologist Jean-Loup Amselle echoes some of the statements made above, and goes a step further in arguing that even before colonial times, the interrelations of cultures was the norm, and that it is the Western anthropologist who has "invented" separate ethnic groups as his objects of study. Arguing against ethnological reason, and in favor of a form of originary indistinction or syncretism, he critiques the anthropological bias towards cultural relativism, and attempts to define a universalist "logique metisse":

> Les anthropologues culturalistes américains tout comme Lévi-Strauss ont eu raison, face à toutes les philosophies de l'histoire et autres sagas du progrès de mettre l'accent sur les spécificités et le caractère relatif des valeurs promues par chaque société; mais le corollaire de cette attitude généreuse est l'érection de barrières culturelles étanches qui enferment chaque groupe dans sa singularité.
>
> N'est-ce pas dans le droit fil de l'anthropologie culturelle américaine que se situe la notion de société multiculturelle dont on a déjà souligné les ambiguïtés? Loin d'être un instrument de tolérance et de libération des minorités comme l'affirment ses partisans, cette expression manifeste au contraire tous les travers de la raison ethnologique et c'est à ce titre qu'elle a été revendiquée en France par la "nouvelle droite." Isoler une communauté par la définition d'un certain nombre de

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"différences" conduit à la possibilité de son confinement territorial sinon de son expulsion. L'assignation de différences ou l'étiquetage ethnique, prophéties autocréatrices, ne traduisent pas seulement la reconnaissance de spécificités culturelles, ils sont également corrélatifs de l'affirmation forcenée d'une identité, celle de l'ethnie française. De la sorte, la problématique de la société multiculturelle conduit tout droit, si l'on n'y prend garde, à un développement séparé analogue à l'Apartheid sud-africain—qui lui-même procède en partie de l'application dévoyée de la notion de culture.

A ce fondamentalisme ethnique ou culturel que certains assimilent à la "défaite de la pensée," il ne s'agit pas d'opposer de façon abstraite les droits de l'homme, ces principes dont personne ne sait au juste de quoi ils sont faits. Il faut plutôt mettre en avant l'idée d'un mélange ou d'un métissage originaire des différents groupes qui se sont formés tout au long de l'histoire de l'humanité. (35)

[Given all the philosophies of history and other sagas of human progress, American culturalist anthropologists along with Lévi-Strauss were right to stress the particularist nature and the relative character of the values promoted by different societies. But the flip side of this generous attitude is the erection of impermeable cultural barriers that imprison each group in its own singularity.

Doesn't the notion of multicultural society, the ambiguities of which have already been emphasized, follow directly from the concepts put forth by American cultural anthropology? Far from being an instrument of tolerance toward, and liberation of, minorities as its proponents like to claim, this notion reveals instead all the wrongs of ethnological reason, and that is why it has been claimed by the "new right" in France. To isolate a community by defining a set of characteristic "differences" can lead to the possibility of its territorial confinement, and its eventual expulsion. Ethnic labeling, and the assignment of differences, are self-fulfilling prophecies. They do not just correspond to the acceptance of cultural specificities, but are also correlative with the coercive affirmation of one identity, that of French ethnicity. This is why, if we are not mindful of it, the problematic of the multicultural society can lead straight into a state of separate development analogous to South African apartheid—itself a consequence of the misapplication of the notion of culture.

To this ethnic or cultural fundamentalism that some would like to assimilate to the "defeat of thought," one does not need to oppose the abstract notion of human rights, these principles that no one can truly define. Rather, one must support and articulate the idea of an originary mixing or *métissage* of the different groups which were formed all through human history.]

