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ALISON MARMONT

# French or Francophone: Postcolonial Immigrant Identities and Literature in Contemporary France

In the last half-century, many immigrants from France's former colonies have made the hexagon their home and have contributed to the country's literary output. However, these immigrants and their offspring are often deemed as 'Others'. This kind of 'othering' is made manifest in the literary sphere through the labelling of their works as 'francophone,' rather than French, by the publishing industry. The first section of this article proposes a definition of (immigrant) identity that challenges this kind of exclusionary and essentialist discourse with reference to the concepts of hybridity, cultural identity and uncanniness propounded by Homi Bhabha, Stuart Hall and Julia Kristeva respectively. This article then examines the *littérature-monde* manifesto to argue that its rejection of the term 'francophone' is not sufficient to dissolve this particular self/'Other' binary. In light of this, this article proposes that Edward Said's humanistic approach to reading, when accompanied by a Segalian respect for the irreducibility of the individual, reflects the proposed conception of identity and so allows scholars to challenge, rather than reinforce, the marginalisation experienced by ethnic minority authors in France.

France, like many prosperous countries in a globalised age, has become not just the transitory destination, but also the home for many different people from all over the world, particularly from its former colonies. The immigrants that France has welcomed, or tolerated, in the last half-century have made their mark on the country and contributed to its economic, political and cultural development. In spite of this, many people with foreign origins in France are deemed as 'Others' and, as a result, experience socio-political and economic marginalisation.<sup>1</sup> This kind of 'othering' also exists in the literary sphere and is made manifest in the labelling of the works of immigrant authors or their children as 'francophone,' rather than French, by the publishing industry and sometimes even by well-intentioned scholars.<sup>2</sup> This labelling not only risks being exclusionary, but may foment the kind of essentialist conception of these 'others' as a homogenous group which occurs in increasingly prevalent right-wing political discourses. In light of this, it is essential that

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<sup>1</sup> The terms 'Other' or 'othering' are used in reference to the process outlined by Sara Ahmed, in which a person is fetishised as a figure of difference, whether this difference is interpreted as positive or negative. This fetishism results in a levelling of difference between various 'others', as the particular histories and power relations determining each individual are not taken into consideration. See Sara Ahmed, *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*, Transformations, 1 (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> Robert Young, 'Postcolonial Remains', *New Literary History*, 43 (2012), 19-42 (p. 36).

postcolonial scholars challenge these reductive conceptions of identity and reveal the asymmetrical power relations which allow them to be perpetuated. Hence, this article aims to reframe our theoretical understanding of (immigrant) identity and explore how this might be reflected in our analysis of the literature of immigrant authors in French. Homi Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and the 'Third Space' have been of significant influence in postcolonial theory because of their subversion of essentialist conceptions of identity.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, this article will argue that, whilst hybridity is an important concept for understanding the experiences and identities of ethnic minorities, references to the 'Third Space' risk overlooking the unequal power relations individuals are caught up in. With reference to Stuart Hall's concept of 'cultural identity' and Julia Kristeva's idea of uncanniness in *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, this article will propose a conception of immigrant identity which takes various social hierarchies into account and destabilises the self/'Other' binary.<sup>4</sup> The following section will examine how this can be reflected in literary analysis and the extent to which the *littérature-monde* manifesto, which rejects the term 'francophone' in an attempt to dissolve the French/francophone dichotomy, succeeds in dissolving this particular binary.<sup>5</sup>

In order to contextualise these arguments, it is first necessary to outline the socio-political environment shaping the experiences of those who are classed as 'immigrant' authors. The increasing attention paid by francophone postcolonial scholars to authors classed as 'immigrants' in France reflects the burgeoning creativity and literary output of these communities. No longer limited to token chapters in general postcolonial reader journals, studies such as Ireland and Proulx's edited collection *Immigrant Narratives in Contemporary France* are dedicated entirely to immigrant writers from a wide range of social, cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds, whose works are equally diverse. There has been particular interest in the works of so-called *beur* or *banlieue* writers who come from the most significant immigrant community, namely of North African descent, such as Reeck's *Writerly Identities in Beur Fiction and Beyond*. However, the term 'immigrant' is, in itself, problematic for many reasons. Firstly, and as will be explored shortly, it is sometimes applied to people who are deemed foreign because of their ethnic background, even though they were born in France. Secondly, far from being a neutral expression, it is often accompanied by negative connotations, particularly when mobilised in right-wing, exclusionary discourses. Thirdly, it amalgamates an extremely heterogeneous group of people whose experiences as immigrants are incredibly diverse because of their multifarious countries of origin, ethnicities, cultures, classes, religions, languages, genders and sexualities. Any discussion of 'immigrant identity' must, therefore, take these disparate experiences into account to avoid reinforcing the same reductive conceptions and labels which allow them to be 'othered'.

The first challenge when examining immigrant authors and their literatures in France is understanding who, exactly, falls under this classification. As Reeck points out, the republican model of integration in France, in contrast to the multiculturalist model of countries like the United States, identifies only two kinds of identities: French or foreign.<sup>6</sup> The integration

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<sup>3</sup> See Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> See Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. by Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), pp. 222-37.

