

Rhetoric of Assimilation, Integration, and Belonging in Khadi Hane's *Des fourmis dans la bouche*

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One of the numerous images that remain in the reader's memory after he/she has finished perusing the last pages of Khadi Hane's *Des fourmis dans la bouche* remains the problematic presence of the African community in the heart of Paris. While Hane's narrative of the Afropean community seems to center predominantly on the destitution and precarity that define her characters' lives, the implicit message instead calls into question their place and identity in the French nation. Hane's portrayal of the Afropean social experience, therefore, becomes a pretext to the analysis of social recognition through the subtle interrogation of contemporary sociopolitical discourses of French national identity. As such, we perceive in reading Hane that the desire to be accepted and the feeling of belonging – which transcend legal and administrative recognitions – remain challenging. Jean Faber analyzes that sense of belonging as an attachment that does not translate into a social behavior of opening and acceptance. More specifically, Faber frames recognition in the form of procurement of documents that neglects the consideration of social and racial diversity. He notes that “ceux qu'on appelle encore des immigrés, et qu'on ne sait pas compter ... sont des Français de papier : toujours et dans n'importe quelle situation sociale, le qualificatif d'immigré, comme celui d'étranger, décerné au vu des seules apparences, fera écran” (39). Drawing from Faber, we perceive the prevailing difference between being

socially French and being French by legal decision. Hence, the presence of African exiles and immigrants in France, as conceptualized by Faber and narrativized by Hane, poses a relational problem that stages former colonized people within France.

Khadi Hane's representation of the African community in Paris is striking for the auspicious images of juxtaposition that transcend the narrative. Her portrayal of life in Château Rouge, her narration of Khadîdja's love for Lenoir, her landlord, and the exposition of the living conditions at the "foyer Sonacotra" illustrate the "distant" coexistence between people of diverse background. Nicki Hitchcott and Dominic Thomas explain such a juxtaposition by resurfacing the persisting political discourse on "insiders" and "outsiders", which "remains a common feature in the French political space" (1). Achille Mbembe frames that juxtaposition in terms of radical alterity while conceptualizing the Sub-Saharan presence in Paris as "ceux qui tout en étant avec nous, à côté de nous ou parmi nous, ne sont, en dernière analyse, pas des nôtres" (141). Drawing from Hitchcott, Thomas and Mbembe, we see that the Afropean presence is defined not only by the ways exiles and immigrants are considered but also by their strong desire to integrate and fully belong to the French society. *Des fourmis dans la bouche*, therefore, raises important questions related to identity and which mainly range from assimilation/integration to recognition and participation in the relationship between African descendants and their land of adoption. Moreover, it reveals the extent to which negotiation between insiders and outsiders still poses a problem in the French sociopolitical landscape. A reading of Hane's novel shows that sociopolitical concepts such as assimilation and integration cease to connote the same reality, and in the encounter between France and what Alain Mabanckou refers to as "another Africa located in the heart of France" (76), assimilation and integration only become a metaphor to invisibility. The following pages, therefore, offer an analysis of the presence of African exiles and immigrants in Hane's novel as an exploration of Afropeans' sense of belonging in France. The essay argues that Hane's novel subtly calls for the recalibration of contemporary dialogues and actions on Afropeans' presence and integration within French society.

In *Des fourmis dans la bouche*, Hane constructs on the problem of integration by blurring the frontiers between visibility and invisibility. She subtly exploits Khadîdja's infatuation for Lenoir to show the ambiguous integration of African exiles in France. The love that tied Hane's two characters develops around a mutual attraction before abruptly, ending with a rejection predicated on racial differences. Though Khadîdja loves