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Amselle's remarks force us to rethink some of the fundamental notions that we are beginning to take for granted as literary and cultural critics: the respect for multiculturalism, the vexing questions of separatism and cultural autonomy, and the need for contemporary societies to respect difference without falling into a situation of apartheid. It is thus interesting to note that postcolonial women writers implicitly address identical issues in their recent essays and fictional works: they depict characters whose originality stems from the fact that the authors give them universal appeal, letting them live their *métissage* in the most original, ingenious, and beneficial ways. These hybrid characters exemplify the inevitability as well as the benefits and disadvantages of intercultural exchange. For, as Amselle goes on to add,

> Les cultures ne sont pas situées les unes à côté des autres comme des monades leibniziennes sans porte ni fenêtre: elles prennent place dans un ensemble mouvant qui est lui-même *un champ structuré de relations* . . .
> *La définition d'une culture donnée est en fait la résultante d'un rapport de forces interculturel* . . . La modification du rapport des forces . . . ainsi que l'éclosion et la disparition des cultures rendent compte des changements qui interviennent dans chaque système sous-culturel pris isolément. (55; my italics)
>
> [Cultures are not located next to one another, without doors or windows, like the monads of Leibnitz: they are situated in a fluctuating context which is *a structured field of relations* . . .
> *The definition of a given culture is in fact the resultant of a ratio of intercultural forces* . . . The modification of the ratio of forces . . . along with the appearance and disappearance of cultures explain the changes that occur in each subcultural system when one looks at them in isolation.]

To follow Amselle is to come to the conclusion that it is not the existence of different cultures that induces a comparative (ethnographical) approach, but rather that the critic's (or anthropologist's) stance as comparatist creates an arbitrary and singular object (be it "Bambara culture" or "Francophone studies")—and thus imposes the constraints of a determinate set of particularisms. Although Amselle does not deny the specificities inherent in certain cultural manifestations, he is in fact arguing against all theories of culture that would locate singularity within a restrained space, an enclosed geographical area, a "nation" or a "tradition."[11] Based on Amselle's extensive field research in Africa, *Logiques métisses* opposes his own theorizing of a sociological and historical "*espace métissé*" to the traditional culturalist approach of anthropology, which, according to him, is just another form of fundamentalism, itself the breeding ground for many contemporary forms of fascism and essentialist tendencies, as witnessed by the pre-civil rights Southern ideology of "separate but equal" and the various other forms of apartheid promoted

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in recent years by Enoch Powell in Britain, Jean-Marie Le Pen in France, and David Duke in Louisiana.

The works of Maryse Condé, Assia Djebar, and Leïla Sebbar make concretely visible the dialectical tensions present in Amselle's or Appiah's theorizing, and shed new light on what previous generations of Francophone critics had taught us to regard as an "alienating" contact between cultures, one in which the dominant group names and circumscribes the subjected one, instilling a colonized or victim mentality into the latter. What these writers illustrate instead are the dynamic and creative processes mobilized by sub-groups as means of resistance to the "victim" syndrome. They use their transformative and performative energies on the language and narrative strategies they borrow from the cultures of the West. To represent their regional cultural realities, they make use of appropriative techniques that interweave traditions and languages. The way they portray characters transforms the way that *they* themselves see the realities of their worlds, as well as the way *we*—readers who are outsiders to the region or culture—will in turn perceive those, that is, no longer as a radically "other" realm, so different and alien that it could only alienate itself more through contact with the West, but rather as a microscosm of the globe. In other words, these recent works point the way back to a new/old concept: humanism, a word that feminists of different stripes are beginning to revalorize; or to borrow Evelyne Accad's more precise formulation, a "femihumanism," a non-separatist feminism committed to bringing about a pluralistic society based on the rejection of oppression and domination, whether globally or locally (25–26; see also Kofman). This ethical imperative governs their search for new cultural forms and hybrid languages that better represent the particularisms of the communities about which they write without locking them into idiosyncratic dead-ends.