<sup>5</sup> See Michel Le Bris, 'Pour une « littérature-monde » en français', *Le Monde*, 15 March 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Laura Reeck, *Writerly Identities in Beur Fiction and Beyond* (Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2011). p. 3.

policy envisages French society as a melting pot into which all immigrants, regardless of ethnicity, religion, origins or culture, must dissolve in order to access full citizenship.<sup>7</sup> Thus, from a political perspective, ethnic minorities ‘remain a statistical absence and a linguistic conundrum’ because the application of ethnic or racial categories to communities in France is seen as a threat to its republican values.<sup>8</sup> This is the case for the arrival of immigrants from countries such as Spain, Italy and Portugal who came to replenish the French workforce after the Second World War as well as the considerable although varied influxes of citizens of France’s former colonies to the *métropole*.<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, the social reality faced by different immigrant communities is more complex as not all foreigners are viewed in the same way. Many scholars have identified the disparate treatment of immigrants as a direct legacy of colonialism, whereby the ‘colonial relationship is relived and rewritten, this time on France’s home territory’.<sup>10</sup> For Reeck, this results in an ‘internal periphery’ and, in a similar vein, it is described as a ‘fracture coloniale’ by Blanchard, Bancel and Lemaire in their edited collection of the same name. For the latter, one of the most evident manifestations of this ‘fracture’ within the immigrant communities is the fact that the children of European workers who have remained in France are accepted as fully French, whereas the offspring of immigrants from the former colonies continue to be seen as foreigners, even when they were born in France and have French citizenship.<sup>11</sup>

Aujourd’hui, plus de sept millions de personnes, immigrés postcoloniaux ou Français d’« origine immigrée » -dénomination qui en dit long sur la transmission d’un statut spécifique d’« éternels étrangers » pour les descendants d’immigrés extra-européens-, vivent concrètement les métissages postcoloniaux, mais aussi des situations de relégation, de discriminations quotidiennes (à l’embauche, à l’emploi), dont nous peinons à nous expliquer l’ampleur [...] la fracture coloniale est née de la persistance et de l’application de schémas coloniaux à certaines catégories de population (catégories réelles ou construites), principalement celles issues de l’ex-Empire.<sup>12</sup>

It is evident, furthermore, that some groups are marginalised to an even greater extent than others, such as immigrants of North African origin who, for Jean-Marie Le Pen and others to the far right of the political spectrum, ‘are not only inassimilable, but could never

<sup>7</sup> See Pascal Blanchard, ‘La France, entre deux immigrations’, in *La Fracture coloniale : La société française au prisme de l’héritage colonial*, ed. by Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard, and Sandrine Lemaire (Paris: La Découverte, 2006), pp. 173-82 (p. 178).

<sup>8</sup> Reeck. p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Susan Ireland, and Patrice J. Proulx, ‘Introduction’, in *Immigrant Narratives in Contemporary France*, ed. by Susan Ireland and Patrice J. Proulx (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2001), pp. 1-6 (p. 2).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Blanchard. p. 186.

<sup>12</sup> Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard, and Sandrine Lemaire, ‘Introduction. La fracture coloniale : une crise française’, in *La Fracture coloniale : La société française au prisme de l’héritage colonial*, ed. by Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard, and Sandrine Lemaire (Paris: La Découverte, 2006), pp. 9-30 (p. 26). ‘Today, more than seven million people, postcolonial immigrants or French citizens of “immigrant origin” – a denomination which says a lot about the transmission of the status of “eternal foreigners” to the descendants of non-European immigrants –, experience the reality of postcolonial hybridisation, but also situations of relegation, of daily discrimination (in recruitment, at work), the extent of which is hard to convey [...] the colonial fracture arises from the persistence and application of colonial schemas to certain categories of the population (real or constructed categories), principally those from the former Empire’. Translation my own.

become French'.<sup>13</sup>

It is unsurprising that this particular climate should have reverberations in the literary sphere. Speaking of minorities of North and sub-Saharan African origin in France, although relevant to the literatures of most immigrant communities, Alec Hargreaves identifies two particularly important factors which impact whether their works are seen as part of French culture. Firstly, the greater the number of generations living and born on French soil increases the chance that their work is recognised as French and, secondly, some cultural or religious differences are perceived as less compatible with French values than others, Islam as the most notable example.<sup>14</sup> Whilst there are many other elements impacting how the literary works of authors of foreign origin are received, such as education, gender and class, another of note is the extent to which they are deemed to be compatible, thematically or stylistically, with French literary ideals. As Hargreaves notes, the orality of many works by authors of Maghrebi origin, in which colloquialisms and informal language abound, means they are often viewed by French scholars as 'fall[ing] not only outside the national field of French literature but also below the threshold of literature "tout court"'.<sup>15</sup>

In this way, an ethno-racial hierarchy, which can be traced back to the Orientalist rhetoric of French colonialism, is being produced and applied not just to immigrants from former colonies, but often to their offspring and their literary works. The way in which these groups are classed as perpetual foreigners, even when they are French citizens, can be seen as an 'implicit attempt to keep them marginalized'.<sup>16</sup> One of the main reasons why immigrants continue to be discriminated against, in France and around the world, is because their different cultures, values, beliefs and customs are perceived as a threat and as inferior to those of the host nation. This is based on an essentialised conception of cultural identity, which sees foreign cultures as potential contaminants of the country's pure, 'originary' essence. In order to challenge this kind of marginalisation, it is necessary to re-evaluate the concepts of foreignness and identity which impact how we conceive immigrants and their *œuvres*. As such, this article will analyse two of Bhabha's most influential and simultaneously controversial concepts of hybridity and the 'Third Space', Hall's two-fold conception of identity, and Kristeva's psychoanalytical theories on foreignness.

