

LITERATURES AS WORLD LITERATURE

# Francophone Literature as World Literature

Edited by  
Christian Moraru,  
Nicole Simek, and  
Bertrand Westphal



B L O O M S B U R Y

# Francophone Literature as World Literature

## Literatures as World Literature

Can the literature of a specific country, author, or genre be used to approach the elusive concept of “world literature”? **Literatures as World Literature** takes a novel approach to world literature by analyzing specific constellations—according to language, nation, form, or theme—of literary texts and authors in their own world-literary dimensions.

World literature is obviously so vast that any view of it cannot help but be partial; the question then becomes how to reduce the complex task of understanding and describing world literature. Most treatments of world literature so far either have been theoretical and thus abstract, or else have made broad use of exemplary texts from a variety of languages and epochs. The majority of critical work, the filling in of what has been traced, lies ahead of us. **Literatures as World Literature** fills in the devilish details by allowing scholars to move outward from their own areas of specialization, fostering scholarly writing that approaches more closely the polyphonic, multiperspectival nature of world literature.

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*To Bi Kacou Parfait Diandué (1973–2019), in memoriam.*



# Contents

Preface and Acknowledgments	ix
Introduction: Reading Francophone Literature with the World <i>Christian Moraru, Nicole Simek, and Bertrand Westphal</i>	1
Part I Systems and Institutions of Literary Francophonie: Language, Written Culture, and the Publishing World	
1 African Literature, World Literature, and Francophonie <i>Bertrand Westphal</i>	49
2 Francophone African Publishing and the Misconceptions of World Literature <i>Raphaël Thierry</i>	66
3 Malinke, French, Francophonie: African Languages in World Literature <i>Bi Kacou Parfait Diandué</i>	83
4 Globalizing the Spiritual and the Mythological: Indian Writing in French from Pondicherry <i>Vijaya Rao</i>	93
Part II Francophone Spatialities: Cities, Landscapes, Environments	
5 Mapping World Literature from Below: Tierno Monénembo and City Writing <i>Eric Prieto</i>	107
6 Questions of Diversity in the Global Literary Ecology and <i>banlieue</i> Literature <i>Laura Reeck</i>	122
7 As the World Falls Apart: Living through the Apocalypse in Christian Guay-Poliquin's <i>Le poids de la neige</i> and Catherine Mavrikakis's <i>Oscar de Profundis</i> <i>Vincent Gélinas-Lemaire</i>	136
8 Poetry in the World: Aimé Césaire, Édouard Glissant, and the Language of Landscape <i>Jane Hiddleston</i>	151



Part III Relational Identities: Sex, Gender, and Class in Francophone World Arenas	
9	World Literature, <i>littérature-monde</i> , and the Politics of Difference <i>Thérèse Migraine-George</i> 167
10	Queer Desire on the Move: Resistance to Homoglobalization in World Literature in French <i>Jarrod Hayes</i> 180
11	Locations of Identity: <i>Littérature-mondaine</i> and the Ethics of Class in Evelyne Trouillot's <i>Le Rond-point</i> <i>Régine Michelle Jean-Charles</i> 194
Part IV Francophone Literature and Planetary Intertexts	
12	Writing French in the World: Transnational Identities and Transcultural Ideals in the Works of Michel Houellebecq and Boualem Sansal <i>Jacqueline Dutton</i> 209
13	Literature's Purchase: Remaking World Economic Relations in Crusoe's Footsteps <i>Nicole Simek</i> 227
14	Worlding <i>Négritude</i> , or Aimé Césaire's Global Caliban <i>Zahi Zalloua</i> 239
15	From Postmodern Intertextuality to "Decomposed Theater": Matei Vişniec between Romanian and Francophone Literatures <i>Emilia David</i> 252
	Bibliography 267
	Notes on Contributors 292
	Index 297

## Preface and Acknowledgments

“Are all literatures world literatures?” wonder the editors of a 2018 book published in the same series as ours.<sup>1</sup> They also point out that the issue seldom comes up with respect to “presumably ‘major’ literatures such as French or British.”<sup>2</sup> They imply, and we too recognize here, that this question is still raised, *expressis verbis* or not, apropos of literary cultures perceived as less central to a world-system whose accounts, at least, are in turn still marked by some of the hierarchies and epistemological biases of the *littérature universelle* paradigm.

In pushing back against this model, *Francophone Literature as World Literature* does not skirt the question either. But, in asking it, our collection’s chapters focus on Francophone writing from outside the Hexagon—from European countries like Luxembourg and from former French colonies—as well as from inside metropolitan France, with both *Beur* literature and highly acclaimed authors such as Michel Houellebecq as major examples. Thus, our contributors trace the ways in which Francophone writers from all over the world lay bare the “worldedness” of their roots and efforts. Uncovering the planetary inscription of the literary works and cultural traditions of a francosphere encompassing Asia, Africa, Canada, the Caribbean, and Europe, without forgetting, inside the latter, France itself is in fact one of this book’s major tasks. For, as it will become readily apparent, Francophone writers—whether we talk about established figures or the recently arrived—make their cases for this world presence assiduously, time and over again. Particularly in the wake of the *littérature-monde* debate, however, French literature traditionally understood can neither claim nor afford anymore, we believe, the self-assigned exceptionalist position inside the world-system of writing of French expression. The Flauberts, the Rimbauds, the Célines, the Duras, and their metropolitan peers and successors must occupy, instead, a more democratically configured place within this system and participate in similar relays and processes of worlding, planetary negotiations, and “planetarizing” (“mondializing”) relevance as any other voices of literary Francophonie no matter what their locations and backgrounds are—hence our World Literature approach to the immensely rich and variegated Francophone corpus.