Thus, for Assia Djebar, the French language leads to an ambiguous situation, because it is the only means through which she can acquire a measure of freedom from the confinement of the harem. Yet, it is also a language in which she suffers from a form of "aphasie amoureuse" (*L'Amour* 142) [aphasia of love (125)], that is, from the complete inability to express "le moindre élan de mon coeur" (145) [the slightest heart-felt emotion (128)] because it is a language that necessarily creates distance and artificiality. Hence, emancipation is a way of breaking ties that bind, but also ties that create a loving, caring community. For Djebar, then, there is this constant tension between individual emancipation and collective female bonding, autobiography and history, writing and orality, as well as between verbal self-unveiling and the quiet dialogues of bodies and words that the ancient traditions of the harem and the hammam make possible among Islamic women. As she explains,

> Comment dire "je," puisque ce serait dédaigner les formules-couvertures qui maintiennent le trajet individuel dans la résignation collective? . . . Laminage de ma culture orale en perdition: expulsée à onze, douze ans de ce théâtre des aveux féminins, ai-je par là même été épargnée du

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silence de la mortification? Ecrire les plus anodins des souvenirs d'enfance renvoie donc au corps dépouillé de voix. Tenter l'autobiographie par les seuls mots français, c'est, sous le lent scalpel de l'autopsie à vif, montrer plus que sa peau. Sa chair se desquame, semble-t-il, en lambeaux du parler d'enfance qui ne s'écrit plus. (177–78)

[How could she say "I," since that would be to scorn the blanket-formulae which ensure that each individual journeys through life in a collective resignation? . . . My oral tradition has gradually been overlaid and is in danger of vanishing: at the age of eleven or twelve I was abruptly ejected from the theatre of feminine confidences—was I thereby spared from having to silence my humbled pride? In writing of my childhood memories I am taken back to those bodies bereft of voices. To attempt an autobiography using French words alone is to lend oneself to the vivisector's scalpel, revealing what lies beneath the skin. The flesh flakes off and with it, seemingly, the last shreds of the unwritten language of my childhood. (156)]

Caught between the urgent need to speak of herself as woman, and the age-old restrictions on self-unveiling, the narrator of *L'Amour, la fantasia* faces a dilemma that is crystallized by the use of French: "L'autobiographie pratiquée dans la langue adverse se tisse comme fiction" (243) [Autobiography practised in the enemy's language has the texture of fiction (216)]. Djebar can chart the complexities inherent in the problem of domination by suggesting that the construction of self and other, of conqueror and conquered, of France and Algeria, and of the woman as mother/sister/daughter is always mediated by an intricate set of images, words, and spaces that are never univocal. The construction of subjectivity is made possible by means of a complex interweaving of metaphors of imprisonment and liberation that are not set in opposition to one another, but engage as alternating patterns in the fabric of self-portraiture, as well as in the evocation of national and/or female liberation:

Parler de soi-même hors de la langue des aïeules, c'est se dévoiler certes, mais pas seulement pour sortir de l'enfance, pour s'en exiler définitivement. Le dévoilement, aussi contingent, devient, comme le souligne mon arabe dialectal du quotidien, vraiment "se mettre à nu." (178)

[Speaking of oneself in a language other than that of the elders is indeed to unveil oneself, not only to emerge from childhood but to leave it, never to return. Such incidental unveiling is tantamount to stripping oneself naked, as the demotic Arabic dialect emphasizes. (156–57)]

To bare one's self in the language of the conqueror is at once a form of betrayal and the inescapable consequence of any gesture of female emancipation:

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> Or cette mise à nu, déployée dans la langue de l'ancien conquérant, lui qui, plus d'un siècle durant, a pu s'emparer de tout, sauf précisément des corps féminins, cette mise à nu renvoie étrangement à la mise à sac du siècle précédent. (178)
>
> [But this stripping naked, when expressed in the language of the former conqueror (who for more than a century could lay his hands on everything save women's bodies), this stripping naked takes us back oddly enough to the plundering of the preceding century. (156–57)]

To unveil this elusive female self thus complicates all relations of power and domination, since the female had come to represent the land itself, and the difficulties of conquest and appropriation. But here, emancipation and unveiling come to be the alternating patterns in the palimpsest of history, whereas in *Ombre sultane*, the second volume of Djebar's projected quartet, betrayal and liberation again become intertwined as Hajila and Isma are made to represent two facets of a single female destiny that is emblematic of the same dialectic of seclusion and dispersion, confinement and liberation, individuality and collective integrity that forms the basis of Djebar's continuing reflections on the process of othering, and the problems of being other in one's own culture.

