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Planting Rhizomes: Roots and Rhizomes in Maryse Condé's Traversée de la Mangrove and Calixthe Beyala's Le Petit Prince de Belleville

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PLANTING RHIZOMES: ROOTS AND RHIZOMES IN MARYSE CONDÉ'S TRAVERSÉE DE LA MANGROVE AND CALIXTHE BEYALA'S LE PETIT PRINCE DE BELLEVILLE

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to God, who has been my constant source of strength and inspiration throughout this journey.

I also dedicate this thesis to my parents, Rev. John and Mrs. Mercy Djebah Kpadamrophe, who instilled in me a deep value for education from a young age. Your unwavering support, encouragement, and sacrifices have brought me to this point in my academic journey, and I am deeply grateful for everything you have done for me.

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ABSTRACT

For centuries, migration has played a crucial role in the development of human civilization, with the transplantation of cultures from one region to another shaping identities worldwide. The African diaspora, beginning with the Atlantic Slave Trade, saw the forced transportation of around 12 million Africans across the ocean, resulting in the creation of creole identities in the Antilles. Literature has long reflected the experiences of migrants. In Maryse Condé's *Traversée de la Mangrove* and Calixthe Beyala's *Le Petit Prince de Belleville*, the complexity of Antillean and Afro-French identities is explored. This thesis delves into how Condé's work highlights the interconnected and decentralized nature of the Antilles, while Beyala's novel showcases the transformation of France's traditional structure into a more fluid and decentralized one. By providing new insights into the cultural and social contexts of the French Caribbean and France, this thesis offers a fresh perspective on these texts, revealing their underlying themes.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Martinican writer Edouard Glissant remains a colossus in French and Antillean literature. Twelve years after his death, his theories on cultural identity, like prophecies from the oracle of Delphi, remain relevant in navigating the changing dynamics of cultural identities within the global sphere. Glissant was born in Martinique in 1928 and spent much of his life writing and teaching in France, where he was a professor at the Sorbonne. Glissant's work focuses on the ways in which colonized societies navigate the complexities of identity and belonging in a post-colonial context. One of his most notable contributions to post-colonial theory is his concept of the rhizome, which he explained in his book *Introduction à une poétique du divers* (1996).

In an interview published by the French newspaper *Le Monde* in 2011, Glissant explains that "*identité-rhizome"* is a better alternative to fixed and homogenous cultural identities, which had been the approach of some cultural theorists. But what does Glissant mean by "*identité-rhizome*"? He builds and expands on Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's rhizome theory, which they explored in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980). They formulated the theory of the rhizome and the root as antithetical elements of Western civilization. According to Deleuze and Guattari, "binary logic is the spiritual reality of the root tree" (5). In other words, the root tree is a metaphor for homogeneity. A root tree is composed primarily of a root from which the tree grows. All parts of the tree trace their origins to the root; it is the foundation upon which the tree must stand and grow. Deleuze and Guattari contrast the root tree with the rhizome, a plant that "connects any point to

any other point, and its traits are not necessarily linked to traits of the same nature" (21). In other words, the rhizome is heterogenous; it does not follow the root tree's binary logic but follows the hybridity logic. The rhizome "ceaselessly establishes connection between semiotic chains, organizations of power, and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences, and social struggles." (7). In other words, the rhizome breaks the hegemonic nature of the root tree and offers an alternative—a structure that encourages interconnectedness, hybridity, and unity in diversity. The rhizome is characterized by its non-hierarchical, multi-directional, and open-ended growth structure and is seen as a valuable metaphor for the complex and dynamic nature of cultural and political systems. In extending the scope of the reach of this theory to the arts, sciences, and "social struggles," Deleuze and Guattari set up this theory to be used not just for literary analysis but for a broader analysis of the world in order to revolutionize cultures in a post-modern world.

Edouard Glissant theorizes that nations are evolving from the root tree to the rhizome. In *Introduction à une poétique du divers*, Glissant argues that the root tree kills plants around it while the rhizome reaches out to meet other roots (15). In other words, the rhizome encourages creolization: the process by which elements from different backgrounds come together to form a new, hybrid culture. In contrasting the nature of the two structures, Glissant is attempting to forge a new lens for viewing identity within the Antilles as well as in France. Furthermore, he describes the root tree as atavistic and the rhizome as composite (15). The essence of Glissant's argument is that rhizomatic cultures allow for unifying various cultural elements that may seem different. In this unification of differences, creolization is formed. Glissant's concept of the rhizome is important for understanding the experiences of individuals and communities in a globalized world

because it highlights the importance of understanding the complexity and interconnectedness of different perspectives and experiences. It also emphasizes the importance of recognizing and valuing the diverse voices and perspectives that make up a community.

Edouard Glissant's analysis of the rhizome differs from Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome theory in several ways. First, Glissant's focus is on the cultural and social implications of the rhizome as a model for understanding identity and diversity. He sees the rhizome as a metaphor for the creolization process. Glissant's emphasis on creolization as a key aspect of the rhizome also differs from Deleuze and Guattari's focus on the rhizome as a model of multiplicity and non-hierarchical organization. Deleuze and Guattari see the rhizome as a way of breaking down the rigid boundaries that limit and categorize knowledge and experience. They see it as a way of creating new connections and possibilities that challenge existing structures of power and control. Whereas Glissant is more concerned about the social and political implications of creolization. In addition to these differences, Glissant's analysis of the rhizome also adds to Deleuze and Guattari's theory. For example, Glissant views the rhizome as a model for understanding the complex and diverse identities of people living in the Antilles and France. He sees the rhizome as a way of capturing the multiple, intersecting cultural and historical influences that shape the identities of these communities. This contrasts with Deleuze and Guattari's focus on the rhizome as a model of multiplicity and non-hierarchical organization, which may not fully capture the complexities of cultural identity. Thus, the Glissantian rhizome theory captures, through a sociocultural lens, the rhizomatic structure of the Antilles and the changing structure of France from a root to a rhizome.

The discussion of Deleuze and Guattari's rhizome theory as a model of multiplicity and non-hierarchical organization takes a literary turn in Maryse Condé's *Traversée de la mangrove*. Literature is essential in this context because it allows for a more nuanced understanding of the cultural complexities that theory alone cannot capture. Through the narrative of *Traversée de la mangrove*, the reader is immersed in the lived experiences of the inhabitants of Condé's fictional Guadeloupean village, Rivière au Sel, providing a more profound insight into the rhizomatic structure of Antillean identity. The novel's characters and their relationships mirror the rhizome's interconnectedness and non-hierarchical nature, bringing the theory to life in a way that theory alone cannot achieve.

Calixthe Beyala, on the other hand, through her novel, *Le petit prince de Belleville*, offers a critical exploration of the evolution of the metropole from a root to a rhizome and the complex relationship between the two. Through the eyes of a young Malian immigrant named Mamadou Traoré, alias Loukoum, the reader experiences the realities of life in Belleville, a diverse working-class neighborhood in Paris. Beyala's choice of title highlights the novel's satirical nature, as her "little prince" is not the typical white French boy, but a person of color navigating the complexities of post-colonial France. Through Loukoum's father, Abdou Traoré's monologues, Beyala exposes numerous criticisms of modern-day France, particularly regarding the challenges faced by migrant communities. The novel suggests that the Metropole is being creolized due to the rise in immigration. While there are undoubtedly challenges and problems associated with this, the increasing number of migrant communities is a clear indication of the changing social structure of the Metropole from a root to a rhizome. Beyala's work serves

as a critical commentary on contemporary French society, highlighting the challenges of a multicultural metropole.

Although both books deal with different regions of the world, they fundamentally deal with the dialectic relationship between root and rhizomatic identities in diasporic communities. Both authors depict the emergence of the rhizome in communities where the root logic seems prevalent. Belleville and Rivière au Sel are diasporic communities where various identities cohabit. Rivière au Sel was formed primarily through forced migration—the transatlantic slave trade. In contrast, the diasporic community within Belleville was developed primarily through contemporary immigration, which is often engendered mainly by economic constraints. As a result of this migration from Africa and other parts of the world to France, there is a transplantation of cultures to the Metropole. As these cultures interact and mix, creole identities and languages are formed. This phenomenon seems to be at an early stage, but Beyala's novel demonstrates that the rhizome is replacing the logic of the root tree in France due to globalization.

In the first part of this thesis, I juxtapose root and rhizomatic identities as they appear within Condé's *Traversée de la mangrove.* The narrative structure, as well as the lived experiences of the villagers, show the presence of a rhizome. Still, root-like identities appear within the novel as some of the characters attempt to claim homogeneous identities as opposed to heterogeneous identities. Condé shows through her main character, Francis Sancher, that despite the prevalence of the root logic, a rhizome lurks beneath the murky waters of Rivière au Sel.

In the second part of this thesis, I show, through Beyala's *Le petit prince de Belleville*, the changing structure of France from a root to a rhizome. Just like the black

Antilleans in Condé's *Traversée de la mangrove,* I argue that the black immigrants in Belleville are similarly transcending the root logic of a return to Africa. Most do not look back to Africa but seek a place within the Metropole. I argue that in Beyala's novel a fundamental distinction exists between first and second-generation immigrants: most first-generation immigrants are still nostalgic for the past. In contrast, most second-generation immigrants are hybrid beings caught between their native culture and that of the Metropole. I also argue that although créolité is a theory often associated with the Antilles, it is fast becoming a theory associated with other regions of the world. As I will explain in this thesis, immigration, a natural effect of globalization and technological advancements, are changing the cultural structure of the Metropole.

CHAPTER 2: ROOTS AND RHIZOMES IN MARYSE CONDÉ'S TRAVERSÉE DE LA MANGROVE

In *Le discours antillais*, Edouard Glissant describes the Antilles as a "population de transplantées" (175). In other words, the Antilles are made up primarily of individuals whose families were transported there from different parts of the world voluntarily or, in most cases, by force. Consequently, the various groups have lived together for many years, evolving from a society structured around the plantation system to a modern industrial society. Theories such as Negritude, Antillanity, and Creolité have reflected the evolution of Antillean consciousness concerning cultural identity over the years. These movements have been articulated primarily through poetry and novels. The genre of the novel has been crucial in the articulation of these movements because it allows for the exploration of complex historical, social, and cultural themes in a way that is both accessible and engaging for readers. The novel has also been a popular and accessible form of literature, making it an effective tool for disseminating ideas and promoting social and political change in the Antilles.

Maryse Condé's *Traversée de la mangrove* captures the complex structure of Antillean identity. Condé, aware of the complexities in the Antilles, writes as an insider as well as an outsider: She is an insider because she was born in the Antilles; she is an outsider because *Traversée de la mangrove* was published three years after her return to Guadeloupe, after spending many years in France, Africa, and America. She explains that she had to be reborn after her return to Guadeloupe in 1986 (Clark et al. 110). Her rebirth

was necessary because when she left Guadeloupe at the age of sixteen, she knew little about Antillean cultures: “A seize ans, quand je partis commencer mes études supérieures à Paris, j’ignorais le créole. N’ayant jamais assister à un « lewoz », je ne connaissais pas les rythmes de la danse traditionnelle, le gwoka. Même la nourriture antillaise, je la jugeais grossière et sans apprêt” (Condé, *La vie sans fards* 15). As a result of this rupture from the Antilles at a young age, *Traversée de la mangrove* represents her analysis of Antillean culture as one who has observed the region from afar and from within. It is also worth noting that this novel was the first novel written by Condé that focused exclusively on Guadeloupe. Thus, *Traversée de la Mangrove* is Condé’s exegesis of Antillean identity. Hence, her main character, Francis Sancher is Condé’s surrogate—the Antillean who has just returned home after many years of being a nomad outside the Antilles. This is emphasized by the fact that Sancher is a writer who is also writing a novel titled, “*Traversée de la mangrove*” (192). This technique of using a surrogate character is one that Condé uses quite a lot. In her novel *Heremakhonon* (1976), the main character, Veronica, also personifies the lived experiences of Maryse Condé, especially of her time in Africa. Along the same lines, Condé exposes through Sancher, her non-romanticized perception of Antillean culture.