Lenoir and wishes to build a long-lasting and more trustworthy relationship with him, her expectations are overturned. Indeed, Hane introduces a capital element that reshapes their relationship: the birth of their baby. Consequently, instead of being a uniting factor, the birth of their child turns out to be the reason for their separation. Khadidja deeply feels the insult when Lenoir refuses to acknowledge the paternity of their child. In addition to his rejection of the child, the language that Lenoir uses to allude to him is offensive and underscores his complete disdain for him. In one such passage, Lenoir questions, “qu’est-ce que tu veux que je fasse de ton chiard” (57), preferring the possessive “ton” to the possessive “notre” which would convey a sense of acceptance of the child. The attitude he develops each time Khadidja wants him to discuss the paternity of the child, also, shows his lack of interest in him. That attitude symbolizes a total deflection of the discourse to other subjects. The following lines illustrate the conflict between Lenoir and Khadidja and how Lenoir ignores matters she considers essential:

“Je veux que tu reconnaisse ton fils, c’est tout.”
 “Tu me fais chier, Khadidja, avoua-t-il.”
 Ses mains tremblaient, sa voix avait durci. Il desserra le nœud de sa cravate et, au bord de la crise de nerfs, brandit l’index sur moi.
 “Bon sang, glapit-il. Pourquoi refuses-tu de payer ton loyer ?”
 (57)

This passage that opposes the recognition of the child to the fact of paying the rent shows that the parents no longer have the same vision, the same interest. While Khadidja fights for the recognition of the child, Lenoir, on the contrary, fights on matters related to money. His attitude is pure negligence of the mother and the child and reveals that what they previously called love, no longer unites them.

The opposition between Khadidja’s and Lenoir’s views is instructive of the meaning of integration and the necessity for social recognition. Adopting a social and moral philosophical approach to the question of respect and recognition, Axel Honneth’s article, “Reconnaissance et Justice”, makes a fundamental argument about the link between social justice and social recognition (*Passant-Ordinaire.org*). Honneth’s analysis mainly considers the relationship surrounding inequality and the fight for dignity. For him, the evolution of contemporary social justice is no longer grounded on questions relative to the eradication of social and economic inequalities but rather on the achievement of dignity for all. Thus, he holds,

“L’éradication de l’inégalité ne représente plus l’objectif normatif, mais c’est plutôt l’atteinte à la dignité ou la prévention du mépris, la “dignité” ou le “respect”, et non plus la “répartition équitable des biens” ou “l’égalité matérielle” qui constituent ses catégories centrales.” Advocating that economic justice does not represent the major component of social demand, he prioritizes a justice that favors social recognition, that is, an inclusion that focuses primarily on dignity. As such, Honneth conceptualizes the achievement of dignity through the eradication of “l’atteinte à la dignité” and “la prévention du mépris”.

Drawing from Honneth’s articulation on dignity and social recognition, we observe that beyond Lenoir and Khadidja’s discussion resides a problem of social acceptance and recognition that is unfolding around their child. Nonetheless, the difference of views is not limited to what disunites them around their child; it is also illustrated through the differing visions of their future. While Khadidja is making plans for herself and Lenoir, Lenoir is not ready to envision a relationship outside Khadidja’s bedroom. For Lenoir, there cannot be any other type of commitment that surpasses the form of love they have adopted. On the one hand, he cannot recognize the child that was born from their meetings; on the other, it is not possible for him to abandon his legal family to satisfy Khadidja’s wishes. The double impossibility implies that the relationship Lenoir demands from Khadidja is a concealed one. It is a relationship that cannot be exposed in daylight, one that will not exhibit his connection to her. Though Lenoir replies, “je m’en fous” (59), when Khadidja informs him that his child bears his name, we perceive his desire for anonymity. It appears, therefore, that identity and social recognition are closely linked and are defined through a pattern of construction that makes identity dependent on social recognition. As Honneth explains, “l’individu commence à se percevoir comme membre particulier et à part entière de la société en prenant progressivement conscience de besoins et de capacités propres constitutives de sa personnalité à travers les modèles de réactions positives de ses partenaires d’interaction.” From Honneth’s articulation of the link between an individual’s formation and his/her belonging to a community, we grasp that Lenoir’s action towards Khadidja and her baby does not partake in the construction of Khadidja’s stable identity. His refusal can, therefore, be explained by the lack of social recognition that keeps Khadidja in a lower social scale and, thus, does not contribute to creating the social condition for her emancipation and integration in the French society. If we consider the extent to which Khadidja devoted herself to Lenoir and the consequences she had to face in her community

and her family, it is evident that the Afropeans' personal effort to integrate the French society is doomed to failure if social recognition does not actively partake in the construction of their identities. The French of African ascendance, then, become marginalized citizens whose effort to integrate their society is driven to the periphery.