## Culture, Identity, and the Uncanny

In *The Location of Culture*, classed as one of the founding texts in postcolonial theory, Homi Bhabha contends that universalist frameworks propound essentialist conceptions of culture and identity unable to accommodate the cultural difference characterising the modern nation 'marked by the discourses of minorities, the heterogeneous histories of contending peoples, antagonistic authorities and tense locations of cultural difference'.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Amar Acheraiou, *Questioning Hybridity, Postcolonialism and Globalization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). p. 134.

<sup>14</sup> Alec G. Hargreaves, 'The Contribution of North and Sub-Saharan African Immigrant Minorities to the Redefinition of Contemporary French Culture', in *Francophone Postcolonial Studies: A Critical Introduction*, ed. by Charles Forsdick and David Murphy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). pp. 145-54 (p. 147).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>16</sup> Ireland and Proulx, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> Bhabha, p. 212.

Bhabha proposes instead that culture and identity are constructed through cultural difference and hybridity; in so doing, he rejects that there is a pure, authentic, original state to which they can be traced back:<sup>18</sup>

What is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the articulation of cultural differences. These ‘inbetween’ spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself. It is in the emergence of the interstices – the overlap and displacement of domains of difference – that the intersubjective and collective experiences of nationness, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, privileging relationality, Bhabha removes identity, individual or communal, from the ‘reified, pedagogical realm’ to define it as a continuum; a process based upon ‘negotiation, remaking, performance and enunciation’.<sup>20</sup> The fact that cultures are constantly in a process of hybridity, open to transformation and translation, allows for anteriority in cultural identity, but never an essence, meaning that the ‘original’ is never whole or finished; it has never had ‘a totalised prior moment of being or meaning’.<sup>21</sup>

To describe the interstitial location in which this hybridity takes place, Bhabha coins the term ‘Third Space’, which, with links to the concept of slippage in Derridean deconstruction, ‘names the gap in enunciation between the subject of a proposition and the subject of the enunciation’.<sup>22</sup> In order to illustrate this slippage, he compares hybridity and the ‘Third Space’ to a stairwell:

The stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy...<sup>23</sup>

The ‘Third Space’ is, therefore, a site of enunciation and hybridity, which, rather than being the outcome of the exchange between different cultures, is the space which allows new positions to emerge. For Bhabha, the transformation which can take place in the ‘Third Space’ is the result of cultural translation (both as representation and reproduction) which involves ‘a self-othering process, one in which cultural sameness and difference are translated to allow for new and wider modes of personal and collective cultural identifications’.<sup>24</sup> It is

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<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Rutherford, ‘The Third Space: Interview with Homi Bhabha’, in *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. by Jonathan Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), pp. 207-21 (p. 220).

<sup>19</sup> Bhabha, p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> Fetson Kalua, ‘Revisiting postcolonial theory: Continuities and departures in the twenty-first century’, *English Academy Review*, 31.1 (2014), 66-76 (p. 71).

<sup>21</sup> Rutherford, p. 21.

<sup>22</sup> Jane Hiddleston, *Understanding Postcolonialism* (Stocksfeild: Acumen Publishing Limited, 2009), p. 115.

<sup>23</sup> Bhabha, p. 5.

<sup>24</sup> Acheraïou, p. 92.

this aspect of the ‘Third Space’s’ hybrid nature which leads Bhabha and many postcolonial scholars to see it as a potentially resistant as well as transformative space. The hybridity which arises from the encounter of different cultures allows the authority and discourse of the dominant culture to be questioned and subverted. As Childs has pointed out, in a postcolonial context this means that, in contrast to Said’s concept of ‘orientalism’, the colonised, or in this case the immigrant, is not completely determined by the discourse of the coloniser and the latter’s authority is ‘reflected, split, syncretized, and to an extent menaced, by its confrontation with its object’.<sup>25</sup> In a deconstructionist vein, Bhabha contends that the liminal and hybrid nature of the ‘Third Space’ means that essentialist discourses, such as those of nationhood, language and culture, based upon reductive, hierarchical binaries, can be subverted and rejected.

Nevertheless, whilst hybridity and the ‘Third Space’ are seen by Bhabha and many postcolonial scholars as the ‘conduits of a revolutionary politics of identity and cultural relationships’, several aspects of these concepts remain problematic.<sup>26</sup> Anthony Easthope notes that Bhabha’s adoption of the Derridean presence/difference binary perpetuates the same failure to define presence, which in this case is the identity which hybridity is capable of undermining. Instead of deconstructing this binary, he merely inverts it; privileging difference to the extent that hybridity is seen as a ‘transcendental signified’, difference becomes synonymous with non-identity in the face of an absolute, Cartesian self-consciousness. Thus, Bhabha fails to provide a relativised identity which accounts for the ‘coherence which is necessary for anyone to be a speaking subject’ within the framework of a continuum.<sup>27</sup> The necessarily emancipatory nature of the ‘Third Space’ is brought into question not only by this failure but also Bhabha’s suggestion that this site of cross-cultural/interracial exchange is neutral when, as Amar Acheraïou points out, it is subject to power relations operating ‘in the guise of a universal ethics of cultural exchange and solidarity’.<sup>28</sup> By extracting individuals from the socio-political discourses shaping their experiences, reference to the ‘Third Space’ may unwittingly reinforce the essentialist discourses Bhabha seeks to undermine when conceiving of identity as a continuum.