Francis’s origin remains a mystery throughout the novel. Mira, Francis’s lover, and daughter of a white farmer, Loulou Lameaulnes imagines the inhabitants of Rivière au Sel talking about Francis: “Aïe, c’était un vagabond qui est venu enterrer sa pourriture chez nous! On ne sait même pas si c’était un Blanc, un Nègre, un Zindien. Il avait tous les sangs dans son corps ! ” (229). In making this comment, Mira is making us aware of two realities: Firstly, the villagers see Sancher as an outsider even though he claims to

trace his roots to the village (61). He doesn't fit into Rivière au Sel because he is constantly othered by the villagers. Secondly, Sancher's identity is vague: he is seen as white, black, and Indian—an embodiment of some of the races that are found in the Antilles. This fluidity and vagueness are what make Sancher such a unique character. Having traveled the world, he has brought the identities of various regions to a small Antillean village. This embodiment of various identities explains why he is persecuted by almost everyone in the village : "Car tous, à un moment donné, avaient traité Francis de vagabond et de chien et ces derniers ne doivent-ils pas crever dans l'indifférence ?" (20). In other words, Sancher was othered by everyone in the village at one time or another. Sancher was hated because, to everyone, he was an Other. If he was seen as white, black, and Indian, as Mira claimed, then this explains the othering he experiences in Rivière au Sel. Rivière au Sel is a metaphor for the Antilles, a region of diverse cultures struggling to come to grips with her diversity and origins. Sancher is the embodiment of the complexity that lies within the Antilles.

The Antilles is a region composed of people whose origins are obscure due to years of slavery, colonization, and intermarriage between races. In describing the Antilles, Edouard Glissant states, "Il n'y a ni possession de la terre, ni complicité avec la terre, ni Espoir en la terre. La prodigalité (on l'apparente insouciance) dont semblaient faire preuve les Martiniquais relève de ce sentiment obscur d'être littéralement de passage sur leur terre" (Glissant, *Le discours antillais* 149). Glissant's point is that the idea of a shared heritage and history in the Antilles is a myth because, for many years, the prevailing attitude in the islands of the Antilles has been one of passage and not ownership. He describes the overall sentiment as one of "prodigalité." For Glissant, the

Antilleans have not developed the concept of the motherland, an idea that is a fundamental element in creating a nationalistic spirit. It is this sentiment of prodigality that Condé attempts to show through the mysterious Francis Sancher. He is a mystery to the villagers as well as to the readers. He claims to trace his origin to Guadeloupe, but there is no concrete evidence to support his claims; he is a prodigal, a vagabond, that has arrived in the mangrove of Rivière au Sel after years of being a nomad. His lack of connection to any specific place or people represents the dispossession felt by many in the Antilles. He is not rooted in any culture or any land; instead, he is a flâneur, dispossessed of his land, journeying literally and metaphorically in search of his identity. Thus, he personifies the Antillean historical experience, one that has been largely shaped by transatlantic migration. For Sancher, he did not come to Rivière au Sel to pass through the land but to die (107). But what is the significance of Sancher's death?

The novel begins with the discovery of the dead Francis Sancher by a retired schoolteacher, Léocadie Timothée (13). His death immediately takes center stage in the narrative as the villagers recount their encounters with the mysterious Francis Sancher. If, as stated above, Sancher is the embodiment of Antillean identities, then his death has a revelatory capacity: he must die to reveal the interconnected roots that lie below the mangrove, a contrast to what seems to appear on the surface—individual root trees. Jennifer Wahl states, "the rhizomatic mangrove creates a singular plane from which shoots rise above the water's surface. To a casual observer who sees the shoots rise above the ground, they appear to be separate plants; however, the shoots are connected to one another along laterally oriented, tightly connected, and intertwined roots (5). Wahl's point is that rhizomes do not immediately appear as interconnected structures until their

roots are revealed. Thus, the mystery behind Sancher's death is that the roots that connect the villagers of Rivière au Sel are exposed after his death. Death is sometimes regarded as a unifying force because it is familiar to everyone, regardless of race or ethnicity. Hence, Sancher's death brings the village together as they all begin to speak one after another.

In the novel's second part, nineteen individuals share their stories, but the unifying factor in these stories is their encounter with Francis Sancher. Thus, Sancher has penetrated the lives of everyone in Rivière au Sel and vice-versa. No matter the race, every family seems to have interacted in some way with the deceased Sancher. This means that Sancher, though dead, lives in the villagers' tales and genealogy. Like an invisible rope, he has connected them through interactions with them in one way or another.

Consequently, the entire village has gathered for his wake. Whites, blacks, Indians, foreigners, mulattos, gardeners, and the rich have all gathered at the wake of the late Francis Sancher. According to Patrick Ffrench, "through the sacrifice of Sancher the community moves towards a recognition and an acceptance of the strangeness or of the difference which constitutes it" (99). In other words, the death of Sancher bears a messianic significance. He is the quintessential messianic figure: he has come to die, and his death has birthed a new epoch for the people of Rivière au Sel. At the end of the novel, they arrive at a sudden awakening, a realization that Francis Sancher was indeed a messianic messenger:

> Qui était-il en réalité cet homme qui avait choisi de mourir parmi eux ? N'était-il pas un envoyé, le messager de quelque force surnaturelle ? ...Peut-être faudrait-il désormais guetter les lucarnes mouillées du ciel pour le voir réapparaître

> souverain et recueillir enfin le miel de sa sagesse ? Comme certains se rapprochaient de la fenêtre pour guetter la couleur du devant-jour, ils virent se dessiner un arc-en-ciel et cela leur parut un signe que le défunt n'était en vérité pas ordinaire. (251)

This sudden realization of Sancher as a messianic figure and the appearance of a rainbow as the villagers speak about him shows that they have arrived at a certain level of enlightenment by properly recognizing Sancher. This enlightenment is the realization of their interconnectedness, as signified by the appearance of the rainbow. In Christian tradition, the rainbow is a sign of the covenant between God and man, a new beginning after the biblical floods that destroyed the earth. The rainbow also signifies peace and unity in diversity. Thus, in writing about the appearance of the rainbow at the end of the novel, Condé is making us aware of the fact that Sancher's death has birthed a new era in Rivière au Sel. The rainbow appears at dawn, just as the wake ends. Hence, the rainbow signifies the announcement of a new beginning for a people whose identities had been built on differences. Thus, Mira, Sancher's first lover in Rivière au Sel and daughter of a white farmer, declares that her life starts with Sancher's death (231). In other words, she experiences a personal awakening because of Sancher's death.

Mira's awakening was needed because she was a victim of xenophobia. Still, she also saw herself as different and better than others because of her light skin: "Les gens de Rivière au Sel ne m'aiment pas. Les femmes recitent leurs prières à la Sainte Vierge quand elles croisent mon chemin… Sans doute que je suis trop belle pour leur laideur, trop claire pour la noirceur de leurs peaux et de leurs cœurs " (57). Mira's point is that she is othered because she is more beautiful than others and lighter in complexion than

other women. She equates beauty with skin color. Mira, as a member of a white family, understands the racial tensions within the land and the hierarchical structure of racial relations. Light skin is seen as better than dark skin. Consequently, in the Antillean racial hierarchy, whites are on top, "mulattos" come second, and blacks come last. As a result of the crystallization of this hierarchical tree within the consciousness of Antilleans, Camélien Ramsaran, a member of an Indian family, respects and honors the Lameaulness, a family that is described as "almost white" because of their color and the relative prosperity they have been able to achieve (176).

Similarly, Mira understands that being light-skinned is a thing of prestige that increases one's social status. Consequently, she equates beauty with light skin because the society has been socially constructed to see white as better and superior to black. As a result of this hierarchy, whitening oneself is seen as a way of salvation. According to Franz Fanon, "it is commonplace in Martinique to dream of whitening oneself magically as a way of salvation" (27). This desire to whiten oneself is not an isolated incident, but it is the case in many regions that Europeans have colonized. Colonization thrives in making the colonized feel inferior based on race, religion, and culture. Consider the case of female Martinican students in France, which Fanon cites in *Black Skin, White Masks*: "We know a lot of girls from Martinique, students in France, who confess in lily-white innocence that they would never marry a black man. (Choose to go back there once you've escaped? No, thank you.) Besides, they add, it's not that we want to downplay the credentials of the black man, but you know it's better to be white" (30). Although such behavior is not as commonplace as in 1952 when Fanon published *Black Skin, White Masks*, it shows the racial structure and psychosis crystalized in the Antilles as a result of

decades of slavery and colonization. Fanon's exposure of the inferiority complex of the black Antillean ladies is not a unique case but one that has been well explored in Antillean history and literature. Therefore, Mira's comparison of dark and white skin follows the binary logic of the root tree crystallized by years of slavery and colonization. This binary logic of analyzing identity within the Antilles is a theme that appears several times in *Traversée de la mangrove.*

2.1 The Logic of the Root Tree

According to Deleuze and Guattari, "the Tree or Root as an image, endlessly develops the law of the One that becomes two, then of the two that become four…Binary logic is the spiritual reality of the root-tree" (5). In other words, the root tree as a cultural theory traces the sociofacts and mentifacts of a society to a unique source—the root. It is from the root that other cultural elements of society find their source. The root tree logic often emphasizes the superiority of a race or people. Thus, the root tree logic is characterized by the emphasis on difference and the cognitive and cultural advancement of a specific culture over others. A society where the root tree logic prevails is a society where homogeneity is emphasized over heterogeneity; hence, people will often trace their cultural identity to a root source from which other elements of culture find their origin.

In the Antilles, the root tree logic was formed by years of slavery and colonization. Having suffered from various forms of discrimination for many decades, the Antillean feels the need to reclaim an idealized past or claim the identity of the colonizer. In *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon writes: "The Antillean does not possess a personal value of his own and is always dependent on the presence of 'the Other'…The inferiorized one believes he has to enhance his standing, and the other is determined to

keep his own superiority" (186). In other words, one of the fundamental characteristics of the Antilles is the desire to show cultural and intellectual dominance over others. Fanon sees this desire as a neurotic response to years of oppression and othering. Having lived for many decades in a society where racial and cultural hierarchies were crystalized in order to maintain the system of slavery, the Antillean has been psychically conditioned to emphasize racial and cultural superiority in relations with others. Thus, the root tree logic has prospered in the Antilles due to the social structures held since the era of slave plantations.

This logic of the root tree is expressed several times in *Traversée de la mangrove*. For example, Loulou Lameaulnes, a farmer who traces his roots to Europe, extols the superiority of his race:

> Dans les livres d'histoire, on appelle nos ancêtres les Découvreurs. D'accord, ils ont sali leur sang avec des Nègresses ; dans ton cas je crois avec des Indiennes. Pourtant nous n'avons rien de commun avec ces Nègres à tête guinée, ces cultivateurs qui ont toujours manie le coutelas ou conduit le cabrouet a bœufs pour notre compte. Ne traite pas Mira comme si elle était l'enfant d'un de ces rien-du-tout (127).

In the above citation, Loulou, Mira's father, is speaking to Francis Sancher to dissuade him from treating Mira like an everyday lady. For Loulou, even though his ancestors were great "explorers," they "sullied" their blood by procreating with blacks. He also tries to make Sancher see that even though his ancestors "sullied" their blood with the Indians, they are fundamentally similar because he claims they can both trace their ancestry to the "explorers"—the Europeans. According to Deleuze and Guattari, "there is

always something genealogical about a tree" (8). Thus, Loulou's attention to ancestry shows that he visualizes cultural identity through the logic of the root tree. Even though he understands that he is living in a society that is comprised of diverse cultural identities, he emphasizes the superiority of his race and culture above all others. In emphasizing the superiority of his race, he asserts the hierarchical structure that has kept his family wealthy for many decades. He knows that his status as a wealthy farmer was shaped mainly and maintained by this crystallization of his racial superiority. He uses the possessive adjective, nos [our], and the personal pronoun, nous [we], to emphasize to Sancher their similarities based on the root logic of racial superiority. For Loulou, society is structured in binaries: rich/poor, bourgeois/proletariat, black/white, and autochthone/immigrants. This binary logic is further exposed by his hatred of immigrants. His son Joby states : "Dès qu'on avait entendu que c'était un Cubain, papa avait déclaré qu'il y avait trop d'étrangers en Guadeloupe et qu'il aurait fallu l'expulser avec tous ces Dominicains et ces Haïtiens" (95). In other words, Loulou feels that all immigrants must be deported from Rivière au Sel because, through his root tree logic, he views them fundamentally as the Other. Othering is a consequence of the root logic of cultural identity. Discrimination stems from seeing others as members of the other side of the spectrum of the binary constructed by society.