Hane describes a peripheral existence that, in turn, illustrates recognition and national preference. The failure of Khadîdja in France is not the result of the way she lived but rather the absence of a social recognition that generally contributes to the establishment of a more substantial adaptation and integration within the French society. Like Hane, Calixthe Beyala, in *L'homme qui m'offrait le ciel*, not only portrays the love between two people of different races but also depicts the impossibility of such a relationship due to the gaze of the French society. Fatou Diome briefly deals with the same problematic in *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* by narrating the family judgment, which leads to the divorce between her protagonist Salie and her husband. In all these texts, there is a line that sets the conditions of love in opposition to social reality. Calling into question the ways the discourse on national identity and integration are held in France, Jean Faber asserts :

Depuis cinquante ans, la question du sort des immigrés que nous accueillons fait l'objet d'une double méprise. Nous n'avons jamais affronté autrement qu'en paroles le défi de l'élaboration d'une politique destinée à déterminer leur place parmi nous. Nous avons toujours substitué un débat sur l'immigration ou la nationalité à un débat sur l'intégration. (19)

The ongoing debate on integration is, therefore, nonexistent in France. Accepting that integration means to be part of a group, better still, to be accepted as one is, it becomes clear, as Faber holds, that it is avoided because what the French society does not want to acknowledge is the right to difference in its midst. Faber adds, "en paroles, la chose existe: mais quant à savoir le sens du mot intégration, l'idée qu'il exprime, la politique qu'il résume silence. Personne n'en sait rien" (21). Unfortunately, Khadîdja's experience with Lenoir foregrounds the impossibility of materializing integration within French society. Lenoir's nocturnal visits to Khadîdja, as well as his obstinate decision to reject his son, suggest the degree to which Khadîdja is not socially integrated.

In "The Return of Assimilation? Changing Perspectives on Immigration and Its Sequels in France, Germany, and the United States," Rogers

Brubaker develops an argument on assimilation and its probable return in transnational and postnational spaces such as France and Germany. For him, assimilation encompasses two different meanings and actions that can be understood through the consideration of the transitive and intransitive character of the verb “assimilate.” He writes,

In the general and abstract sense, the core meaning is increasing similarity or likeness. Not identity, but similarity. To assimilate means to become similar (when the word is used intransitively) or to make similar or treat as similar (when it is used transitively). Assimilation is thus the process of becoming similar, or of making similar or treating as similar. (42)

Brubaker’s definition leads us to consider the models of assimilation Khadi Hane displays in *Des fourmis dans la bouche*. Treating similar or becoming similar are moments that show the confrontation that unfolds between Afropeans, their desire to be part of society, and the response of the society to such desire. It is, thus, important to view Malick’s story as well as Hane’s depiction of the “foyer Sonacotra” as moments that defy or conform to the definition of assimilation, mainly in its most salient point: making similar/treating similar.

In the short passage concerning Malick, the reader learns that his father is le vieux Jules – a French citizen of Malian origin who decided to stay in France after he fought for the French army ; that he has been living in France for about twenty years; he is the father of Khadija’s three children; and that he was repatriated to Mali after the French authorities refused to grant him the right to stay. What is at stake here is the degree to which one can be treated as similar. In the narrativization of Malick’s story, Hane alludes to the construction of similarities that stems from the relationship between him and le vieux Jules in order to show the limits of being “treated similar” (Brubaker, 42). The first similarity is the existing link between le vieux Jules and Malick and the second one, the connection between Malick and France. The connection existing between Malick and France should directly derive from the one he shares with his father, Jules. Hane’s narrative reveals that Jules – as a young man – was a soldier in “l’armée française” and that he fought in “la guerre d’Indochine.” By linking Jules to “la République,” Hane insists on the fact that he is a French citizen even if the treatment he receives from the “République” is not up to the recognition he deserves. It is then surprising to note in the narrative that a former French soldier residing in France has a son