Within the Caribbean context, the focus has been somewhat different, given that writers, ever since Jacques Roumain's *Gouverneurs de la rosée* or Aimé Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, had been engaged in an enterprise of "creolization" of the French language. Among women writers, Simone Schwarz-Bart and Maryse Condé represent the most interesting examples of this phenomenon, although their respective use of language differs considerably. When it was published in 1972 to great critical and popular acclaim, *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle* did much to revitalize the genre of the Caribbean novel by harmonizing the creole vernacular and a rich and subtle metropolitan syntax. But that was in large part because, unlike Condé's *Traversée de la mangrove*, it did not need to contain a glossary of creole terms: the French language is appropriated and enriched without apparent syntactic or semantic dislocation. The French reader can approach Schwarz-Bart's text and enjoy its exoticism without feeling too disoriented: s/he can entertain the illusion that the protagonists are from a completely different cultural sphere, but that they are knowable, and the language of the text perpetuates this illusion. The originality of Schwarz-Bart is to have succeeded in translating into French a uniquely Caribbean way of perceiving the world: proverbs and oral tales communicate an ancient wisdom. Her use of narrative devices common to the tradition of oral storytelling, and her deft mixture of genres (fable, legend, historical chronicle, and realist descriptions) give this novel a richness of tone and a depth of meaning that make it a major landmark in Caribbean women's writing. But in many ways, it is also a transitional one. Thematically it is linked, as critic Roger Toumson holds, to the "mythe idéologique de la quête identitaire" [ideological myth of the identitary quest] by its portrayal of male revolt (Amboise), and its emphasis on the

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painful history of slavery that continues to have a profound impact on the life of its female characters Toussine, Victoire, and Télumée (497). *Pluie et vent* thus corresponds to certain expectations that the non-Caribbean reader has about "traditional" Antillean culture, and that the French have about the natural and timeless beauty of the tropics. The novel also satisfies the convention of the Caribbean "roman paysan," a genre that begins with Jacques Roumain's *Gouverneurs de la rosée*.

Condé's *Traversée* also belongs in that tradition of rural novels, but it is a resolutely contemporary work, without the mythic atemporality of Schwarz-Bart's novel. Condé's characters are multifaceted and live in the present, going about their daily lives, self-possessed, and speaking creole. They do not live under the gaze of the colonizer, they are self-assured in their difference, and they do not—it seems to me—correspond to any existing metropolitan stereotypes about the Antilles. The text does not mythify them, nor does it reveal traces of nostalgia or discontent about the (pre)colonial past, although the past is present in the person of Xantippe, the former slave and "nèg mawon" (255) [runaway black], and in the figure of Francis Sancher, the former revolutionary and disillusioned intellectual. As Xantippe says, "le temps de la vengeance est passé" (259) [the time for vengeance is now past].

This is indeed the first time that Condé has a truly Caribbean audience in mind: although published in Paris, like her previous books, *Traversée* is not written for a French public. Creole words and expressions are translated at the bottom of each page, but this was done after the fact, as a favor to the French reader, and on the recommendation of Condé's editor. Aside from this linguistic *dépaysement*, the text offers no major cultural surprises: the cast of characters is a familiar one for a rural community, with its conflicts among families, its storytellers and teachers, its village idiot and its healer, its migrant workers and other outsiders who bear the brunt of xenophobic reactions on the part of long-time residents. These characters live, love, and die in Rivière au Sel as do humans everywhere. Because the village is isolated, it is possible to identify particularisms that have disappeared from more urban settings in other parts of the Caribbean—but by the same token, these rural characteristics are not unlike those that might be shared by a similarly isolated village in the heart of France's Berry, for example.[12]