Other members of Rivière au Sel also perpetuate acts of othering. For instance, Man Sonson, a black sorceress laments about her son Robert marrying a white lady: "Une femme blanche! J'ai pleuré toutes les larmes de mon corps. C'est que nous ne sommes pas n'importe quelle qualité de Nègres. Les yeux des Blancs n'ont jamais brulé les nôtres" (83). Just like Loulou, she uses the pronoun "nous" [we] to emphasize her racial

identity. In other words, she sees the world through a binary logic: we/them. "We" for her, is a signifier for blacks, while "them" is a signifier for whites. The binary root tree logic thrives in oppositions between both sides of spectrums—in this case, the black/white binary. After all, grand western theories such as Hegel's master-slave dialectic and Karl Marx's historical materialism are based on the opposition of binaries. Therefore, it is no surprise that a society colonized and primarily shaped by Western imperialism thrives in the expression of binary oppositions.

As a region of former colonies, cultural identity within the Antilles has often swung between identifying with Europe and Africa. Xantippe, a mysterious figure who claims to have named the village Rivière au Sel, explains the swift return to an identification with French identity after the colonizers left:

> J'ai vu les Blancs s'enfuir en grand désordre dans les tourbillons de fumée des plantations. J'ai vu les Nègres en joie donner dos à la gratelle de la canne et se presser dans les chemins menant aux villes. Les femmes les regardaient partir, essuyant l'eau de leurs yeux et berçant les bâtards, sachant quand même dans le secret de leurs cœurs que cette liesse ne durerait pas et que, sous peu, la misère les ramènerait au bercail. J'ai vu s'ouvrir les écoles et, n'en croyant pas mes oreilles, j'ai entendu les enfants chantonner : « Nos ancêtres les Gaulois… » (243-44).

Xantippe's point is that after the colonizers were expelled from the land, the vestiges of the colonial past remained rooted in the consciousness of the people. The phrase he claims he heard the children recite valorizes the Gauls, a group of Celtic tribes that inhabited mainland Europe from about the 5th century BC to the 5th century AD (*Ancient Gaul (France)*). The French often trace their ancestry to the Gauls. According to Janice

Gross, this famous phrase was introduced into classrooms throughout France's colonial empire from the 1800s (951). She further states: "the French colonial experience, while based on the asymmetry of the colonizer as the source of civilization, invited its newfound pupils to embrace a common ancestor, the Gaulois" (951). In other words, the French colonial enterprise used the educational system in the colonies to encourage the spread of the root logic of French identity. Hence, Xantippe is painting a reality that exists in the post-colonial Antilles: the root identity of the "Gaulois." This root tree, a transplantation of French identity to the Antilles, was effected through years of colonial education and assimilation and ultimately led to the departmentalization of Martinique, Guadeloupe, Reunion, and French Guiana in 1946 ("70 Years of Departmentalization!"). These regions remain overseas departments of France, a realization of the goal of assimilation which fueled the French colonial enterprise for many years.

Departmentalization has been a subject of debate for many years. Gary Wilder states in *Freedom Time*, "departmentalization was supported by all of the island's major political parties (Communist, Socialist, MRP) and trade unions. Opposition was limited to white businessmen and landowners and a small group of Martinicans associated with the Congrès de l'Union des Évadés Volontaires et Résistants" (112). Basically, departmentalization was seen by most Antilleans as the best option for the region after World War 2. According to Wilder, Martinican writer, Aimé Césaire who became a deputy for Martinique in the French National Assembly in Paris, concluded after the war that "it would be unacceptable to exclude these territories from the society, economy, or polity of which they had always been a part" (106). For Césaire, as for many Martinicans, being a part of France was best for the region primarily for economic reasons. His first

intervention in the French National Assembly was to demand economic and social reforms for the Antilles (110). Hence, the union with France has been both political and economic. Accordingly, this economic and political union has strengthened one spectrum of the binary of the root tree within the Antilles, the European (Gaulois) identity, which according to Xantippe, has influenced the younger generation.

Along the same lines as Xantippe, Carmélien, a member of an Indian family states: "ouvre les yeux, mon cher! Nous sommes déjà européens ! L'Independence est une belle endormie qu'aucun Prince ne réveillera plus" (218). In other words, Carmélien sees independence from France as a farce because, as he states, they are still Europeans. This Europeanization of the Antilles is what Glissant describes in *Le discours antillais* as a sociological paradox: "on se heurtera dans le réel au paradoxe sociologique et historique, à l'impossibilité Culturelle globale posée par cette dénomination: comment peut-on être français—en Amérique" (309). Glissant's point is that this sociological paradox of being French in a region outside of France is a symptom of French cultural domination which has created a cultural impossibility within the Antilles. He sees this imposed "Gaulois" identity as one which is impossible to achieve. The weight of French cultural influence is seen in nearly all aspects of life in the Antilles. Renée Larrier states: "In 2006, the imbalance of power persists in that most television programs and school textbooks are still produced in the hexagon, which means that the visual representation and official history are defined largely outside of the DOM" (173). In other words, power in the Antilles rests firmly in the metropole. Thus, the French colonial doctrine of assimilation is still prevalent in the Antilles. It is for this reason that Glissant states in *Le Discours antillais* that departmentalization, "un 'progrès juridique et administratif,' est

devenu un idéal en soi" (826). In other words, departmentalization has become an end in itself rather than a means to an end. The focus has shifted from the economic benefits first envisaged to assimilation. It is for this reason that Carmélien critiques the façade of Guadeloupean independence. For him, Guadeloupeans have become so ingrained with European culture and values that they can no longer claim to have a distinct identity. Thus, the root logic of "Gaulois" identity remains firmly rooted in the Antilles.

2.1.1 Negritude

Maryse Condé also captures the other side of the root tree binary, the African/black identity, epitomized by the Negritude movement, which blossomed in the first half of the 20th century. The 20th century featured the rise of black writers worldwide, some of whom pioneered black liberation movements. In America, in the 1920s, the Black Renaissance Movement led by black writers such as Langston Hughes, W.E.B Du Bois, Claude Mackay, Contee Cullen, and Zora Neale Hurston wrote in reaction against systematic racism. As a result of the advances of black writers around the world, black students in Paris began to unite against racism in France. In 1934, some West Indian and African students created a small journal, *L'Etudiant Noir*, to publicize the struggles of blacks in France and the diaspora (Kesteloot 83). This journal had black writers such as Léonard Sainville, Léon-Gontran Damas, Aimé Césaire, Léopold Senghor, Birago Diop, etc. It was in *L'Etudiant Noir* that Césaire first used the word Negritude.

Césaire, Senghor, and Damas are recognized as the founders of the Negritude movement. In his book, *The French Imperial Nation-State*, Gary Wilder states: "the primary ambition of Negritude students was to create a new poetry rooted in black

experience that addressed colonial racism and Panafrican culture" (205). Thus, Negritude writers were concerned primarily with creating a cultural revolution for blacks. The medium they chose for this struggle was poetry; accordingly, the three Negritude writers listed above were all poets. Martinican writer Aimé Césaire defined Negritude as "the awareness of being black, the simple acknowledgment of a fact which implies the acceptance of it, a taking charge of one's destiny as a black man, of one's history and culture (Kesteloot 105). In other words, he saw the movement primarily as a force geared towards the valorization of blackness in a time of intense racial discrimination. In her article, *Négritude Césarienne, Négritude Senghorienne*, Condé exposes two visions of Negritude:

> Dans le cas de Césaire, elle se veut préalable passager, mais indispensable, à la prise de conscience qui mène à la lutte de libération. Dans celui de Senghor, connaissance des valeurs culturelles du Monde Noir, et partant, source de force, d'orgueil et d'ivresse, face à la technicité desséchante du monde blanc. Pour nous, elle est un piège sentimental et vain. (418)

For Aimé Césaire, Negritude is a necessary step towards consciousness and liberation. In other words, it is a prerequisite for the struggle against colonialism and racism. For Césaire, the task of the writer is not just to produce beautiful literature but to actively engage in the struggle for social and political change. In this sense, Negritude is a means to an end, rather than an end in itself. On the other hand, for Léopold Sédar Senghor, another prominent figure of the Negritude movement, Negritude is more of a celebration of African culture and a source of pride and strength in the face of the technical and scientific dominance of the Western world. For Senghor, African culture has a richness

and depth that the Western world lacks, and Negritude is a way to assert the value of that culture. In this sense, Negritude is more of a cultural project than a political one.

Condé's own view of Negritude is different from that of Césaire and Senghor. She sees Negritude as well as Pan-Africanism as a form of "globalization, the implied project of a complete identity and an active solidarity among the black peoples" (Condé, *O Brave New World* 2). In addition, she asserts that Negritude poets were haunted by dreams of internalization and globalization due to their enthusiastic embrace of Marxism (3). Thus, Condé sees Negritude and Pan-Africanism as forms of global solidarity among blacks. However, she argues that the notion of divisions according to race was a western fabrication (2). Twenty four years after "O Brave New World," Condé argues that Negritude was a fabrication of the West: "c'est l'Europe qui a fabriqué le Nègre" (Condé, *Négritude Césarienne, Négritude Senghorienne* 413). In other words, she sees Negritude as an indirect creation of the West because the ideologies that are at the foundation of the movement were primarily western ideologies. As she rightly claims, globalization stems from the Marxist idea of a world without borders. Although Negritude was an ideology conceived within the context of globalization, it follows the root tree logic because it posits the unity of blacks based primarily on race.

Thus, this approach to cultural identity is homogenous. Negritude poets saw Africa as the arche and telos for blacks in the diaspora. For this reason, in his famous work, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, Aimé Césaire refers to the Bambaras, an ethnic group in West Africa, as "mes ancêtres Bambaras" (58). In other words, Césaire advocates for the root logic by symbolically tracing his ancestry to the Bambaras. This idea of African identity for blacks in the diaspora was well explored by the other

Negritude writers, including Guyanese poet Gontran Damas, who advocated against French assimilation in favor of an original Africanity. In sum, Negritude followed the root logic of identity and has since faded away; but as Maryse Condé rightly asserts, it gave blacks confidence and dignity in their skin color (Clark et al. 114).

This idea of tracing Antillean identity to Africa is echoed by Condé's mysterious character, Xantippe: "les arbres sont nos seuls amis. Depuis l'Afrique, ils soignent nos corps et nos âmes. Leur odeur est magie, vertu du grand temps reconquis" (241). Xantippe not only refers to Africa but uses the possessive adjective "nos" [our] to assign the people of Rivière au Sel, an African identity. In other words, it is not his soul and body that were healed by trees from the time of Africa, but "our" soul. Furthermore, his emphasis on trees reinforces the root tree logic. For Xantippe, "les arbres" metaphorically represents an African past that he identifies with even in the present. In addition, the manner in which he speaks about Africa is very poetic. Words such as tree, odor, magic, and soul paint poetic imagery. Condé intentionally frames this to express the poetic language through which Negritude poets spoke about Africa. According to Condé, the belief that blacks are the same is a racist idea inherited from whites who saw blacks as the same (Clark et al. 116). Thus, Xantippe's poetic and romantic view of Africa follows the Conradian imagination of Africa, a continent etched in a romanticized past that the black diaspora must look back on. This idea of a return physically or culturally to Africa is rooted in the binary logic of the root tree. Root identity ideologies such as Negritude and Pan-Africanism can only function on the basis of similitudes among black people. Negritude scholars took little account of the differences that exist among Africans. To

anchor identity to an entire continent is to ignore the vast differences in cultural identities that exist within the continent.