that is being repatriated to Mali. Although Malick is the son of a French national who fought for the Republic, he does not enjoy the benefits of a son. He is treated differently from his father, who deserves to stay in France. As a result of that difference, the reader learns, “Malick venait de recevoir une lettre de la préfecture de Paris qui le sommait de quitter le territoire où il vivait depuis vingt ans” (139). The decision to repatriate denotes the involvement of the authorities at a high level. Furthermore, the refusal to naturalize Malick indicates the consideration the Republic has for the French citizen with roots in Africa. Not only was le Vieux Jules not treated fairly, but his son also paid for the inconsistency of the decision. Such discrepancy is also characteristic of the social life in the “foyer Sonacotra” Hane attempts to portray.

Hane’s description of the “foyer Sonacotra,” indeed, demonstrates signs of problems of assimilation that impinge on the dignity of its residents. The “foyer” is primarily described by Hane as “une sorte de cave à immigrés” (109). And as its name indicates, it is a dwelling place for exiles and immigrants, mainly from sub-Saharan and North Africa. The narrative reveals that it is an old, putrid building, a poor dwelling space, “partout sur les murs, le temps avait laissé ses plaies, ébréchure de la façade, cicatrices sur le ciment moribond” (Hane, 109). Pascal Blanchard describes the “foyer Sonacotra” as temporary dwelling places that later transformed into permanent ones, “devenu de plus en plus des lieux d’habitat durables, foyers et cités de transit se transforment pour les célibataires en maison de retraite de pauvres” (194). Blanchard’s description underscores the social identity of the residents but also reveals that what gradually became places of residence for immigrants and people of low social status were originally thought of and designed as spaces of transit. Patrick Weil, in *La France et ses étrangers*, gives more details about the “foyer Sonacotra”, asserting that the buildings were first built for the “salariés célibataires algériens” (91). About their nature as places of transit, Weil points out the underlying political rejection of any form of reunion that could participate in the reception of migrant families, “l’objectif était que ces Algériens ne procèdent pas à des regroupements familiaux” (91).

It is in one of these “foyers” that the elders of the Malian exiles live a peripheral existence in the middle of Paris. Their existence itself is characterized as “absurd,” and their daily life portrayed as being “aux couleurs de la misère” (112). Khadidja, who compares her decrepit building to their dwelling place, finds it “un palais” compared to what she sees. What those images of the “foyer Sonacotra” and the refusal to grant residency to Malick – whose Father is French and has fought for the “République”

– suggest is the absence of political and social decisions to better integrate African exiles and immigrants in France. Drawing from Brubaker’s notion of treating similar, we see that the French ideology of assimilation poses a serious problem of adaptation and rather creates significant social dissymmetries. Hane’s description of the “foyer Sonacotra”, far from substantiating a “making similar,” displays forms of exclusion that are marked by a difference of treatment concerning the right for a father to keep a family member near him, the right of a son to live in the country of nationality of his father, as well as the exclusive living conditions encountered in the “foyer”. All this derives from a lack of social and political recognition of the presence of the Afropean with, and among, French society. Honneth insists on social integration, which he associates with inclusion. He writes, “nous ne pouvons représenter l’intégration sociale qu’en tant que processus d’inclusion réglé par des formes de reconnaissance.” The “formes de reconnaissance” which partake into the construction of the nation through social integration are not, themselves, offered to exiles and immigrants. Their basic needs of recognition are met with a political discourse that rather refuses their very existence by negating their right to difference, while also refusing their right to sameness.