One might surmise, then, that an anthropologist looking for "culture" and difference in Rivière au Sel would initially be disappointed, as were Renato and Michelle Rosaldo when they did their field work among Filipinos who are generally viewed by anthropologists as "people without culture" because, having been "acculturated" by three and a half centuries of (Spanish then American) colonial rule, they are not all that "different": they are "rational, not cultural," and "to the ethnographic gaze, these civilized people appear too transparent for study; they seem *just like us*: materialistic, greedy, and prejudiced."[13] The point, of course, as Rosaldo suggests, is that it is precisely those "zones of cultural invisibility" (78) that pose the most compelling questions for contemporary critics and theorists because that is where the transcultural process, through appropriation and contesta-

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tion, manifests itself with clarity. It is because "they" appear to be like "us" (Western readers), because "they" are involved in "universal" human problems that the characters of *Traversée* are subversive: they undo that opposition between "us" and "them" which is indispensable to the representation of the exotic other in art, literature, or ethnography.[14] The villagers of *Traversée*, like Rosaldo's Filipinos, are human beings whose cultural production and consumption defy the West's attempt to exoticize them.

To refute the paradigm of exoticism and/or victimization, Condé skillfully depicts a self-sufficient community unburdened by crises of identity. She gives voice to each one of a series of characters with a unique perspective on the events that have caused them all to assemble at the wake for Francis Sancher, the stranger whose presence in Rivière au Sel caused some major changes in the relations among the villagers. As a figure that allegorizes both the colonial process and the fate of nomadic intellectuals such as Maryse Condé herself, he is a cleverly drawn character who enters into a complicated relationship with the local *habitants*. He allows Condé to be self-reflexive about her writing, and about the role of writing in her own cultural context (203). Condé appropriates the technique of the novel within the novel to reflect upon the role of the writer as outsider, and of the outsider as catalyst or *pharmakon*, as both poison and antidote, dangerous supplement, chronicler, and *aide-mémoire* of the community.[15]

The organization of the story follows the classic unities of time, place, and plot. Condé borrows from classical and modernist esthetics to create a novel that represents "créolité" in all of its complexity. The Creole and Indian characters voice their own unique perspectives, and it is through them that Condé the writer achieves a sense of her own humility as a recorder and transcriber of reality, a role very much unlike the heroic and prophetic ones that male writers such as Césaire or Glissant espoused as poets and leaders of the community.

For Leïla Sebbar, who writes from within France, the postcolonial condition is synonymous with exile and nomadism, literary *métissage*, and bicultural identity. The theme of immigration is central to all her works, and she focuses on the *Beurs*, the second generation descendents of Algerian immigrants, on "marginal" types of all sorts (runaways, drug addicts) who live in the "border zones" of French cities, on regional peasant culture, and also on historical or literary characters whose mythic lives as nomads and ex-centrics fascinate her: Rimbaud, Flora Tristan, Isabelle Eberhardt, V. S. Naipaul, Jeanne d'Arc, Phoolan Devi, or the Dahoman amazons of the eighteenth century. Her characters are from nowhere and everywhere, they are emblematic of the shock of societies resulting from the major upheavals of (de)colonization. The very concept of the French "hexagon" and the notion of "francité" are questioned in her novels and essays. She belongs, it seems to me, both to French and Francophone literature and her writing undermines our academic distinction between "French" and "Francophone" areas.[16]

Her *Shérazade* trilogy consists in a geographic and symbolic journey through the signifying system of French Orientalisms. A seventeen-year-old runaway who knows very little about her Algerian heritage, Shérazade embarks on a hitch-hiking