However, despite the criticisms of Negritude, it formed a foundation for the eruption of other cultural theories in the Antilles. According to Bernabe et al., “La Négritude césarienne est un baptême, l’acte primal de notre dignité restituée. Nous sommes à jamais fils d’Aime Césaire” (18). In other words, in restoring the dignity of blacks in a period of intense racism, Negritude created a platform for other black intellectuals to express themselves boldly. Consequently, many black scholars have been able to propose theories rooted in the current Antillean cultural realities. By celebrating blackness, Negritude gave rise to a sense of pride and confidence among black people, which inspired many black scholars to propose theories rooted in the current Antillean cultural realities. Many black scholars in the Antilles were able to draw from the legacy of Negritude and propose new theories that expanded on its core ideas. For example Frantz Fanon's writings on decolonization built on Negritude's critique of colonialism and explored the psychological effects of colonization on the colonized. Also, Condé affirms that Negritude helped blacks to appreciate their blackness (Clark et al. 114)

In order to emphasize the cultural differences between Africa and the Antilles, Condé’s character, Cyrille, a local griot who traveled to Dakar at the age of twenty, claims to have returned a little disappointed: “Je serais bien resté là, moi, en Afrique. Mais les Africains m’ont donné un grand coup de pied au cul en hurlant : ‘Retourne chez toi !’” (154). In other words, Cyrille is making the villagers aware of his love for Africa as well as the impossibility of a return to Africa. Africans, he claims, did not want him in Africa. This is because cultures are not static, so the pure Africa, Pan-Africanist, and

Negritude scholars desired is non-existent. The Antillean is fundamentally different from Africans in language, culture, and traditions; therefore, any ideology that thrives on a return to a pure African culture is an ideological approach because a fundamental characteristic of cultures is that they evolve. The novel invites us to consider that African as well as Antillean cultures have evolved since the slave trade, and there are probably more differences than similarities between the cultures of both continents. Consider the experience of Condé's character, Dodose Pélagie in Africa:

> C'est une erreur de croire qu'Africains et Antillais ont quoique ce soit en commun, hormis de la peau…J'ai travaillé cinq ans en Côte-d'Ivoire dans une plantation d'okoumé. Vous savez, ce bois précieux ! Et pour parler à mes gens, j'avais besoin d'un interprète. D'un interprète. Nous ne pouvions pas communiquer. Noirs, nous ne pouvions communiquer ! " (207)

The essence of Dodose's argument is that Africans and Antilleans have nothing in common apart from similarities that may exist in skin color. She supports this idea through her own experience in Côte-d'Ivoire. She needed an interpreter in this West African country to communicate with the locals. Her point is that years of separation from the continent have created a cultural and linguistic gulf between black Antilleans and black Africans. Therefore, any form of return to Africa would ultimately end in frustration. Her need for an interpreter in Africa shows her status as an outsider, an Other.

Franz Fanon argues in *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) that "in order to ensure his salvation and to escape from the supremacy of the white man's culture, the native feels the need to turn backward toward his unknown roots and to lose himself at whatever cost in his own barbarous people" (217-218). Fanon's point is that root identity

movements such as Negritude are fundamentally reactionary movements. Turning back to an idealized past is a reaction to the colonizer's culture. It is simply a way of saying, "look, we also have a culture." Along the same lines as Fanon, Stuart Hall argues that the search for roots in the black diaspora is a reaction to being blocked from access to European identity (74). The black diaspora, having been alienated from the native culture feels the need to search for roots. Thus, the search for roots is a reaction to otherness perpetuated by the dominant culture. What is eventually produced is a dichotomous relationship among roots.

Glissant explains that the root tree thrives through violence against other roots (*Introduction à une poétique du Divers*, Glissant 59). Hence, where the root logic prevails, there will often be discrimination from both sides of the spectrum of binaries. This is the reason for the hatred for strangers which is evident in Rivière au Sel: "les gens de Rivière au Sel détestent les étrangers. Ils les détestent et racontent n'importe quoi à leur sujet" (212). Thus, the autochthone/foreigner binary is firmly rooted in the Rivière au Sel. This root logic, therefore, drives a dichotomous relationship with foreigners. Hence, othering does not just take place between black and whites but also between black Antilleans and other blacks. For instance, Désinor, a Haitian, complains about how Haitians are treated like slaves in Rivière au Sel: "Ah, l'esclavage du Nègre d'Haïti n'est pas fini! A grands coups de coutelas, Désinor tailladait sa rage et son désespoir" (199). Thus, Rivière au Sel is a microcosm of the Antilles, a region of diverse cultural identities still in conflict with one another.

Ultimately, the root identities of a return to Africa and an alignment with France have both failed to resolve the identity crisis engendered by years of slavery and

colonization in the Antilles. In *Le discours antillais*, Edouard Glissant maintains that the myth of French citizenship has replaced the dream of a return to Africa; he further explains that this myth is against the harmonious habitation of the Antilleans in their land (149). For Glissant, this myth of French citizenship has been used to create a sense of belonging among the Antillean population and make them believe they are part of a larger French identity. However, Glissant argues that this myth is false and has led to the erasure of the Antilleans' unique cultural and historical identity. The myth of French citizenship has created a false sense of homogeneity among the Antillean population. Furthermore, Glissant argues that the myth of French citizenship has created a sense of detachment from their land and history, leading to a lack of connection to their cultural heritage. The Antillean population has been made to believe that their identity is tied to their citizenship rather than to their land and their history. Glissant argues that the myth of French citizenship is detrimental to the harmonious habitation of Antilleans in their land. The false sense of homogeneity that it creates has led to a lack of appreciation for the cultural diversity of the Antillean population. Thus, for Glissant, identity lies not in the binary logic of the root tree but in the acceptance of a new identity rooted in the Antillean experiential reality, an expression of the uniqueness and diversity of the islands—a rhizome.

2.2 The Logic of the Rhizome

According to Deleuze and Guattari, “one of the most important characteristics of a rhizome is that it always has multiple entryways” (12). In other words, in contrast to the binary logic of the root tree, the rhizome thrives in multiplicity. The rhizome thrives in diversity; it is not limited to the acceptance of fixed cultural identities but extends its

roots to merge with other elements through interactions and further acceptance. In other words, the rhizome never ceases to expand; it is always open to merging and transformation. It is this logic of the rhizome that Condé attempts to capture firstly through the novel's title, *Traversée de la mangrove*. Mangrove habitat provides a good place for rhizomes to grow. Thus, Condé's title is a reference to rhizome that grows in the mangrove habitat of Rivière au Sel. The logic of the rhizome is also captured through the nonlinear narrative structure of the novel.

Traversée de la mangrove does not follow a linear structure. It begins with the end, the death of the protagonist, Francis Sancher. The second part of the novel, "la nuit," is made up of twenty parts (Mira narrates twice), each named after the individual narrators who all live in Rivière au Sel. Each narrator shows unique traits: although some of them are from the same family, they speak mainly about their personal stories, and they all talk about their encounters with the deceased Sancher. These narrators manifest a fundamental characteristic of the rhizome: multiple entryways to the larger plot as well as to the Antillean experience. Condé carefully gives voices to the individuals to express their unique identities but ties them together through the life and death of Sancher. The essence of this technique is to show the diverse roots that exist within Antillean communities and their interconnectedness.

One of the unique characteristics of the novel is that it begins with the death of its protagonist. If, as I have stated, Sancher epitomizes the complexities of Antillean identity, then the individual voices that speak about him are critical because, through these voices, we gain insights into the complexities of the rhizomatic structure that constitutes Antillean identity. We learn through their narrations that some of them

are Indians, békés,[1] blacks, and mulattos. There seem to be deep affinities to their root identities, but as I have pointed out, the death of Sancher leads them to an enlightenment—the recognition of their interconnected. In other words, they arrive at a consciousness of the rhizomatic structure that lurks within the mangrove.

2.2.1 La Créolité

One of the ways Condé expresses the rhizomatic structure of Rivière au Sel is by exposing the creoleness of the village. In their groundbreaking work, *Eloge de la créolité*, Bernabé et al. proclaim: "Ni Européens, ni Africains, ni Asiatiques, nous nous proclamons Créoles. Cela sera pour nous une attitude intérieure, mieux : une vigilance, ou mieux encore, une sorte d'enveloppe mentale au mitan de laquelle se bâtira notre monde en pleine conscience du monde" (13). Creoleness, as defined by Bernabe et al., is a hybrid and syncretic identity that is neither European, African, nor Asian. It is a unique identity that emerges from blending different cultures and histories, creating a new form of cultural expression distinct from its constituent parts. The Creole identity is not static but is constantly evolving, reflecting the changing social, political, and cultural realities of the Antilles. Thus, due to years of interactions between cultures, the Antilles has evolved to reflect hybridity—the merging of various root cultures. It is in this process of interaction that roots merge, producing creoleness—a composite of various cultures. Ultimately, emphasis is placed on interconnectedness than on the separate root identities. Thus, for Bernabé et al., it is not origins that matter but the reality of the present historical moment. As Glissant explains in *Le discours antillais*, there is a lack of history and collective memory in the Antilles (149-50). It is this lack of collective memory that

[1] Béké is a creole term that refers to the descendants of early white European settlers in the Antilles.

Condé captures through the nonlinear and fragmented narrative she chooses. Through the nineteen individuals that make up the novel's second part, we see Rivière au Sel's fragmented nature. The different families seem to trace their origins separately. Thus, the history of the village is fragmented based on the subjectivities of the various families. But what Créolité entails is the amalgamation of these separate roots, ultimately forming a rhizomatic structure.

Condé's protagonist, Francis Sancher, as an embodiment of various identities, dispels the logic of the root tree. After Loulou Lameaulnes tries to make him see their similarities based on skin color, he replies, "Tu as tort. Nous ne sommes plus du même camp et je vais te dire que je n'appartiens à aucun camp" (127). The essence of Sancher's statement is that he has transcended the binary logic of the root tree; therefore, he holds no strong affinities to a unique origin. He doesn't belong to any "camp" because he has embraced his creoleness: he is neither African, European, or Asian; he has arrived at creoleness, the unification of various cultural elements within the Antilles. According to Nikiema Patoimbasba, "transcendant la division construite sur la culture, l'origine et la race, Sancher se situe dans une intersection qui se caractérise par son imprécision car il ne se réclame d'aucune position, d'aucun camp" (360). Patoimbasba's point is that contrary to the root tree logic that Loulou espouses, Sancher believes in a rhizomatic identity formed through an intersection of cultures. In the case of Rivière au Sel, this intersection takes place primarily through interactions between people who trace their roots to various parts of the world. Even though some of them still hold strong affinities to their root identities, years of interaction and cultural exchanges have ultimately formed a rhizome. Although this rhizome is hidden beneath the waters of the mangrove, Sancher

has come to the village to reveal the rhizomatic structure that lies beneath the waters of the mangrove.

According to Bernabé et al., "la créolité est l'*agrégat interactionnel ou transactionnel*, des éléments culturels caraïbes, européens, africains, asiatiques, et levantins, que le joug de l'Histoire a réunis sur le même sol" (26). In other words, Créolité is forged through interactions as well as transactions. Interactions are the social and cultural exchanges that occur between different groups of people in a given context. In the Antilles, these interactions have been shaped by the history of colonialism and slavery, which brought together people from diverse cultural backgrounds. The interactions between these groups led to the development of a unique Creole culture that is distinct from the cultures of the colonizers or the enslaved populations. Transactions, on the other hand, refer to the economic exchanges that occurred during the colonial era, such as the trade of goods and labor. These transactions were often exploitative and unequal, with the colonizers benefiting at the expense of the enslaved populations. However, the transactions also played a role in the formation of Créolité, as they brought together people from different cultures. In the formation of Créolité, interactions and transactions were interconnected. The cultural exchanges that occurred during interactions were often facilitated by the economic transactions that brought people together. Similarly, the economic transactions that occurred between different groups of people often led to the exchange of cultural practices and the development of new forms of expression.