The development of Khadîdja’s life in Paris – the choice to relinquish some of the values that characterize the society she is from, as well as her adoption of new values specific to Paris – sets her at the intersection of two cultures, of two different worlds. Her life is, thus, typified by the doubleness of her identity, a phenomenon misunderstood by both the Conseil des Sages (a group of elderly immigrants that came from Mali and who live in the “foyer Sonacotra”), and her family in Mali. Hane’s representation of Khadîdja is, then, predicated on two aspects: the fluctuating geographical spaces and the double consciousness of her protagonist. Khadîdja’s identity symbolizes the very existence of Hane’s Afropean experience, which intersects two identities and is described as “Franco-sénégalaise”. Khadîdja, is a “Franco-Malienne” who, like Hane, navigates two worlds, two different realities that shape her existence and lead her to the discovery of challenges in Paris. The constant introspection and questioning of her Parisian life, together with the careful understanding of the opportunities that her land of origin represents, therefore, dictates her decision to question her very presence in France. Like Hane, other Afropean writers, especially Isabelle Boni-Claverie in *Trop noire pour être française*, capitalizes on that geographic fluctuation to describe their protagonist’s double consciousness by accentuating a sense of double-belonging. Part of the critical apparatus of Hane’s novel, notably that

concerning the existential definition of the doubleness of Khadîdja's identity and that of the kids in Château-Rouge, poses a problem since it encompasses different perceptions of belonging.

Hane primarily focuses on geographic spaces that situate Khadîdja. As such, Khadîdja retains a strong attachment to Mali and is even perturbed at times by her reminiscences. In a poignant episode that highlights that attachment, she dances with her daughter, leaving behind the harshness of life. The narrative reads :

La poitrine de Sali se soulevait en même temps que la mienne et nos corps vibraient à l'unisson. La voix d'Oumou Sangaré, vedette de la chanson malienne, remontait aux secrets des aïeux, dans un chant de gloire à l'honneur des Cissé. Je me sentais vivre. Couchée à côté de ma fille, que je serrais contre moi, je respirais l'odeur de ma terre. J'étais heureuse, même si Paris annonçait une fois de plus une journée de disette. (75)

Such evocation of the "home" country, the happiness that derives from it, as well as the contrast Hane makes with life in Paris reveal what Steven Vertovec articulates as the "diaspora consciousness". For Vertovec, such a consciousness is marked by a dual or multiple identification (5). He holds that "there are depictions of individual's awareness of de-centered attachment, of being simultaneously 'home away from home', 'here and there' or, for instance, British and something else" (6-5). Drawing from Vertovec, we see that location goes beyond the physical presence in a place to encompass the awareness of being part of a multiplicity of mental or reified places. In the narrative, Khadîdja exteriorizes that notion of "here and there" by positioning herself simultaneously in two different spaces. Moving from one present narration to the immediate resurgence of her past, her sense of de-centeredness, however, is multifaceted. At times, it is represented as a strong attachment to her "home" country, revealing the joys and the happiness of being part of the cultural identity she left. At others, it is presented through the recollection of the difficulties faced when she was still in Mali. Moments of happiness, such as the dance she performs with her daughter on Oumou Sangaré's melody, arise from the same vivid memories of belonging to that culture as well as moments where she desperately questions her existence in the village. Narrative passages of her early and forced marriage, her first pregnancy with a man she loved but who was not her husband, in addition to her sister's arranged marriage highlight her consciousness of home but are themselves

rooted in narratives that show her attachment to France. The expression of such de-centeredness, where evocation of Mali and the narrative in Paris combine to foster her double consciousness is present in passages where the visit of Madame Renaud, the social worker, is quickly transformed into a period of recollection, where once again, Mali surfaces, “le cou de Madame Renaud parut s’allonger quand elle déglutit sa salive. C’est vrai, je ne lui facilitais pas la tâche. A chaque visite, le même cirque. La bonté fusait d’elle, de moi sortait le pire. Des souvenirs ressassés auxquels j’avais attribué la cause de mes galères, depuis le Mali” (49). Despite the mention of Mali in Khadîdja’s reflection, which already shows her mental connection to both geographical spaces, the narration that follows, “tout avait commence avec mon père, chef de village coiffé d’une tiare, qui me céda,…” (49), immediately continues with her trajectory when she was thirteen years of age. Hane, therefore, reinforces Khadidja’s identity by subtly bridging past and present. By refusing a narrative linearity, and by referring to her protagonist’s different moments of life in a way that blurs the frontier between past and present.