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trip through the hexagon that will allow her to discover the Orient, and the meeting of East and West, through the paintings of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century artists. She writes in a set of notebooks, the title of which is the same as the one Sebbar gives to the second book in the trilogy: here too, self-reflexive devices allow Sebbar to comment both on the status of writing, and on the social problems faced by her characters. If, as Michel Foucault has argued, "we are in the epoch of simultaneity . . . of juxtaposition . . . of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed . . . [an] epoch . . . in which space takes for us the form of relations among sites" (22–23), then Sebbar's narratives are exemplary of a condition of hybridity that allows different historical and spatial configurations to coexist. By reading texts and images of the past in order to understand her own situation as a postcolonial nomad, Shérazade uses all the means at her disposal to survive and contest the negative representations of oriental women that are embedded in the dominant culture. Sebbar gives her character the opportunity to refuse to be made into an "other": although subjected to the male gaze of Julien or Gilles, who can only perceive her through orientalist codes, Shérazade is able to manipulate those codes, to historicize them, and to point to the historical Arab or Saracen influences on southern France, to the always already hybrid nature of French culture: "Tu sais que les guerriers musulmans arrivaient en Gaule avec leurs familles? Ils venaient de loin, depuis l'Arabie en passant par l'Égypte, l'Afrique, l'Atlas. Il y avaient des Mozarabes, des Juifs, des captifs chrétiens ralliés à l'islamisme, des Berbères islamisés" (*Les Carnets* 264) [Do you know that Muslim warriors would arrive in Gaul with their families? They came from far away, from Arabia, via Egypt, Africa, the Atlas mountains. There were Mozarabs, Jews, Christian prisoners who had become allies of Islam, and Islamized Berbers].

Contrary to popular views that hold that "la France profonde" of the provinces is the purer, more authentic France (unlike cosmopolitan urban centers), Sebbar stages heterogeneity among rural people as well. There, regional patois reinforce difference and plurality:

> —Je ne sais pas leur langue, dit Shérazade.
>
> —Moi, je sais parler l'alsacien dit Marie, mais c'est pas le patois d'ici. L'alsacien c'est une langue; mon père m'a toujours dit ça et il m'interdit de dire que les paysans parlent en patois; il dit que c'est aussi une langue et qu'on doit pas les mépriser. (168)
>
> [—I can't speak their language, Sherazade said.
>
> —I can speak Alsatian, Marie said, but that's not the same dialect as the one spoken here. Alsatian is a language; my father always tells me this, and he forbids me from saying that peasants speak patois; he says that it is a language, and that they should not be despised.]

Sebbar's emphasis on regional minorities mirrors the postcolonial thematics of diversity. Here, as in *Traversée*, peasant culture is represented in all of its complex-

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ity, while it is implicitly contrasted to the appropriative gestures of the young urban *Beurs* whose dress codes reflect their postcoloniality:

> —Bon, alors ils disent que c'est leur look à eux, leur style, que personne peut leur piquer parce qu'ils sont les seuls à oser mettre en même temps une chéchia, tu sais ce que c'est? comme leurs ancêtres de là-bas et un jean comme tous les jeunes de partout, ou un battle dress des stocks américains ou une veste de smoking qu'ils trouvent aux Puces, ou un boléro brodé . . .Tu comprends . . . les habits traditionnels de leurs grand-pères turcs, arabes, berbères, africains sont à eux et les habits européens sont à tout le monde et eux, leur look, c'est de tout mélanger, mais pas n'importe comment, c'est très étudié . . . (159)
>
> [Well, they say that this look is theirs alone. It is a unique style, and nobody can steal it from them because they are the only ones who dare to wear a chechia, you know what that is? like their ancestors from overthere, along with a pair of blue jeans like young people everywhere, or an American army battle dress, or a smoking jacket found at the flea market, and an embroidered bolero . . . You see . . . the traditional clothes of their Turkish, Arab, Berber, African grandfathers are theirs, and European clothes belong to everybody, and their look, well, it is to mix everything, but not just any old way, it is a very carefully studied way . . .]