Cultures are never fixed but evolve in the process of interactions and transactions—the giving and the receiving of cultural elements. Indeed, the Antilles is the

result of cultural exchanges that have occurred over many decades, primarily between European settlers and enslaved Black people. Therefore, Créolité is produced by coming to grips with the reality of the accumulation of various cultural elements fostered by exchanges between diverse cultural identities. This coming to grips is what I have described in this essay as an enlightenment: the villagers at the end of the novel finally arrive at creoleness. They realize through the appearance of the rainbow that underneath the murky waters of the mangrove, their roots are interconnected. Before the end of the novel, a few individuals also attain the attitude of creoleness. For example, Man Sonson after questioning her son, Robert's decision to marry a white lady gets this reply from him: "Maman, tout ça, l'esclavage, les fers aux pieds, c'est de l'histoire ancienne. Il faut vivre avec son temps" (82). In other words, Robert recognizes the fact that slavery happened, but he wants his mother to live in the reality of the present era. The reality of the present is that interactions and transactions among cultures have led to interconnections between various roots. The binary logic of the master-slave that constituted social relations in the Antilles for many decades has been altered. Thus, Robert is advocating for a recognition of the merging of roots as opposed to the opposition of binaries. Thanks to her son, Man Sonson eventually realizes her own bias: "Peut-être qu'il a raison. Peut-être qu'il faut déraciner de nos têtes l'herbe de Guinée et le chiendent des vieilles rancœurs. Peut-être qu'il faut apprendre de nouveaux battements à nos cœurs. Peut-être que ces mots-là, noirs, blancs, ne signifient plus grand-chose !" (82). In other words, Man Sonson realizes after listening to her son that her views about interracial marriage are actually founded on resentment. She must let go of that resentment and see humanity beyond the binary of black/white. For Créolité to be

produced, this binary must be deconstructed in favor of a society where cultural identity is not tied to skin color or the root logic of ancestry but to the collective experience of various groups. This collectivity is what produces Creole, a language that Condé uses, albeit only a few times in the novel.

According to Bernabé et al., the Creole language is the nucleus of la Créolité (33). They state : "Le créole, notre langue première à nous Antillais, Guyanais, Mascarins, est le véhicule originel de notre moi profond, de notre inconscient collectif de notre génie populaire, cette langue demeure la rivière de notre créolité alluviale. Avec elle nous rêvons. Avec elle nous résistons et nous acceptons" (43). The essence of their argument is that the Creole language is at the foundation of Antillean identity. Thus, without Creole the soul of creoleness is lost because Creole is a mix of various languages. In essence it is a blend of the languages of various groups of people in the Antilles who may trace their roots to other parts of the world. Therefore, it is the soul of creoleness because it is probably the most obvious manifestation of the rhizome. Those who speak Creole are unconsciously using the linguistic structures of other groups; hence, it is the manifestation of the cultural blend that is an integral characteristic of the rhizome.

Condé's characters use Creole a few times in the novel. For example, Man Sonson speaks to Sancher using Creole: "Ouk on pwa ka bouyi" [you are like peas that boil] (85). Other words and expressions used include*: pié bwa* [shrub]; *Sa ou fé* [how are you]; *Ola ou kaye kon sa* [where are you going]; *makoum*é [homosexuals]; *manjé la pawé* [Madame is served] (96, 31, 37, 115). I believe these words are intentionally inserted to show the use of Creole in the Antilles. In Guadeloupe, for example, most people can speak Creole ("What Language is spoken in Guadeloupe?"). In sum, the use of Creole

shows the amalgamation of various root identities in the Antilles; its formation is one of taking and receiving—interactions and transactions among diverse cultural identities.

Although, as I have explained, Condé shows various root identities as well as their interconnections, she also portrays the tensions visible in a society still trying to grasp the reality of the rhizome. The villagers' hate of strangers is antithetical to the nature of the rhizome; although they see the reality of the rhizome in the diversity of the village, they strive to hold on to their roots. For instance, Leocadie Timothée complains about the influx of immigrants into the country: "Vraiment, ce pays-la est a l'encan. Il appartient à tout le monde à présent. Des métros, toutes qualités de Blancs venus du Canada ou de l'Italie, des Vietnamiens, et puis celui-là, vomi par on ne sait quel mauvais porteur, qui s'est installé parmi nous. Oui, notre pays a changé, c'est moi qui vous le dis" (139). If, as I have affirmed in this essay, the rhizome is always open to joining with other roots, then Timothée's worry is a symptom of a society that sees the evolution from root to rhizome but has always wrestled with this change. Timothée sees that the country has changed, but she still strives to hold on to the logic of the root tree. Although the inhabitants of Rivière au Sel eventually arrive at the understanding of their creoleness at the end of the novel, the entire novel is about their struggle with the reality of the rhizome. The widespread persecution of Sancher, the figure who embodies creoleness, is proof of the villagers' struggle to cope with the changing structure of the island.

The fact that the logic of the root tree is more prevalent in the conversations of the people of Rivière au Sel shows how powerful roots are. Still, more so, we also see how powerful an individual, a writer in the case of Sancher, can be in connecting roots. Among all the things that Francis Sancher represents, his most important characteristic is

that he is a writer who is writing a book called “Traversée de la Mangrove” (192). Thus, Condé places the Antillean writer as an interrupter, a philosopher, and a healer whose role is the connection of roots. In this case, the Antillean writer’s job is not to sit on the sidelines but to interact with the people and merge with various roots in order to understand the people and tell their stories firsthand. Thus, Sancher, though dead, speaks through the stories told about him and the unity he has brought among the people.

CHAPTER 3: ROOTS AND RHIZOMES IN CALIXTHE BEYALA'S LE PETIT PRINCE DE BELLEVILLE

Le petit prince de Belleville is a novel by Cameroonian novelist Calixthe Beyala. The book has been a subject of controversy since Beyala was convicted in a Parisian High Court of plagiarizing the novel from Howard Buten's *Burt.* Although Beyala has never outrightly denied the accusations of plagiarism, she claimed that borrowings are a common feature in African literary tradition (Hitchcott 104). Despite what many may perceive as a setback in her literary career, Beyala has remained a key figure in French and African literature. In 1996, the same year she was convicted of plagiarism, she was awarded the prestigious "Grand Prix du roman" prize for her novel, *Les honneurs perdus*. She has since published 11 more novels. She has the reputation of being the best-selling African female novelist in France. Despite the apparent controversies surrounding *Le petit prince de Belleville*, it remains an essential narrative in explaining the cultural dynamics of African immigrants in France.

The novel chronicles the story of Mamadou Traoré, alias Loukoum, a ten-year-old Malian immigrant living in Belleville, a community in Paris, France. We learn early in the novel that Loukoum was brought to France at a young age for welfare benefits (35). He exhibits traits of hybridity: caught between the culture of his Malian family and other cultures within the metropole, he strives to internalize these cultures. His father, Abdou Traoré, on the other hand maintains his African roots. He retains his African

culture despite the strain of holding on to cultural expressions that do not align with French culture. According to Dawn Fulton Loukoum and Abdou represent two immigrant perspectives (9). Beyala juxtaposes these two perspectives in order to portray the diversity of African immigrants' experiences. Loukoum, like Sancher, internalizes the cultures around him—he embodies the various identities in the metropole. Abdou, on the other hand, seems lost in France. The nostalgia for his native land seems strong. He strives to keep his African culture above that of the metropole, but as he discovers several times in the novel, his African root culture is constantly at odds with the "Gaulois" root culture.

In an article titled "Welcome to Belleville: A Haven for Artists, Immigrants and Revolutionaries in Paris," Traub Courtney describes Belleville: "Naturally, each new generation of migrants brought their own cultural traditions. Greek, Armenia, Tunisia, Algerian, Subsaharan African, Vietnamese—Belleville is marked by all these cultures as a result of intense and constant migration to the area." In other words, Belleville has a reputation for being a haven for immigrants. Loukoum describes Belleville: "si vous connaissez le coin, vous savez que c'est toujours plein de tribus qui viennent d'Afrique et qui vivent en tas sans négliger personne" (8). Loukoum's point is that Belleville is a hub for African immigrants, and they are often obliged to stick together as a result of the poor conditions in which they find themselves. For this reason, Beyala chooses this neighborhood to show the struggles of African immigrants in France. Despite the presence of immigrants from other parts of the world in Belleville, Beyala's focus is primarily on sub-Saharan African immigrants for apparent reasons: Beyala was born in Douala, Cameroon, in 1961. She migrated as a student to France at the age of 17; she

completed her education and married in France. Hence, familiar with the lives of immigrants from Sub-Saharan Africa, Beyala tries to explore the cultural identity of black African immigrants in France.

There are many reasons for the migration of Africans to France, but the most obvious reason is that of economic benefits. For example, Loukoum's father, Abdou Traoré claims he migrated to France for economic reasons: "Je suis venu dans ce pays tenu par le gain, expulsé du mien par besoin. Je suis venu, nous sommes venus dans ce pays pour sauver notre peau, acheter le futur de nos enfants" (22). In other words, Abdou believes that his migration to France was inspired primarily by economic prosperity and the desire to create a better future for his children. A recent survey by *Immigration Policy Lab* indicates that 74 percent of African immigrants to Europe cite economic factors as the primary reason for migrating. This survey demonstrates that African immigrants to Europe are mostly fleeing poverty in search of a better life which they hope to find in Europe. Most African immigrants from former French colonies prefer to migrate to France for apparent reasons: During the colonial era, the French government operated a system of assimilation in the colonies—a system which was designed to restructure the colonies as extensions of the metropole: "Colonies were reconceptualized as integral, if legally ambiguous, parts of the French nation." (*The French Imperial Nation*-State, Wilder 4). This goal of assimilation was at the heart of the "mission civilisatrice" which was carried out in French colonies.

This political ideal promoted after the first world war often referred to as "Greater France" was designed to imagine the colonies as extensions of the metropole. According to Wilder, the vision of Greater France "no longer implied a homogeneous national space

that extended abroad. It understood the empire as an aggregate of heterogeneous colonies, each of which was distinct from metropolitan France but which together constituted a more or less coherent imperial formation, diverse but unified" (30). Thus, the original intent of the vision of Greater France was to imagine France as a heterogeneous entity that spans the borders of the metropole. Albert Sarraut, governor of Indochina and minister of colonies, proposed incorporating French life into colonial life; he imagined a France whose security and food would be provided by a much larger population if integrated with the colonies (Wilder 30-31).

Despite the assimilationist vision of Greater France, "partisans of Greater France…always coupled invocations of a unified empire-nation with warnings against extending citizenship to culturally backward and politically immature natives" (33). In other words, the natives were socially included in French culture but not politically included. Social inclusion, according to Sarraut, was to be achieved through a paternalistic relationship with the natives (123). Thus, a more social rather than political approach was advanced in the colonies: the pacifying of the natives was carried out with the narrative of assimilation, but assimilation within the French colonies was ambivalent. Citizenship was out of reach for the native, but he had to conform to the colonizer's culture. But in this act of mimicry, the native remains a subject of the colonizer, framed into the image the colonizer imagines. Thus, the native is, in using Fanon's phrase, bestowed a "white mask." Although citizenship is always out of reach, the native is given the illusion of Gaulois identity. Just like the children Xantippe sees in Condé's Rivière au Sel celebrating an imposed Gaulois identity, assimilation in the colonies imposes on the natives a false sense of being one with the colonizer. As a result of the principle of

assimilation, the native is programmed to align with the root culture of Gaulois identity. Still, when he finally travels to the metropole, he discovers the ambivalence of the narrative of assimilation. As we will see in this thesis, this is the experience of Loukoum's family. Having migrated to the metropole, their African identities remain more visible than any French trait they may have accumulated.