The explicit or implicit relationship that always exists between translation and power structures means that the ‘Third Space’ cannot be seen as a site in which power is simply destabilised and polarities are collapsed:

the third space is underpinned by an insidious totalizing drive that inscribes translation in a subtle struggle for meaning and construction of cultural identities. Moreover, for all its theoretical significance the third space of translation does not collapse the politics of polarity into a flat, disempowered narrative of equivalence and entropy. It merely reshapes the terms of the binary same-Other and, in so doing, it masks the will-to-power and hegemonic impulse inherent in cultural translations.<sup>29</sup>

In light of this, Acheraïou proposes that the ‘Third Space’ be abandoned altogether so that

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<sup>25</sup> Peter Childs, *An Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory* (London: Prentice Hall, 1997). p. 136.

<sup>26</sup> Acheraïou. p. 91.

<sup>27</sup> Anthony Easthope, ‘Bhabha, Hybridity and Identity’, *Textual Practice*, 12.2 (1998), 341-48 (p. 345).

<sup>28</sup> Bhabha, p. 56; Acheraïou, pp. 92-93.

<sup>29</sup> Acheraïou, pp. 92-93.

hybrid subjectivity can be integrated into the ‘realm of the possible’ where, ‘integrated as an equal part into the dominant archive of collective and individual identifications’, it can be conceived as an active agency which can (re)define its own identity.<sup>30</sup> Stuart Hall’s conceptualisation of identity as not just a continuum but also ‘production’ makes this kind of agency possible to envisage: ‘Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a ‘production’ which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, and not outside, representation’.<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, the second of Hall’s two conceptualisations of ‘cultural identity’ brings to light the role of unequal power relations in the formation of identity and how they can be undermined. The first definition of cultural identity he proposes is an essentialist understanding based upon the idea of a group culture and collective ‘oneness’ arising from shared historical experiences. This provides people with ‘stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history’. However, in contrast to Bhabha, Hall believes that this conception of identity is of value because of its central role in the ‘recovery’ of identity fundamental to, for example, ‘Caribbeanness’, black diaspora and post-colonial struggles throughout the world. The second definition of cultural identity is, according to Hall, more useful for analysing the traumatic nature of colonialism for those whose identities were produced for them by the colonisers. Its emphasis is not on the similarities between the past and the present but the many fissures which develop between them. As such, whilst acknowledging that its formation is within discourses of culture and history and that it is ‘subject to the continuous “play” of history, culture and power’, this second type of identity refuses to be fixed in an essentialised past. For Hall, identity in this sense is not just about ‘being’ but also of ‘becoming’, as it undergoes constant transformation, and a politics of ‘positioning’: ‘identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past’.<sup>32</sup>

The emphasis of this second definition upon the historical and social contingency of identity can elucidate how discourses inherited from French Imperialism ‘produce’ immigrants as a homogenous mass, and the traumatic impact of this ‘positioning’: ‘Le vécu de la discrimination et de la ségrégation, et peut-être plus encore le sentiment d’être défini par un déficit permanent de “civilisation” dans les discours du pouvoir, d’être soumis à des injonctions d’intégration au moment même où la société vous prive des moyens de la construire, évoquent directement la “colonie”’.<sup>33</sup> This conception of cultural identity can, therefore, illuminate not only how some people are ‘positioned’ and the potential violence of representation, but also the hierarchies which give some the authority to ‘produce’ some others in such a way as to maintain their own privilege within the system. Nonetheless, as

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p.188.

<sup>31</sup> Hall, p. 222.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., pp. 223-25.

<sup>33</sup> Ian Hussey, ‘Note on Stuart Hall’s “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”’, *Socialist Studies*, 10.1 (2014), 200-04 (p. 200); Didier Lapeyronnie, ‘La Banlieue comme théâtre colonial, ou la fracture coloniale dans les quartiers’, in *La Fracture coloniale : La société française au prisme de l’héritage colonial*, ed. by Sandrine Lemaire, Nicolas Bancel and Pascal Blanchard (Paris: La Découverte, 2006), pp. 209-18 (p. 214). ‘The experience of discrimination and of segregation, and perhaps even more of being defined by a permanent deficit of “civilisation” in discourses of power, of receiving orders to integrate into society at the same time as it deprives you of the very means to achieve this, directly evokes the “colony”’. Translation my own.

previously mentioned, the produced nature of identity also allows for internal resistance to these exteriorising discourses. In this way, analysing the ways in which immigrants in France are speaking out through literary texts, and also other mediums such as films and music, can reveal not just how they are challenging representations of themselves in, for example, politics or the media, but also how they are producing their own identities through self-representation.