Dress is a signifying system that denotes not just the global process of neocolonialism and assimilation ("un jean comme tous les jeunes de partout"), but the *Beurs'* own rich construction of their lives and transcultural identities, their sense of how the past and the present, the near and the far, come together in the material things that they use, in the practices that they adopt. Their control over their sense of personal identity is evident in this creative use of the means of self-representation, in the "logique métisse" of their sense of self.

Not surprisingly, Sebbar's text reveals the same conscious control of the means of representation. *Les Carnets* draws a new geography of France from Marseille to the Ile de Ré, from Narbonne to Nantes. In its formal organization, the text integrates the voices and the idioms of regional or immigrant minorities, numerous intertextual references to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century travel narratives as well as to traditional and classical Arabic texts, to film, operatic music, and popular culture represented both by *Carte de séjour* ("un groupe rockarabe, rockmétèque" 148) and by a group of female rappers ("rap arabe" 253) who perform at a Moroccan country wedding near the southern town of Castres. Like the *Beurs*, Sebbar weaves her own tapestry using an esthetics of *bricolage* that carries over into her style of writing, and into the way she actually puts words on paper, since she often writes in cafés, using bits and pieces of paper, "un morceau de nappe, des papiers-sucre, le dos de la note" [a piece of paper tablecloth, sugarcube wrappings, the back of the bill] (Huston and Sebbar 9). This image of the unassum-

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ing nomad or bohemian writer is also in stark contrast to the heroic and angry voices of Maghrebian male writers of the immediate postcolonial and nationalist periods, whose sense of self and seriousness of purpose is derived from an oppositional nativist ideology, and not from the studied ("C'est très étudié") appropriation of such objects and techniques that can transform the relations Rosaldo designates as "inequality, power and domination" that saturate the social and cultural field but cannot succeed in preventing transcultural exchanges.

Although politically and socially peripheral, Francophone women writers share with the *Beurs* this ability to suggest alternative paradigms that maintain discrete *moments* of opposition (translated in dress codes, music, idioms, etc.) without necessarily becoming a counter-ideology. Such moments are not part of a rigid system, since each context will generate different practices (the metaphoric link between territorial conquest and the rape of women in Algeria, the use of creole in the Caribbean, and rap music in France) that make visible both the dominant culture's power to impose meaning, and the social actors' power of agency over configurations that will ultimately undermine those meanings. The practices thus serve to delegitimate the cultural hegemony of "French" culture over "Francophone" realities.

What the writings I have briefly surveyed suggest, then, is that the old dichotomies are no longer tenable, that the local and the global are increasingly interrelated, and that one cannot be fully understood without reference to the other. But at the same time, it becomes clear that universality would be an empty proposition without the gendered specificities offered by particular writers representing different cultural configurations. Francophone women novelists offer us rich and varied ways of understanding this contemporary dialectic—and the ways in which it reweaves the problematics of classical European humanism into a new tapestry in which there can be no room for the normative approaches of the past.

NOTES

[1]Rosaldo uses this term in reference to areas of Hispanic influence in the United States.

[2]For a more developed analysis of the novels discussed here, see Lionnet, "*Traversée*" and "*Parcours*."

[3]I use "discourse" in Foucault's sense. See *Archaeology*.

[4]As Albert Memmi has indeed pointed out in *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, "it is the colonized who is the first to desire assimilation, and it is the colonizer who refuses it to him" (125), because to assume "that the colonizer could or should accept assimilation and, hence, the colonized's emancipation, means to topple the colonial relationship" (126). Assimilation is thus a fiction uneasily perpetuated by a hegemonic system that simultaneously fears what it wrongly perceives to be inevitable.

[5]One notable exception is the work of historian Mechal Sobel, who analyses the contributions that African notions of time and space made to the slave owner's *weltanschauung*, thus becoming part and parcel of the Southerner's perception of reality.