After World War Two, many Africans in French colonies were allowed to migrate to France as labor immigrants. These immigrants provided cheap labor for the metropole, an initiative that Cameroonian writer Gaston Kelman describes as "profondément discriminatoire, sinon raciste" (38). For Kelman, it was another way of taking advantage of vulnerable Africans for the dream of living in France. Many of these Africans were not adequately integrated into French society and were left to stay in poor communities often referred to as migrant communities—primarily found in Parisian banlieues. These neighborhoods are often characterized by poverty, high levels of crime, and limited access to education and job opportunities (Avenel 36-37). As a result of the lack of integration, these immigrants would often maintain their root cultures. As I have stated in the first part of this thesis, root cultures thrive on the opposition of binaries. Thus, the immigrant confronted with the reality of being locked out of the Gaulois root cultural identity often reverts to his own roots, hence, transplanting African culture to the metropole. In 2015, French MEP Nadine Morano stated: "la France est un pays de race blanche" (Lambert). This statement not only marginalizes African immigrants by implying a lower status but also reinforces a Gaulois root identity that pressures other cultures to maintain their roots since citizenship is associated with whiteness, an unattainable state for many African immigrants.

3.1 The logic of the root tree in Belleville

The Traorés find themselves surrounded by other immigrant families, a setup that fosters root cultures. Loukoum's fictitious letter to the French President, François Mitterrand shows the racially motivated distribution of migrants within the Metropole:

> Mon père est un tirailleur ancien combattant de la France que vous connaissez sans doute puisque vous lui avez donné ses papiers à l'an 1981, lors de votre accession à la magistrature suprême…Quand il n'est pas de service de poubelles, il fait des exercices par terre pour s'augmenter mais il s'augmente pas à cause des soucis quotidiens. Tout ça pour vous dire qu'il n 'est pas dérangeant et bouffe rien du tout…Pour les nègres, je peux vous assurer qu'ils n'ont rien, mais rien du tout, exactement comme mon papa. C'est pas de sa faute à M. Le Pen s'il souffre de désinformation, car la division sociale veut que chacun reste bien chez lui dans son arrondissement sans intention de nuire (25-26).

Loukoum's imaginary letter shows that he has some understanding of the political and social discourses in France. He understands that his father's job as a trash collector means he is a hard worker. Still, despite his desire to work, he suffers from "disinformation" because, according to Loukoum, the social division has relegated some groups of people to specific neighborhoods. In other words, the metropole is structured so that migrants are kept in places where they interact primarily with other migrants, thus keeping them with their "kind." Consequently, this initiative makes it easier for migrants to maintain their roots.

According to Deleuze and Guattari, "binary logic is the spiritual reality of the root-tree" (5). The social structure designed to keep African immigrants in fixed

neighborhoods follows the binary logic of autochthone/immigrant (African immigrants in this case). Belleville is depicted as a space for immigrants, an extension of Africa in the metropole. The immigrants meet mostly in a café owned by Monsieur Guillaume, the only white man named as a resident of Belleville: "Ensuite, nous sommes allés au café de Monsieur Guillaume. Toute la tribu nègre est là" (47). Black African immigrants from various countries meet from time to time in the café or Abdou Traoré's house. This gathering of black Africans is fostered primarily by the otherness they experience in the metropole. Like Negritude poets such as Césaire, Senghor and Damas who united in response to the racism of their day, Beyala's African characters often come together as a reaction to otherness faced in the metropole. In an essay titled, *Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities*, Stuart Hall writes: "Blocked out of any access to an English or British identity, people had to try to discover who they were. This is the moment I defined in my previous talk. It is the crucial moment of the rediscovery of the search for roots" (74). Similarly, the African immigrants in Belleville, having been blocked out of French identity, have to reaffirm their root identity. This affirmation of their cultural identity is crucial due to the otherness they experience in the metropole.

In *Le discours Antillais*, Glissant states: " il reste alors à l'émigré à devenir un « vrai » Français, ce qui lui est généralement impossible, sinon à la deuxième ou troisième génération" (131). The essence of Glissant's argument is that first-generation immigrants often find it impossible to become "French." This is due to the fact that the immigrant's culture is usually at odds with that of the metropole. Thus, becoming "French" is often postponed to the second or third generation. Abdou Traoré's frustration with the French system is a symptom of this impossibility of assimilation that Glissant

argues: “Je cherche mon visage dans cet ailleurs qui m’expulse et me vomit” (Beyala 51). Abdou is frustrated because he feels he has been expelled from mainstream French society. Since he will find it almost impossible to become “French,” he has to constantly return to his roots: “Je viens d’un pays planté de forets, de soleil et d’argile” (71). Mentally, he keeps returning to the past, an Africa, that although far, he and other Africans strive to transplant to the metropole. According to Stuart Hall, the return to roots is activated the moment the immigrant discovers he has been excluded from the identity of the metropole. (74). He further states that “black” was created as a political category during the civil rights movement, decolonization and nationalist struggles (75). In other words, once the immigrant discovers that he has been fixed on the other side of the binary of the root tree, he strives to valorize and grasp his roots. For instance, Abdou complains about his exclusion from French society: “Je ne me suis pas trompé. J’ai cherché la survie dans mes signes à moi…je n’ai rien fait de mal car ta législation n’a pas intégré mes coutumes” (246). In making this comment, Abdou urges us to understand that the metropole has been socially structured to exclude him, therefore, his return to his root identity is a survival strategy. Having been othered, he must guard his root identity.

Despite the othering immigrants experience, most still desire to remain in the metropole. For instance, Soumana, the second wife of Abdou fears a return to Africa: “Il faut pas qu’il m’amène a l’hôpital, Loukoum, sinon, ils vont me renvoyer en Afrique” (174). Soumana is afraid of going to the hospital because she doesn’t want to return to Africa. Despite the terrible economic conditions they experience in the metropole, many immigrants often choose to remain in France in the hope of a better life for themselves and their children. Consider the case of Fessologue, the hero of Congolese writer Alain

Mabanckou's novel, *Black Bazar* (2009). Even though he has been living in a small studio with four roommates for fifteen years, he still desires to remain in Paris: "J'ai vite senti que l'Afrique, fallait pas trop la questionner là-dessus, elle ne connaissait pas. Le Congo, non plus. Elle rêvait d'y aller un jour, moi je ne voulais plus y retourner quand je repensais aux péripéties de mon arrivée en France quinze and plus tôt " (72). Despite the harsh conditions he has faced for fifteen years in a migrant neighborhood in Paris, Fessologue refuses to return to Congo. This confirms that many African immigrants do not see a return "home" as a necessary alternative to the social conditions of the metropole. After all, some have passed through extremely dangerous situations for the dream of economic prosperity in Europe.

One of the main reasons for the lack of desire to return to Africa is that Africa has already been transplanted to the metropole due to globalization. According to sociologist, Robin Cohen, one of the effects of globalization is "a deterritorialization of social identity challenging the hegemonizing nation-states' claim to make an exclusive citizenship a defining focus of allegiance and fidelity in favor of overlapping focus of allegiance and fidelity in favor of overlapping, permeable and multiple forms of identification" (157). Cohen's point is that globalization engenders the spread of identities beyond borders. In other words, as people migrate, they also carry their cultures along with them. Hence, in this age of rapid globalization, the social structure of many nation-states is shifting towards multiculturalism. But as Stuart Hall rightly affirms, multiculturalism is not a new phenomenon: "long before the age of European expansion…migration and movement of peoples has been the rule rather than the exception of global history, producing societies which are ethnically or culturally 'mixed'"(98). The essence of Hall's argument is that

multiculturalism has been the norm for many centuries. Many decades before the arrival of African immigrants, France received Poles, Spaniards, Italians, and Portuguese immigrants. (Kelman 17). These immigrant cultures, once transplanted to France, merged their cultures with French culture, thus enriching the culture of the indigenous culture and vice-versa.

Since multiculturalism has been the norm for centuries, why does the presence of Africans in the metropole raise questions? According to Marc Antoine Pérousse de Montclos, the West has always been afraid of an invasion of Barbarians (118). But does this explain why Abdou Traoré claims that far-right politician M. Le Pen asserts that African immigrants are a nuisance to the Metropole? (23). Although I agree with Marc Antoine's claim, my view is that the othering of African immigrants is also perpetuated by economic factors and the broader cultural context, which is dominated by a Eurocentric perspective. This perspective views Europe and European culture as the norm, and anything that falls outside of this norm is seen as different, inferior, or exotic. According to Dawn Fulton, "Loukoum's tale of an African immigrant community excluded from the Parisian urban infrastructure and marginalized by republicanist state policy…suggests a vision of the global city that maintains the exoticism of the non-European immigrant by isolating the foreigner both spatially and ideologically" (15). In other words, one of the factors that fuel the exclusion of the immigrant in Beyala's *Le petit prince de Belleville* is the exoticizing of the immigrant's culture in French society. This is evident in the way Pierre Pelletier reminds Loukoum of African history and civilization, a lesson that Loukoum has little interest in learning (178-79). Gaston Kelman affirms this reality: "Et on parle à ma fille de griot, et on lui en présente ce succédané,

parce que le griot ferait partie de ses racines africaines, et ce faisant, on invente à ma fille, des racines qui ne sont ni les miennes, ni celles de sa mère" (30). Kelman's point is that even though his daughter was born in France, teachers always tend to exoticize her African roots by constantly talking about African griots, which he claims he never saw in the more than twenty years he spent in his native Cameroon. Furthermore, Kelman argues that this act of exoticizing the past of blacks in France reminds them of their position as subalterns who are permanently attached to an African origin even though they may have been born and raised in the metropole (31-32). This subtle form of othering ultimately fixes African immigrants on the other side of the binary of the root tree.

In order to reassert the binary logic of the root tree, Loukoum's teacher, Mademoiselle Garnier, divides the class into two groups: those from developed countries and those from developing countries (52-53). Loukoum is paired with a white student, Pierre Pelletier, to help teach him how to read in French. Although this strategy proved effective in teaching Loukoum how to read, the class splitting is consistent with the binary logic of the root tree. Just like Condé's character, Loulou, who espouses the superiority of his white race in Rivière au Sel, this division affirms the hierarchical structure of the root tree logic. It is also a depiction of French society: the metropole is structured in such a way that in interactions between the autochthone and African immigrant, there are often three possible results: The autochthone may say to the other, "you must be like me." In other words, the immigrant must forsake his "barbarous" ways for integration. Secondly, the autochthone may say, "keep practicing your culture in the neighborhoods assigned for you." Both results are a consequence of the binary logic of the root tree. Thirdly, the autochthone and immigrant may make concessions in order to

produce a cultural blend for the ultimate good of both—this is the logic of the rhizome. In the case of Loukoum's family, the second result seems to be the case: they have been relegated to a migrant neighborhood where their African culture takes preeminence above that of the metropole.

Due to globalization, these migrant neighborhoods have become extensions of Africa. Thus, for many African immigrants, these neighborhoods present a certain remedy for nostalgia. The desire for a return to the native land has been altered by the fact that the native land has been extended to the foreign land. Most immigrants can easily get African food, clothing, and other cultural elements within the Metropole; furthermore, there is no shortage of African communities in Europe. For instance, the migrant Parisian neighborhood, La Goutte d'Or is often referred to as "Little Africa" because it is known for having African food, fashion, and artisans. Thus, African migrants can feel at home in the metropole and even transplant vital elements of their culture, as we see from the lives of the Africans in Belleville:

> Cette nuit, toute la tribu nègre est venue. Une sorte de marée de gens, cinquante environ. Ils sont peinturlurés. Certains sont habillés de boue. Ils ont amené du vin de palme, de la cola, des poulets rouges, des mangues, des avocats…La noix de cola est le symbole de la concorde, de la paix et du bonheur dans mon peuple. C'est sur elle que nos empires se sont bâtis jadis. Elle est favorable (191).

Loukoum depicts the importance of kola nuts and palm wine, two significant cultural artifacts in many Sub-Saharan African nations. In essence, these artifacts signify the transplanting and further blooming of African cultures in France. Loukoum also explains the significance of the palm wine: "Avec le vin de palme, la danse a duré toute la nuit.