Hane’s narrative does not center on the hybridization of her protagonist, but rather positions her double experience in a remarkable contrast between her home country and France. Consequently, through the spontaneous back and forth movements between the two countries, France becomes the mirror that allows a better assessment, a sharper image of the value of the home country. The reader, then, gets the full meaning of Khadîdja’s declaration : “J’avais aussi levé l’oeil sur Paris et manqué ce que le Mali aurait pu me donner que je n’aurais jamais ailleurs” (144). Khadîdja’s assertion emphasizes the influence of Paris over her life in Mali. In other words, the encounter with Paris brings her to the recognition of what she could get from Mali. By building a consciousness of Mali and Paris, she comes to the realization that Mali – a place she knows, and which builds up her identity – offers more than she had previously imagined.

Hane’s portrayal of Khadîdja’s life unveils the double projection of Khadîdja’s profound thoughts in order to make its search for a social contrast salient. In using that contrast, the narrative reconstructs the idea of belonging and place. As such, Hane plays on the parallel existing between double consciousness and “multilocality” as conceptualized by Margaret Rodman. In her essay, Rodman examines place, and its changing meaning for people, establishing that unlike what some anthropologists think of place as unproblematic, being just a location or simply “where people do things” (640), places “are not inert containers. They are politicized, culturally relative, historically specific, local and multiple constructions”

(641). One of the multiple definitions Rodman retains of multilocality is the reflexive relationships with place, understood as a dislocation from the possibility of local identity (646-47). Rodman's anthropological idea of dislocation – which is tied to the concept of multilocal belonging – recalls Hane's deterritorialized characters. Khadîdja's consciousness of her double belonging compels her to reflect on the identity of the children living in Château-Rouge. She intensifies her interrogation by questioning their hybridity, and the reader perceives the growing doubt about the in-between condition that distinguishes the children's place in France. For Khadîdja, their birth in France from African immigrant parents will influence their place and acceptance in French society. Watching the children play in the streets, Khadîdja wonders, “ Qui étaient-ils? Un panachage raté de deux cultures qui les feraient cavalier derrière ce truc indéfinissable qui manque à ceux qui n'arrivent pas à se situer sur une échelle familiale désormais régie par un code inconnu. Peut-être ces enfants grandiraient dans le moule français sans qu'on ne les bassine avec leur identité, ...” (29). The uncertainty that characterizes Khadîdja's thinking illustrates the difficulty of belonging to a French system that ultimately categorizes its citizens not according to the nation's ideals but in terms of the origin of the parents. Her apprehension for the future of the children anticipates difficult living conditions as well as nearly impossible social integration in France. The use of “peut-être” shows the implicit doubt that defines her assertion and suggests that the children's identity will determine the degree of their integration. Therefore, Khadîdja foresees a dislocation, symbolized by the separation of the children in Chateau-Rouge from the possibility of a local identity. The result of such a probable dislocation entails an endless interrogation of their existential experience. Indeed, it revives their quest for their identity on African lands they barely know, and which are supposedly their homes. Hane refers subtly to the constant questioning of these children's origin by using the term “bassiner”, which implies the children's constant quest for their place and belonging. Despite the mitigation of that dislocation, which is manifested by “peut-etre” and the use of the conditional “grandiraient,” the problem Hane raises about the children's integration still surfaces. Not only does she put it in terms of action by exploiting the sense of “cavalier derrière,” which shows the effort to embody that identity, but she also defines the dislocation in terms of the incapacity to figure out exactly what that identity is, “ce truc indéfinissable qui manque” (29).