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[6]In a recent talk at the Program of African Studies at Northwestern University, Jean Comaroff gave a fascinating account of late nineteenth-century practices of South African blacks who were adopting Western clothing, including Victorian wedding gowns and suits.

[7]Appiah notes that the African sculpture, *Man with a Bicycle*, is

> a figure who is . . . polyglot—speaking Yoruba and English, probably some Hausa and a little French for trips to Cotonou or Cameroon . . . *Man with a Bicycle* is produced by someone who does not care that the bicycle is the white man's invention: it is not there to be Other to the Yoruba Self; it is there because someone cared for its solidity; it is there because it will take us further than our feet will take us; it is there because machines are now as African as novelists. ("Is the Post-" 357)

[8]My emphasis; all translations are mine unless otherwise noted. I have discussed "transculturation" and its relationship to *métissage* in *Autobiographical Voices* (16). The concept of transculturation was first advanced by Fernando Ortiz, as Morejón explains. However, Ortiz's view of culture promotes a form of transculturation that implies the assimilation of Afro-Cuban culture *into* Hispanic culture. Morejón's *transculturación* is more dialectical, as is my term *métissage*. I should add that the present essay was written long before the publication of Mary Louise Pratt's "Arts of the Contact Zone" (an essay excerpted from her book, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*), in which she makes use of the term "autoethnography" much in the same way that I have used the term in my 1989 book, although the corpus she studies, and her approach, are different from mine.

[9]This is true both in the Caribbean (see Bernabé, *Eloge*) and in the Indian Ocean (see Sam-Long).

[10]For a discussion of the linguistic originality of some of these works, see Bernabé, "Le travail"; LeClézio; Lionnet, "*Traversée*"; Zimra, "Assia Djebar" and "In Her Own Write."

[11]Amselle's work thus intersects with that of Anderson, Hobsbawm and Ranger, and Wagner. For a detailed and thorough examination of some of these issues from a different perspective that emphasizes the importance of relativism as a mode of intercultural critique, see Miller, esp. chapters one and two.

[12]I mention the Berry because it is a mostly agricultural region of France, noted for its healers and storytellers. Marie-Blandine Ouedraogo, discussing the shortcomings of ethnographic representations and the problems of the women's movement in Upper Volta, makes a similar point:

> On a parfois l'impression que les ethnologues ne s'intéressent pas beaucoup à la vie des femmes . . . qu'elles cherchent à tout prix à découvrir un autre système tout à fait étranger au leur, qu'elles tiennent à se démarquer de nous.
>
> Moi, je trouve que tu mettrais une Africaine devant une paysanne européenne et tu ne verrais pas tellement de différence. De la même manière, une Blanche urbaine ne me paraît pas très différente d'une Africaine des villes. Quand celle-ci veut entrer en contact avec les

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femmes villageoises, elle rencontre les mêmes difficultés, la même méfiance que l'européenne. (33)

[Sometimes it seems that female ethnologists are not very interested in women's lives . . . that they try, at all cost, to discover a system completely foreign to their own, that they insist on differentiating themselves from us.

I think that if you were to compare an African woman with a European peasant woman, you would not see a whole lot of differences. Similarly, a white urban woman does not seem to me to be that different from an urban African woman. When the latter wants to communicate with a village woman, she encounters the same difficulties, the same level of suspicion as a European woman does].

[13]The Rosaldos were studying the Ilongots who "lacked the ethnographic staples of the day: lineages, villages, men's houses, elaborate rituals . . ." (77).

[14]Hence, these characters are the counterpart of the *Man with a Bicycle* as described by Appiah (see note 7 above). For an interesting discussion of the issue of cultural and historical relativism, see Mohanty.

[15]I use the term in the Greek sense made familiar by Jacques Derrida: "Le *pharmakon* est ce supplément dangereux qui entre par effraction dans cela même qui voudrait avoir pu s'en passer" (126).

[16]On Sebbar and the Beurs, see Mortimer, Woodhull, and Laronde.

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