Les nègres adorent le vin de palme. Partout en Afrique" (109). In insisting that palm wine is loved everywhere in Africa, Loukoum asserts that Africa is no longer seen as a continent but a transcontinental entity that immigrants in the metropole have transplanted. Africa is seen in the food they eat, the clothes they wear, the languages they speak, and the feasts they celebrate. Even the local marabout[2], Cérif is called upon to heal Soumana when she falls ill (192-93). Thus, a tradition that one would naturally associate with villages in Africa is still held firmly by immigrant families in France. This proves that immigrants can maintain a root identity in a globalized world, even manifesting cultural aspects that are uniquely African. Furthermore, because of globalization, Africa is no longer restricted to a continent but can be found even in Europe and other parts of the world. Hence, it becomes pretty easy to maintain a root identity in a globalized world. At the beginning of the novel, we discover that Loukoum cannot read in French even though he had spent several years in France (8). When asked to write in French, he proceeds to write a religious statement in Arabic, a language many young Malians are taught in Koran classes (10). This shows that the education he receives in school clashes with the education he receives at home and on the streets of Belleville.

Despite the apparent desire among many immigrants in Belleville to remain in the metropole, some immigrants, following the logic of the root tree, still, propagate the ideology of a return to Africa. Consider the case of a black nationalist that Loukoum sees speaking in a Parisian mall:

> Le nègre tient un drapeau blanc dans ses mains. Des dizaines de personnes l'écoutent. Le nègre dit que les nègres ne savent pas qu'ils sont nègres. Vous

[2] A religious leader in Islamic parts of Africa believed to have supernatural powers.

> voulez tous être des Blancs, mais les Blancs voient bien à votre gueule que vous êtes pas du terroir. Antillais ? Ça veut rien dire ! Nous sommes tous africains... L'Afrique, c'est nos racines. Personne ne peut renier ses origines sans aller à sa perte. (123)

Basically, this black nationalist is promoting the idea of returning to Africa. The white flag in his hands symbolizes the purity and innocence of Africa, while his speech addresses the issue of identity among African immigrants in France. He insists that Antillean and African immigrants share the same roots and must return to Africa. Thus, his argument follows the root tree logic propagated by Negritude and Pan-Africanist theorists.

Like Condé, Beyala exposes this root-based ideology, but unlike Condé, who explicitly denounces such notions through her characters, Beyala fails to explicitly refute or affirm such claims. Instead, Loukoum's use of the word "nègre" serves as a complex signifier of the ongoing debates and tensions surrounding identity, language, and culture among African immigrants in France. His use of the derogatory word "nègre" shows that he has internalized a narrative about radical black activists, which places them as outsiders from mainstream African immigrant communities. Thus, neither Loukoum nor M'am pays much attention to his claims, confirming their little interest in a return to Africa. His call to return is simply a reaction to the racism of the other. As stated in this thesis, the root tree logic thrives in the opposition between the spectrum of binary structures. Therefore, the call to return to Africa, in this case, is a reaction to the discrimination of the other.

Wherever identities clash, there can either be a reinforcement of the root identities or a synthesis that leads to the formation of a rhizome. The black nationalist's cry for a return to Africa is at odds with Glissant's vision of creolization: "Ma proposition est qu'aujourd'hui le monde entier s'archipélise et se créolise" (Glissant, *Traite du tout-monde* 194). Glissant's statement suggests that the world is undergoing a process of transformation where traditional boundaries and distinctions are breaking down. This process is characterized by two key terms: "archipelago" and "creolization." The concept of "archipelago" refers to the idea that the world is becoming more fragmented and decentralized, much like an archipelago, a group of islands that are separated from each other. For Glissant, the world is characterized by multiple, overlapping, and interdependent identities that defy easy categorization. The archipelagic worldview encourages a more fluid and open understanding of the world, where diversity is valued and celebrated. Glissant argues that in the contemporary world, creolization is happening at an unprecedented pace and scale, thanks to the force of globalization (193-194). As a result, cultures are no longer static and homogenous but dynamic and hybrid. This process of creolization is not just about mixing cultures but also about creating new forms of cultural expression and identity. It is about the formation of rhizomatic identities.

3.2 Hybrid beings and rhizomes

According to Stuart Hall, "in diasporic conditions, people are often obliged to adopt shifting, multiple, or hyphenated positions of identifications" (114). This is evident in Beyala's main character, Loukoum. He is caught between the identity of his Malian family and that of the Metropole. Thus, he is the quintessential "afro-français," a hybrid formed by a mixture of African and French cultures. Loukoum has no qualms about

shifting between cultures; unlike his father, who maintains a root-based identity, Loukoum exhibits hybridity. For instance, he is happy to see Santa Claus but also very much aware of the significance of kola nuts among Africans (145, 191). His shift between identities is necessitated by the fact that, as a young immigrant, his interactions shift daily from home to school and back home; therefore, he must navigate both spaces by understanding the dynamics of both cultures. Much like Condé's main character, Sancher, who embodies the various cultures he interacts with, Loukoum situates himself in between the cultures that surround him.

The "afro-français" must build relationships through communication in navigating both spaces. Loukoum's relationship with autochthones is vertical, while his relationship with other African immigrants is horizontal. Horizontal relationships are characterized by equality, while vertical relationships are characterized by hierarchical relations between people (Thisted). Thus, when Mademoiselle Garnier divides the class between people from "developing countries" and those from the metropole, she creates a hierarchical structure within the classroom (52-53). But despite the presence of this structure fostered by the logic of the root tree, Loukoum transcends the system through his puppy love for a white classmate, Lolita, which she, in turn, reciprocates (200-201). The significance of their relationship is that they have broken the hierarchical structure imposed upon them and entered into a horizontal plain of relationship. One of the fundamental natures of rhizomatic plants is that their roots connect horizontally. Therefore, to form a rhizome within the metropole, the binary structures of black/white and autochthone/immigrant must be altered for a more horizontal, interconnected order. This interconnected order is what some Antillean scholars have described as creolization.

3.2.1 Manifestations of creolization within the metropole

In his book, *Traité du tout-monde* (1997), Edouard Glissant defines creolization : “j’appelle créolisation la rencontre, l’interférence, le choc, les harmonies et les désharmonies entre les cultures, dans la totalité réalisée du monde-terre” (194). Glissant uses several terms to describe the different aspects of créolisation. The first is "rencontre." This refers to the initial contact between cultures, which can be either voluntary or forced. The second term is "interference." This refers to the ways in which cultures influence and shape one another through their interactions. The third term is "choc," which means clash or collision. This refers to the moments of conflict or tension that can arise when cultures collide. The fourth term is "harmonies," which refers to the moments of agreement, similarity, or compatibility between cultures. The fifth and final term is "désharmonies," which refers to the moments of disagreement, difference, or incompatibility between cultures. Taken together, these terms help to paint a picture of what Glissant sees as the complex and multifaceted nature of créolisation. It is not simply a matter of cultures blending together or colliding in a straightforward way, but rather a dynamic and constantly evolving process that involves a range of different experiences and outcomes. Finally, Glissant emphasizes that creolization takes place within “the realized totality of the world-earth.” This phrase suggests that créolisation is not a separate or isolated phenomenon but rather something that is intimately connected to the larger context of the world as a whole. Thus, for Glissant, although an Antillean concept, creolization can be used to explain cultural dynamics in a globalized world. He explains that globalization has made cultural exchange between groups more feasible (193).

Glissant's definition of creolization highlights the importance of cultural and linguistic encounters and interaction in creating cultural identity. Thus, in a multicultural society like France, creole identities are being formed. Glissant's theory of creolization argues that cultural diversity and openness are essential elements of a rich and vibrant cultural identity. As cultures interact, differences and disharmonies first appear, but eventually, cultural exchange will lead to the blending and effacing of certain cultural elements. As Ernesto Laclau rightly asserts, "there is no way that a particular group living in a wider community can live a monadic existence…part of the definition of its own identity is the constitution of a complex and elaborated system of relations with other groups" (48). Thus, no cultural identity is fully closed because identities are formed in light of the Other. Therefore, cultural exchange is inevitable as groups encounter other groups. Hence, no culture can attain absoluteness. As cultures interact, differences and differing occur—a différance of identities. For example, there are apparent differences between Loukoum and the white students in his class, but we also see that his identity is never fixed—as he interacts, his cultural identity constantly evolves in light of the other. For example, Pierre Pelletier tries to teach Loukoum European values (242). But it is not only Loukoum that is influenced; the African bracelets he makes and sells to his classmates become an instant hit among them (73-75). This shows that there is cultural exchange even within the small classroom. Thus, even a conservative root culture is never ultimately closed, but it evolves in the midst of differences.

Loukoum's own identity evolves as the narrative progresses. At the beginning of the novel, a social worker speaking to M'am, Abdou's first wife, complains about Loukoum's lack of integration (13). However, toward the end of the novel, Abdou

complains about Loukoum's lack of interest in African culture and his subsequent assimilation into French society:

> Très jeune, j'emmenais mon fils avec moi pour lui apprendre le secret de nos dieux, comme dans une forêt, en marchant souplement…Je lui disais : Chez nous au Mali, les rues sont plus étroites, bordées de manguiers et d'avocatiers…il y aune grande place avec un baobab millénaire…mon fils peu a peu ne m'écoutait plus…Aujourd'hui, je vois mon fils. Il a découvert le vocabulaire de Paris…Il répugne à manger avec ses doigts…Mes histoires l'amusent. L'Afrique, le Mali, ma Terre…nous appartenons à la tribu des Malinkés. (215)

Abdou insists that despite his best efforts to teach Loukoum African culture, he is eventually losing interest in African identity. The implication is not so much that Loukoum has been assimilated into French culture but that he is evolving away from a root-based African identity towards hybridity and creoleness—a mix of the identities surrounding him. This phenomenon is common among second and third-generation immigrants who, despite the root identities many of their parents maintain, seek to transcend any idea that borders around a return to roots. Glissant explains the loss of Antillean culture among second generation Antilleans in France: "Il est définitivement assimilé au paysage français: il considère avec beaucoup d'indulgence la réalité de son pays d'origine, il continue à consommer en famille les boudons, rhum, légumes et piments en provenance des Antilles" (130). Similarly, Loukoum does not desire to return to his African roots; for him, the past does not constitute his identity but the reality of the present—the presence of multiple identities. Like Condé's Sancher, he has transcended

the binary logic of the root tree and has become the embodiment of the cultures that surround him within the metropole.

According to Glissant, "l'Europe se créolise…Elle possède plusieurs langues et littératures très riches, qui s'influencent et s'interpénètrent…" (*Le Monde*). In other words, Europe is in the process of creolization. Just like the Antilles was creolized by the presence of multiple identities, Europe is following the same path, due to the presence of immigrants from various parts of the world, particularly Africa. Glissant sees creolization as a universal occurrence, visible in the streets of Rio de Janeiro, Mexico, the banlieues of Paris and even in America (*Le Monde*). In their book, *Eloge de la Créolité*, Bernabé et al. states : "il existe donc créolité antillaise, une créolité guyanaise, une créolité brésilienne, une créolité africaine, une créolité asiatique et une créolité polynésienne, assez dissemblables entre elles mais issues de la matrice du même maelstrom historique" (31). In other words, the theory of creolization is not limited to the Antilles but can also been seen in other parts of the world where the migration and globalization have brought different groups together in a particular place. Hence, there is also a "créolité française" engendered by the presence and interconnectedness of various cultural identities within the metropole.

In contrast to the Antillean creolization that was formed in the system of the plantations, French creolization is being developed through migrant communities. Thus, this site of othering becomes a place from which migrants can extend their roots to the Other and vice-versa. For example, Loukoum is able to cross Belleville to another neighborhood where Lolita lives (157-160). When he finally arrives at Lolita's house, he exclaims: "La maison de Lolita est la plus belle maison que j'aie jamais vue, je vous le

jure!" (160). By transcending the boundaries that define the autochthone/immigrants binary, he is protesting against the system of root identities that have socially divided the city. Unlike his father, who has been locked on the other side of this root tree binary, Loukoum seeks to explore the possibility of blending with different cultures. Furthermore, his successful trip to Lolita's house represents how young afro-français are breaking the norms imposed upon them through the root logic prevalent for many decades within the metropole. Calixthe Beyala herself is one of such immigrants that have managed to transcend the boundaries that define the binary of autochthone/immigrant. She arrived in Paris from Cameroon at 17 and has achieved incredible metropole success despite the obstacles she has encountered in her literary career.