However, it is necessary to look elsewhere to fully destabilise the self/‘Other’ dichotomy. Julia Kristeva’s *Étrangers à nous-mêmes* is concerned with the way in which immigrants in France are represented as a threatening, homologous group and the question she aims to answer in the text is how we can ‘intimement, subjectivement, vivre avec les autres, vivres autres, sans ostracisme mais aussi sans nivellement?’.<sup>34</sup> The solution which Kristeva proposes is based on Freud’s semantic analysis of the German words ‘heimlich’ and its antonym ‘unheimlich’ in *The Uncanny*. Freud points out the ambivalence of the former as its meaning overlaps with that of its antonym so that it can, at once, recall ideas of the familiar and the uncanny.<sup>35</sup> The presence of the uncanny within the familiar undermines the assumption that the uncanny arises only from the unknown and is therefore considered by Freud and Kristeva to be ‘une preuve étymologique de l’hypothèse psychanalytique selon laquelle “l’inquiétante étrangeté est cette variété particulière de l’effrayant qui remonte au depuis longtemps connu, depuis longtemps familier”’.<sup>36</sup> In this way, foreignness, normally attributed to the ‘Other’, becomes integral to the self through the unconscious:

Avec la notion freudienne d’inconscient, l’involution de l’étrange dans le psychisme perd son aspect pathologique et intègre au sein de l’unité présumée des hommes une *altérité* à la fois biologique *et* symbolique, qui devient partie intégrante du *même*. Désormais, l’étranger n’est ni une race ni une nation. L’étranger n’est ni magnifié comme *Volksgeist* secret, ni banni comme perturbateur de l’urbanité rationaliste. Inquiétante, l’étrangeté est en nous: nous sommes nos propres étrangers – nous sommes divisés.<sup>37</sup>

According to Kristeva, if this definition were to be widely accepted, the destabilising effect which it has on the self, whether individual or communal, could lead to a reorienting of approaches to foreignness, integration and difference in (French) society whereby the question becomes ‘non plus de l’accueil de l’étranger à l’intérieur d’un système qui l’annule, mais de la cohabitation de ces étrangers que nous reconnaissons tous être’.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes* (Paris: Fayard, 1988), p. 10; ‘intimately and subjectively, able to live with the others, to live as others, without ostracism but also without leveling?’. This, and all further translations, quoted from Julia Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, trans. by Léon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), here p. 2.

<sup>35</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘The ‘Uncanny’’, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVII (1917-1919): An Infantile Neurosis and Other Works*, ed. by James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955), pp. 217-256 (here p. 224).

<sup>36</sup> Kristeva, p. 270; ‘an etymological proof of the psychoanalytic hypothesis according to which “the uncanny is that class of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar”’ (p. 183)

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 268. ‘With the Freudian notion of the unconscious the involution of the strange in the psyche loses its pathological aspect and integrates within the assumed unity of human beings an otherness that is both biological and symbolic and becomes an integral part of the same. Henceforth the foreigner is neither a race nor a nation. The foreigner is neither glorified as a secret *Volksgeist* nor banished as disruptive of rationalist urbanity. Uncanny, foreignness is within us: we are our own foreigners, we are divided’ (p. 181 in translation).

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11: ‘no longer that of welcoming the foreigner within a system that obliterates him but of promoting the togetherness of those foreigners that we all recognize ourselves to be’ (pp. 2-3 in translation).

Whilst at first glance Kristeva's assertion of solidarity through the uncanniness of the unconscious working within all of us may seem to fall into the trap of offering the kind of universal concept for understanding cultural diversity against which Bhabha warns, this conceptualisation of identity in no ways precludes the difference which exists between people(s) or the ways in which their 'cultural practices construct their own systems of meaning and social organisation'.<sup>39</sup> In fact, it underlines the 'incompréhensibilité éternelle' of other people because the self necessarily also eludes understanding and pinpointing.<sup>40</sup> Thus, Kristeva's focus on the unconscious also undermines the Orientalist discourse denounced by Said, which purports to 'know' the 'Other' and uses this 'knowledge' to justify the West's acting upon and exerting power over the Orient.<sup>41</sup>

In *Postcolonial Remains*, Robert Young denounces the way in which, by an irresponsible approach to and use of the concepts of self and 'Other', some postcolonial scholars are inadvertently perpetuating the very dichotomy they should be subverting: 'Tolerance requires that there be no "other", that others should not be othered. We could say that there can be others, but there should be no othering of "the other"'.<sup>42</sup> By dissolving the self/'Other' binary, Kristeva's psychoanalytical approach offers a solution to avoid this 'othering' as she calls on citizens (and scholars) to avoid 'turning the otherness of the foreigner into a fascinating and also terrifying thing, in order to deny their own alterity'.<sup>43</sup> Thus, she proposes an ethico-political conception of foreignness which does not attempt to level out difference as, along with Bhabha, she believes that 'the time for 'assimilating' minorities to holistic and organic notions of cultural value has dramatically passed'.<sup>44</sup>

One of the weaknesses of *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, to which Woodhull calls attention, is the privileging of the 'foreigners within' to the 'foreigners without'. Kristeva falls into the trap of levelling the varied experiences of immigrants by not taking into account fundamental differences between them such as class, sex and ethnicity.<sup>45</sup> However, she is aware that her conception of identity cannot do away with the problems which do arise from cultural difference and cohabitation, and her own oversights do not preclude the application of her theory in literary analysis in a way which takes into account the unique environment in which each writer and text evolves.