The interrogation of the identity of these descendants of exiles and migrants creates a dislocation that not only prevents them from referring

to a unique and precise identity but also keeps them from adequately participating in the socio-economic life of the nation. This cleavage from French society, resulting from the lack of integration of the French citizen with a sub-Saharan ascendance, helps explain the rise of Afropean literature, which predicates its works on the presence and experience of the African diaspora in Europe. Such dislocated identity of the French of African descent in France reminds us of Pap Ndiaye's study. In his analysis, most people from sub-Saharan ascendance he interrogated insist on being part of the French nation. Only a minority believe their identity as French people is combined with another origin (47). However, it is important to note that accepting thoroughly one's identity as French depends on one's degree of integration. Consequently, belonging to the nation starts with a relation with one's immediate society. In his work, Ndiaye transcribes the thoughts of Alou – a French person of sub-Saharan descent – to exemplify the dislocation from the possibility of local identity, “de toute manière, si t'es noir, déjà, tu n'es pas vu comme Français. Si en plus t'as un nom pas catholique, alors là... On va te demander d'où tu viens” (47). The problem that accentuates the dislocation resides in the questioning “d'où tu viens”. We are led to understand that the local and the national have characteristics that cannot encompass certain races and names. Race and name constitute, then, the prime elements that determine the Afropean belonging in France. As Ndiaye explains, “les Français noirs d'aujourd'hui et d'hier font l'expérience d'une identité française contestée” (47). As such, the idea of multilocality as expressed by Rodman becomes an obstacle for subjects whose belonging to a land is questioned and even denied at times. This denial exteriorizes the extent to which the battle for identity and claim for a place of belonging is crucial. Leonora Miano portrays the dislocation and endless construction of the Afropean identity,

En France, les Noirs ne sont pas nommés d'une manière qui inscrive leur trajectoire dans celle de leur pays. Lorsqu'on les mentionne, c'est en indiquant qu'ils viennent d'ailleurs. Ainsi, une personne qui descendrait, par exemple, d'un soldat subsaharien ayant combattu pendant la Grande Guerre avant de décider de s'établir en France comme certains le firent, reste des décennies plus tard, considérée comme issue de l'immigration. Dès lors qu'il s'agit de ces populations descendantes de colonisés, le décompte des générations ayant vécu sur le sol Français est sans fin, les gens pouvant donc être des immigrés de troisième génération : nés en France, de parents eux aussi nés en France, mais toujours pas Français. (79)

Miano eloquently goes beyond the idea Hane develops in her book. Her analysis of the recurrent mode of designation of the sub-Saharan descendant shows a citizen whose national attachment is continually at stake. Drawing from Miano's inquiry, we see that Khadidja's mention of "panachage raté de deux cultures" could also reflect the idea of "panachage refusé," which largely expresses a desire to build walls between citizens of the same country. To Hane's narrativization of the problematic identity of the immigrants' and exiles' descendants in France and the clarity of the politicized, culturally relative and historically specific nature of place, and her question "qui étaient-ils?", Miano responds, "il est donc normal que les Afropeens s'inventent un ancrage pour ne pas sombrer" (86). For Miano, this "ancrage" is grounded in the concept of *Afropea*, one that she links to the experience of the French citizen with sub-Saharan ancestors. Miano's answer to the impossibility of belonging to local identity focuses on a mental reconsideration of self and place. She writes, "Afropea, c'est, en France, le terroir mental que se donnent ceux qui ne peuvent faire valoir la souche française. C'est la légitimité identitaire arrachée,..." (86). Although one can find the solution of a mental location worthy of interest, the fact that it does not end the continuous struggle against dislocation and rather presents identity as "arrachée" still poses a serious problem to the Afropean's presence in France.

Khadi Hane's writing of the Afropean experience raises important questions around social cohesion in French society. By narrativizing the quest for belonging, she compels her readership to serious interrogations concerning the Afropean identity and place, the salient ones being to know who Afropeans are and where they belong. Hane's novel, however, builds on one certainty: the undeniable fact that African exiles and immigrants and their descendants consider France their home. The reflection she makes concerning the future of coming Afropean generations, demands tangible answers that transcend Miano's allusion to a "terroir mental" that will act as a secure refuge. The desire for recognition and belonging that Hane represents shows that exiles and immigrants cannot capitalize only on mental satisfactions. As such, literary productions that narrativize or analyze the Afropean experience should focus on more effective dialogues of encounter that do not only center on oppositions between outsiders and insiders but that also works at shattering the remaining borders and the last ramparts to a socially homogeneous French society.

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