Another interesting phenomenon about Loukoum's short trip to Lolita's house is the way he observes the white neighborhood and the manner in which he speaks to Lolita's mother: "Je lui ai expliqué. Elle m'a écouté religieusement. Les Blancs écoutent les Noirs quand vous leur racontez vos misères. Mais quand vous leur dites que ça se passe bien, que vous n'avez pas besoin d'eux, la, ils vous écoutent plus…je lui ai raconté une histoire que les Blancs n'aiment pas. Que nous sommes des gens bien" (160-61). In other words, Loukoum does not want Lolita's mother to express pity concerning the condition of his family so he lies that his parents are well to do, an action he feels will definitely disinterest her as he claims whites prefer hearing miserable stories about blacks. Thus Loukoum understands a unique form of racism which Gaston Kelman describes as "angelic racism" : "le racisme angélique, fait de paternalisme, d'apitoiement sur le sort de ces pauvres gens. C'est la résultante du sanglot de l'homme blanc pris de

remords pour l'ancestral racisme diabolique de son peuple envers le Noir" (21). Kelman argues that treating blacks in a paternalistic way as an atonement for slavery and colonization is a subtle form of racism. Although this form of racism is often fostered by good intentions, it is a subtle way of insinuating that blacks lack agency and will always need the paternalistic guidance of the Other to become successful. Hence Loukoum, aware of this paternalistic tendency, prefers to lie in order to maintain his sense of worth. This is his own way of protesting against any form of othering that may occur from affirming his family's unfortunate state. His trip to Lolita's house is a form of protest, but so his is demeanor in the house. His demeanor screams: "I belong here!"; that is, having transcended the imposed social boundaries, he has finds himself in a place where he should not be, but he is not perturbed. He navigates the space masterfully, even moving into Lolita's bedroom (161). Thus, Loukoum is not afraid to break certain social norms as he strives to blend with other identities. For example, he goes to the mosque, he is also happy to participate in African gatherings, and he is happy to visit Santa Claus (84, 191, 145). According to Susan Gauch, "the visit to Santa appears as an opportunity to participate in the rites of French society" (217). Thus, he has no problems participating in the rites of French society and also participating in the cultural and religious rites of his family. He is a hybrid being, a creolized entity, a collage of different cultures, a personification of the changing mentifacts and sociofacts of the metropole. Like Condé's Sancher who interacts freely with every culture in Rivière au Sel, Loukoum is unbiased towards all the cultures that surround him. Although he is surrounded by a multitude of conflicting identities, he adeptly navigates them. It is this blending of identities which Loukoum displays that is at the core of the emerging creolization of the metropole.

Creole cuisine is one of the most apparent manifestations of creolization in the metropole. Creole cuisine is a fusion of cultural and culinary influences, mainly African, French, and Caribbean. The presence of Creole cuisine in Belleville is proof of the creolization of the metropole. When Loukoum asks M'am what is available for breakfast, she replies: "Du pain, des céréales, de la confiture, du beurre, du thé, du lait, du café" (28). Later on in the novel, M'am prepares a popular West African dish: "M'am prepare un aloko sauce d'arachide. Elle enlève les peaux des plantins, elle les coupe en petits morceaux…" (140). Aloko is another name for fried plantains, a prevalent food in West-African nations. She combines this delicacy with peanut sauce, another West African treat. Thus, migrant families prepare their native delicacies and incorporate French dishes into their diet. Loukoum is exposed to traditional African cuisine, but he is equally exposed to French cuisine. Therefore, he is incorporating diverse identities, transcending the root tree's binary logic, and constantly evolving toward a rhizomatic identity. Towards the novel's end, Loukoum's father, Abdou, laments Loukoum's lack of desire to eat with his fingers (214). For Abdou, this shows that he is being assimilated into French culture. His lack of desire to eat with his fingers is a testament to the fact that he is internalizing the cultures around him. But for Loukoum, there is no total assimilation into any culture; he picks up traits from each culture and internalizes them, thus evolving into a hybrid being capable of interacting with people of different cultures.

In France, African cuisine has had a significant influence on French cuisine for many years: "much of France's more dynamic dishes are inspired by the various spices used across Africa. In any French kitchen, you'll most likely find spices like cumin (West Africa), saffron (Morocco) and vanilla bean (Madagascar). Popular blends include za'atar

(Egypt) and berbere (Ethiopia)" (Muñoz). In France, afro-français chefs such as Vanessa Bonongo, a French-Burkinabé, create creole dishes by mixing African culinary traditions with French cuisine ("French-African Fusion Cuisine Breaking down Cultural Barriers"). Creole cuisine serves as a symbol of the rising rhizome within the metropole. Cultures are becoming increasingly interconnected despite the dialectical relationship between root and rhizomatic identities in the metropole.

Quoting Glissant's *Introduction à une poétique du divers*, French philosopher Michel Onfray juxtaposes Judeo-Christian civilization (root) and creole civilization (rhizome) (299). Furthermore, he asserts that creole civilization represents a rejection of Judeo-Christian civilization, which he describes as an "assassinat de l'Europe judéo-chrétienne" (307). In addition, Onfray argues that Glissant's theory of global creolization is simply a poetic expression :

> Mais nous ne sommes pas en bonne logique : Glissant pense en poète…quand une intuition poétique sous-tend un programme politique là visée civilisationnelle planétaire, on peut épistémologiquement exiger autre chose que la rêverie, l'imagination ou l'utopie qui produit des ravages quand ceux qui s'en réclament veulent localiser ce qui, c'est sa définition (302-303).

In other words, Onfray argues that Glissant's theory of creolization is not a sufficient basis for a political program; he claims that Glissant's view of creolization is too vague and abstract and therefore lacks a practical basis for political action. In Onfray's view, a political program requires a more solid foundation of knowledge and evidence than a poetic intuition.

Although there are political implications to creolization, it transcends the political. What Beyala shows is that everyday people within the metropole are at the heart of the creolization process. As Glissant asserts, there will be shock, harmony, and disharmony in the process of the formation of creole identities (Glissant, *Traité du tout monde*, 194). But it is formed in the dialectic of the root and the rhizome. What Beyala portrays through Loukoum is a multicultural society opposed to the formation of the rhizome. Like Condé's Rivière au Sel, the structure of the metropole in Beyala's *Le petit prince de Belleville* is fundamentally multicultural. Still, just like Rivière au Sel, the inhabitants of the metropole struggle to affirm their underlying creoleness. Thus, Beyala provides a nuanced portrayal of the internal struggles faced by many African migrants in a society that is becoming increasingly multicultural. Therefore, Loukoum is the quintessential immigrant navigating a complex terrain where his language and way of life are often at odds with those around him. This is the dilemma of many young immigrants who are caught between their family's cultural identity and that of the land where they now claim citizenship. They are often conflicted between returning to their family's roots or transcending them. Ultimately, Loukoum's identity cannot be defined on the basis of a root culture; we cannot fully assert that he is French, Malian, or Muslim—his relationship with these identities is somewhat ambivalent. Thus, he is neither here nor there: he has internalized creoleness. Hence, metaphorically advocating for the creolization of the metropole.

CHAPTER 4: CONCLUSION

The novels *Traversée de la mangrove* and *Le petit prince de Belleville* depict creolization in the Antilles and France, respectively. Through the use of root and rhizomatic identities, both authors illustrate the dialectic relationship between the two, demonstrating the fluid and dynamic nature of cultural identity formation in the creole context. But creolization is not without its challenges: where there are multiple cultures, there will always be conflicts as people try to assert their identities on others. This is what Condé exposes masterfully through the constant othering that takes place in Rivière au Sel. Beyala, on the other hand, reveals the social hierarchization of French society that has placed African migrants in communities where economic mobility seems to be complicated. Despite the racialized structure of the metropole, young immigrants like Loukoum are protesting against otherness by merging with other identities in the metropole, forming a new creole identity.

In *Introduction à une poétique du divers*, Glissant argues against the hierarchization of cultures within a creole context :

> La créolisation suppose [que] des éléments culturels mis en présence doivent obligatoirement être équivalents en valeurs pour que cette créolisation s'effectue réellement. C'est-à-dire que si dans des éléments culturels mis en relation certains sont infériorisés par rapport à d'autres, la créolisation ne se fait pas vraiment. Elle se fait mais sur un mode bâtard et sur un mode injuste. (17)

The essence of Glissant's argument is that elements brought together in the creolization process must be considered equivalent in value for the creolization to occur in a meaningful way. According to Glissant, if certain cultural elements are inferiorized in relation to others, the creolization process is not truly taking place. Instead, it is occurring in a bastardized and unjust manner. He argues that the hierarchization of cultures, or the valuing of one culture over another, undermines the process of creolization and creates a biased and unjust outcome. Furthermore, he argues that this occurs when one culture is considered superior and the other inferior, leading to the dominance of one culture over the other. This not only results in the suppression of the inferior culture, but also in the degradation of the creolized culture as a whole. In Glissant's view, the true creolization process can only occur when cultural elements are considered equal in value. This allows for the creation of a new culture that is a synthesis of its constituent parts, rather than a degraded or inferior version of one culture. Glissant sees this as a more just and equitable outcome, as it recognizes the worth and value of all cultures involved in the creolization process.

Although I agree with Glissant up to a point, I cannot accept his overriding assumption that cultural elements must be equal for creolization to be successful. Although equality of cultural expressions is essential, it is not the force that drives the creolization process. It is practically impossible to achieve equality of cultural expressions. As I have shown in this thesis, Sancher and Loukoum both embody the various cultures they interact with. For Sancher, he personifies creoleness because he asserts that he doesn't belong to any group. Although the process through which Sancher develops a creole identity is not explicitly explored, we see that through his many

journeys and interactions, he internalized the cultures of various groups. Beyala's character, Loukoum, on the other hand, interacts daily with the different cultures within the metropole. Still, an obvious reality is that there is gain and loss as he internalizes the cultures around him. His father laments that he has lost certain traits of his native land, Mali (213-15). Thus, Beyala shows more explicitly the creolization process: As roots merge, specific characteristics of individual cultures are lost. Loukoum is hardly concerned about the hierarchy of values; he is more concerned about successfully navigating the various cultural identities surrounding him. Although he is from a Malian Muslim family, he has little or no problem participating in the rites of French society. Thus, even though he seems to interact daily with conflicting worldviews, he masterfully navigates the terrain by internalizing the various cultures. Still, within this process, he gains and loses certain cultural expressions as Abdou laments: "Aujourd'hui, je vois mon fils. Il a découvert le vocabulaire de Paris…Il a acquis d'autres manières de dire bonjour. Il connait des rituels qui me bouleversent. Il répugne à manger avec ses doigts" (214). Abdou's complaining of Loukoum's acceptance of certain French cultural traits and his further loss of certain African cultural features shows the dialectic relationship between the root and the rhizome. Abdou, driven by the root logic, fails to see that to live within a multicultural society, one must be open to receiving from the other and vice-versa. But this process cannot be effected without gains and losses. In Loukoum's case, he loses some of his native culture's traits and gains some French cultural traits. This is what is at the heart of the creolization process: the various cultures involved must be willing to exchange cultural traits for the rhizome to be formed. Without a certain level of

compromise, the root logic will continue to prevail because each culture will keep asserting the objectivity of its values.

Both Sancher and Loukoum embody the rhizome. This explains why both characters are at odds with other characters driven by the root logic. They both show that for the rhizome to be formed, one must be open to merging with other roots. Accordingly, harmony in a multicultural society is not easily achieved. It must be negotiated among the people. In Rivière au Sel, Sancher's death sparks this negotiation. Although the root logic prevails in Belleville, Loukoum represents the emerging rhizome within the metropole. He is not tied to any root identity; instead, he carries within himself expressions of the various cultures within the metropole. Thus, he represents an emerging expression of cultural identity—the interconnection of multiple roots—the rhizome.

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