Bhabha and Hall's theories highlight the ways in which an essentialised understanding of identity justifies and masks the unequal power relations played out on national territories between those who consider themselves to be native citizens and those they perceive as foreigners. However, the integral nature of relationality to identity and the possibility of resistance do not completely escape the reductive self/'Other' binary which Kristeva uproots in *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*. By bringing together these concepts, it is possible to make up for the elisions of each and to propose a general conception of identity which avoids essentialism and consequently allows for cultural difference without either demonising it as

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<sup>39</sup> Rutherford, p. 209.

<sup>40</sup> Victor Segalen, *Essai sur l'exotisme, une esthétique du divers* (Fontfroide: Bibliothèque artistique & littéraire, 1995), p. 25.

<sup>41</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 2003), p. xiii.

<sup>42</sup> Young, p. 36.

<sup>43</sup> Winnie Woodhull, 'Review: *Etrangers à nous-mêmes* by Julia Kristeva', *SubStance*, 19.2/3 (1990), 199-201 (p. 199).

<sup>44</sup> Bhabha, p. 251.

<sup>45</sup> Woodhull, p. 201.

a threat or overlooking the challenges which arise from hybridity. Furthermore, the polarities by which foreigners are deemed to be either completely knowable or wholly ‘Other’ are subverted by the natural uncanniness of the self which leads to an acknowledgement of the irreducible nature of every individual and the impossibility of anyone being completely alien.

The next question that must be asked is how theory and practice can come together. How can this understanding of identity as an irreducible continuum, produced within a complex nexus of power relations, be reflected in, and illuminate, the way scholars approach the literary works of so-called immigrant authors writing in French? Indeed, analyses which lose sight of this, however well-intentioned, risk reinforcing essentialised conceptions of identity and masking the inequalities faced by those labelled as ‘Others’. Given the importance of labels in the ‘positioning’ of the self or others, the next section will analyse the debate surrounding the contentious terms *francophone* and *francophonie*. The 2007 *littérature-monde* manifesto proposes a new approach to literature in French as it rebukes the use of these terms by publishers and scholars as exclusionary and hierarchical.<sup>46</sup> The extent to which this new approach, along with Edward Said’s concept of humanistic reading, allows for literary analyses which respect and illuminate the conception of identity outlined above will now be considered.

## ‘Immigrant’ Literature: Postcolonial theory versus *Littérature-monde*

Given the aim of francophone postcolonial studies to identify and subvert the (lingering) imperialist discourses from which power relations based on violence, domination and inequality emerge, it would seem to be a fruitful avenue through which immigrant literature in France could be explored.<sup>47</sup> However, one of the debates which often arises in this field is the use of the terms *francophonie* and *francophone*. One of the most evident legacies of France’s colonial empire is the fact that French is either the native language or widely spoken in thirty-four countries around the world, excluding Europe. This linguistic and cultural phenomenon is conveyed in the term *francophonie*. However, some theorists argue that the terms *francophonie* and *francophone* are problematic because they can be seen to perpetuate the exclusion and inequality intrinsic to colonial centre/periphery discourses: ‘La francophonie, émanation de la politique coloniale d’assimilation, relègue les locuteurs non français à une catégorie “autre”, marginale, impure, parasite’.<sup>48</sup> As Forsdick and Murphy highlight, when used to refer to all literature written in French except that coming from the *métropole* (or, indeed, written only by those considered to be autochthonous), ‘francophone literature [...] suggests a neo-colonial segregation and a hierarchisation of cultures’.<sup>49</sup> This

<sup>46</sup> Le Bris, ‘Pour une « littérature-monde » en français’, *Le Monde*, 15 March 2007.

<sup>47</sup> Young, p. 20.

<sup>48</sup> Charles Forsdick and David Murphy, ‘Introduction: the case for Francophone postcolonial studies’, in *Francophone Postcolonial Studies: A Critical Introduction*, ed. by Charles Forsdick and David Murphy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), pp. 1-16 (p. 7); Isabelle Constant, Kahiudi C. Mabana, and Philip Nanton, ‘Postface’, in *Antillanité, créolité, littérature-monde*, ed. by Isabelle Constant, Kahiudi C. Mabana, and Philip Nanton (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), pp. 149-52 (p. 149). ‘Francophonie, emanating from the colonial policy of assimilation, relegates speakers who are not French to the category of a marginal, impure, parasitical “other”’. Translation my own.

<sup>49</sup> Forsdick and Murphy, p. 3.

segregation is made particularly salient when the term ‘francophone’ is applied, as it often is, to the works of immigrants and their children, even if they are French citizens.

The maintenance of an exclusionary, nation-centred approach to literature is a concern for postcolonial studies generally because it not only perpetuates the imperialist self/ ‘Other’ binary, but also prevents the acceptance of the ‘worldliness of literature’.<sup>50</sup> Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’o suggests that applying national boundaries to literature is like ‘trying to contain a river’s flow within a specific territory’ and, thus, it is a counterproductive and unnatural task which impedes our ability to comprehend the ways in which literature can transcend national borders.<sup>51</sup> In light of these issues, Forsdick and Murphy, among others, propose that it is time to ‘decolonise’ the term ‘francophone literature’ by expanding its reference to include France and French culture as well.<sup>52</sup> In contrast, others theorists, such as Michel Beniamino, call for the abandonment of ‘French literature’ or ‘Francophone literature’ in favour of ‘literatures in French’ to draw attention to the multiplicity and diversity of these literatures.<sup>53</sup>

Beniamino’s position is echoed by the proponents of the *littérature-monde* movement, including Gary Victor, who states: ‘Donner une nationalité au sens strict à la création, c’est la fossiliser, l’exclure de certains lieux et l’empêcher de déployer librement ses ailes’.<sup>54</sup> This concern is at the heart of the movement launched in 2007 with the *Pour une littérature-monde en français* manifesto which had forty-five renowned French speaking signatories from all around the world and was shortly followed by a collection of essays. Given that ‘Personne ne parle le francophone, ni n’écrit en francophone’, they call for the term ‘francophonie’ and the reductive conception of literature it entails, to be replaced by the more outward-looking and transnational *littérature-monde*.<sup>55</sup> They hope to liberate the French language from its ‘pacte exclusif avec la nation’ and also counter the difficulties faced by authors who are labelled as francophone when it comes to getting their work recognised and published.<sup>56</sup>

This call for the uprooting of neo-colonial power structures and the valorisation of authors and literatures proceeding from the ‘peripheries’ would seem to make *littérature-monde* a plausible and attractive solution to examine the difficulties faced by immigrant authors in marginalised communities within the metropole. However, whilst some theorists have praised the movement’s attempt to dissolve the French/francophone hierarchy, it has been criticised as overly simplistic in asserting that abandoning the term ‘francophone’ ‘ferait magiquement disparaître le mépris ou la condescendance que manifeste une partie

<sup>50</sup> Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong’o, *Globalectics: Theory and the Politics of Knowing* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), p. 47.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, p.47.

<sup>52</sup> Forsdick and Murphy, p. 7.

<sup>53</sup> Ching Selao, *Le Roman vietnamien francophone : orientalisme, occidentalisme et hybridité* (Montreal: Les Presses de l’Université de Montréal, 2011), pp. 24-25.

<sup>54</sup> Gary Victor, ‘Littérature-monde ou liberté d’être’, in *Pour une littérature-monde*, ed. by Michel Le Bris and Jean Rouaud (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), pp. 315-20 (p. 315). ‘Applying a nationality to the creation fossilises it, excludes it from certain places and prevents it from fully spreading its wings’. Translation my own.

<sup>55</sup> Le Bris (2007); Jane Hiddleston, ‘Littérature-monde and Old/New Humanism’, in *Transnational French Studies: Postcolonialism and Littérature-monde*, ed. by Alec G. Hargreaves, Charles Forsdick, and David Murphy (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), pp. 178-92 (p. 178).

<sup>56</sup> Hiddleston (2010), p. 178.

de l'institution littéraire parisienne à l'égard des écrivains dits francophones'.<sup>57</sup> Two of the main critiques of *littérature-monde* made by francophone postcolonial scholars are that it is oblivious to both the 'impact of colonialism and decolonisation on literary history' and the importance of 'deep structures of national belonging and economic interest contouring the international culture industry'.<sup>58</sup> The former continues to shape and inform the literatures of immigrant authors with origins in the former empire and the latter has a significant impact on how their works are received. As such, the movement's apolitical stance risks overlooking aspects which are key to the experiences and artistic works of individuals from ethnic minority or immigrant communities in France.

Moreover, in spite of nods to writers winning prestigious literary prizes in 2007 such as Marie NDiaye, sometimes wrongly labelled as an immigrant author because her father is Senegalese, their assertion that the French metropole is part of a constellation, a 'centre relégué au milieu d'autres centres', neglects sections of the internal periphery inhabited by ethnic minority writers.<sup>59</sup> Although Le Bris is interested in the work of authors he considers to be 'à cheval entre plusieurs cultures' and their potential to give new life to literature, it is interesting to note that the manifesto does not have a single 'beur' or 'banlieue' signatory.<sup>60</sup> Le Bris' disregard for literatures emerging from France's disadvantaged banlieues is particularly conspicuous in an interview conducted by Laura Reeck in which, when asked about the views of the manifesto's signatories regarding the 2005 riots, he asserts that it was not their concern. For Reeck, this illustrates the exclusion of writers from the banlieues from the supposedly inclusive *littérature-monde* movement and emphasises the fact that 'No one sees the second-generation ethnic minority authors in France as their own. When they are not overlooked, they are misrepresented, ghettoised, or oversimplified'.<sup>61</sup> In this vein, *littérature-monde's* partisanship means that it fails to meet the needs of an important part of France's internal periphery and, in fact, reinforces the reductive, hierarchical self/'Other' binary which it aims to subvert by rejecting the term 'francophone'.

As the *littérature-monde* movement fails to destabilise essentialist binaries or account for the real socio-political and economic inequalities shaping the experiences of those positioned as foreigners on French soil, it cannot provide postcolonial scholars with the means to effectively analyse their *œuvres*. Whilst labels must be interrogated, a more general framework is required to bring the particular and unique nature of the novels and the contexts informing them to light and, thus, avoid reductive conceptions of either. Said's concept of humanistic reading, based on two phases, 'reception' and 'resistance', encourages this kind of analysis. Said intends this approach to be a 'model of coexistence' which would allow societies to acknowledge and deal with the various forms of injustices and disparities

<sup>57</sup> Selao 'would make the disdain or condescension which part of the Parisian literary institution manifests towards so-called francophone authors magically disappear.' (p. 40) Translation my own.

<sup>58</sup> Emily Apter, 'Afterword: The "World" in World Literature', in *Transnational French Studies: Postcolonialism and Littérature-Monde*, ed. by Alec G. Hargreaves, Charles Forsdick and David Murphy, Francophone Postcolonial Studies, 1 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), pp. 287-95 (p. 288).

<sup>59</sup> Le Bris, 'Pour une « littérature-monde » en français', *Le Monde*, 15 March 2007. 'A centre relegated in the middle of other centres.' Translation my own.

<sup>60</sup> Michel Le Bris, 'Pour une littérature-monde en français', in *Pour une littérature-monde*, ed. by Michel Le Bris and Jean Rouaud (Paris: Gallimard, 2007), pp. 23-53 (p. 35). 'Straddling multiple cultures.' Translation my own.

<sup>61</sup> Laura Reeck, 'The World and the Mirror in Two Twenty-First-Century Manifestos: 'Pour une "littérature-monde" en français' and 'Qui fait la France ?'', in *Transnational French Studies: Postcolonialism and Littérature-Monde*, ed. by Alec G. Hargreaves, Charles Forsdick and David Murphy, Francophone Postcolonial Studies, 1 (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), pp. 258-73 (pp. 269-70).

present in multiculturalist societies. This model of coexistence integrates his concept of ‘wordliness’ (which refers to the way in which all texts and representations are informed by the social, cultural and historical contexts in which they are written and, also, interpreted).<sup>62</sup> Hence, the first element of humanist reading — that of reception — involves a close reading in which the theorist must aim to put themselves in the author’s shoes in order to ‘locate the text in its time as part of a whole network of relationships whose outlines and influence play an informing role *in the text*’.<sup>63</sup> For Jane Hiddleston, this attentive reading is characterised by ‘an ethical openness to the complexity of cultural difference’ and its integrative nature would, as such, ‘offer resistance to the great reductive and vulgarising us-versus-them thought patterns of our time’.<sup>64</sup> The second, resistance stage in Said’s model focuses on the wider horizon of the context in which a work is interpreted. For Said, the interpretative framework, the societal, institutional, educational or other limitations which impact the reader, must be understood so that, in a humanistic vein, these confinements may be challenged.

Both of these stages are indispensable for an effective analysis not just of the texts but also of the latent power structures informing their creation and consumption. The highly self-reflexive nature of the field of francophone postcolonial studies, whereby it constantly questions issues like its use of labels or the position from which a scholar is analysing a text, is evidence of its engagement in this resistance stage. However, Said’s warning against rushing too quickly from the close reading of reception to the wider horizon of resistance is worth reiterating. This reception stage is vital if scholars hope to undermine othering and homogenising discourses in contemporary France and also to reveal the authors’ agency when their texts represent a form of self-production. Two complementary examples upon which we can draw are Auerbach’s literary analyses in *Mimesis* and Segalen’s approach to writing. For Said, Auerbach’s seemingly ‘infallible interpretive skill for elucidating relationships between books and the world they belonged to’ is the kind of close reading to which all scholars in the humanities should aspire.<sup>65</sup> Said’s assertion that, in order to achieve this, it is necessary to try and live the reality of the author, to be able to see through their eyes, is suggestive of Segalen’s approach to his novels on foreign peoples such as the Polynesians. Segalen’s respectful affirmation of the impossibility of fully knowing or representing ‘un hors soi-même’ is reminiscent of Kristeva’s call for us to respect the individual’s irreducibility. As a result, Segalen’s in-depth studies, so thorough that his novel *Les Immémoriaux* was often classed as an ethnographic text, allow him and his reader to draw closer to people from different cultures without ever essentialising this difference or their identities.<sup>66</sup>

Literary scholars must also maintain this precarious balance between a hopeful, ethical proximity to, and respectful distance from, the cultural difference they encounter within and beyond the novels. Describing this paradox, Said asserts that ‘the intellectual’s provisional home is the domain of an exigent, resistant, intransigent art into which, alas, one can neither retreat nor search for solutions. But only in that precarious exilic realm can one first truly

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<sup>62</sup> Edward W. Said, *Humanism and Democratic Criticism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 49.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 61–62.

<sup>64</sup> Hiddleston, p. 189; Said (2004), p. 50.

<sup>65</sup> Said (2004), p. 87.

<sup>66</sup> Segalen, p. 25 ; Henry Bouillier, *Victor Segalen* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1986), p. 127.

grasp the difficulty of what cannot be grasped and then go forth to try anyway'.<sup>67</sup> Only through serious close-reading paired with perceptive self-reflexivity can scholars hope to do justice to the diversity of the texts being written by the multifarious so-called immigrant authors in France and illuminate the relationship between these works and their environment. The varying degrees of marginalisation which writers originating from former colonies face are merely a symptom of reductive, discriminatory conceptions of foreignness. This means that their works are recognised as French only with great difficulty. It is, therefore, with urgency that postcolonial scholars must turn their attention to these works and, with the non-essentialising, relational and irreducible conception of identity proposed, reveal and subvert the prevailing exclusionary and hierarchical discourses and power structures which impact these authors and their texts.

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<sup>67</sup> Said (2004), p. 144.

- versity Press, 2003), pp. 1-16
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