Bringing together not only Francophone material but also scholars of literary Francophonies from Australia to Africa and Québec and from the Caribbean to Romania and India, this book would not have been possible without the unflagging support provided by the Bloomsbury staff, as well as by our institutions and colleagues. Thus, we want to recognize Editorial Director Haaris Naqvi, whose professional guidance and help overall has been unparalleled, as well as Editorial Assistant Amy Martin, the press’s outside readers, and its marketing and production teams. We are also most grateful to Thomas Oliver Beebee, editor of

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At University of North Carolina, Greensboro, Beth Miller has helped editing the book and has done the index. Christian Moraru would also like to thank the following institutions, programs, and individuals: the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation, for its steady sponsorship over the years; UNCG chancellor Franklin D. Gilliam, Jr., and Provost Dana Dunn, for their support of advanced collaborative research bringing together faculty from UNCG and other universities; the College of Arts and Sciences, for travel grants awarded by Dean John Z. Kiss; UNCG's Class of 1949 Distinguished Professor in the Humanities Endowment; UNCG's Atlantic World Research Network and its director, Professor Christopher Hodgkins; UNCG's Office of Research and Economic Development and its vice chancellor, Dr. Terri L. Shelton, for well-targeted, dependable funding; UNCG's International Programs Center, for recent travel awards; the University's Walter Clinton Jackson Library and Information Technology Services specialists, for all their invaluable assistance; the UNCG English Department's Head, Professor Scott Romine, for his unique leadership and the English faculty for their collegiality and participation in the conversation about World Literature and its place in the department. Gratefully acknowledged are also the support, kindness, and friendship of Henry Sussman, Eileen Julien, Keith Cushman, Karen Kilcup, Stephen Yarbrough, Jean-Michel Rabaté, Alexandru Matei, Jeffrey R. Di Leo, and Radu Țurcanu. Camelia has helped, once again, in far more ways than can be described here.

*Francophone Literature as World Literature* features solely original work. Most contributions have been written in English. Three of them have been done in other languages and have been rendered into English: Bertrand Westphal's "African Literature, World Literature, and Francophonie" (translated from the French by Amy Wells); Bi Kacou Parfait Diandué's "Malinke, French, Francophonie: African Languages in World Literature" (translated from the French by N'Guessan Kouadio Germain); and Emilia David's "From Postmodern Intertextuality to 'Decomposed Theater': Matei Vișniec between Romanian and Francophone Literatures" (translated from the Italian by Elizabeth MacDonald). All translations have been thoroughly revised by the editors.

Finally, we should note that the bibliography compiled at the end lists, as consistently as possible, items the contributors both reference and use in their chapters. Here, "use" means, quasi invariably, engaging with the works in question in ways requiring more formal citation. In some cases, however, our critics mention in their respective chapters solely the author name, title, and possibly the publication year. In this category fall mostly primary material and some philosophy and literary-cultural scholarship. The bibliography includes texts of this sort because, while they are not fully referenced in their respective chapters and sometimes are mentioned only in endnotes, they are relevant to the overall discussion in those contributions.

*Christian Moraru, Nicole Simek, and Bertrand Westphal*

## Notes

- 1 Mircea Martin, Christian Moraru, and Andrei Terian, eds., "Preface and Acknowledgments," in *Romanian Literature as World Literature* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2018), xiv.
- 2 Martin, Moraru, and Terian, eds., "Preface and Acknowledgments," xiv.



# Introduction: Reading Francophone Literature with the World

Christian Moraru, Nicole Simek, and Bertrand Westphal

A comprehensive, all-embracing art, an art that joins together, a tissue-art, an art of links, a network-like art. An art that places thousands of points in relation to one another and explores the roads all these interconnected points entreat us to take.

—Grégoire Polet, “L’atlas du monde”

“As far as poetry and politics go,” Martinican writer Édouard Glissant declares in a 2003 interview given to Philippe Artières and reprinted in the collective volume *Pour une littérature-monde* coedited by Michel Le Bris and Jean Rouaud, “I think I have always listened to my instinct telling me that the utmost object of poetry is the world: the world of becoming, the world that jostles us, the world that defies understanding, . . . the world as place of meeting, of cultural impact, and of the human in all its forms.”<sup>1</sup> What ties the literary and the political together, Glissant goes on, is “this reference to the world.” This world, he specifies, is not a “kind of abstract universal” but a concrete and immediate *totalité-monde*. However, this “world totality” is non-“totalist,” and it is definitely non-totalitarian; in it, people, cultures, and histories stand “in relation to one another,” worlded.<sup>2</sup> The French-Caribbean author further insists that being in relation in and with the world is a prerequisite to creating aesthetically and, by the same token, to recreating politically. Whether we talk about the making of poetic form or about the remaking of a socioeconomic system still undergirded, as Glissant reminds us, by hegemonic versions of relationality, either action is for him—as it is for the editors of *Francophone Literature as World Literature*—predicated on an awareness of the world-as-world or, as we shall see later on, of the world as *planet* and its *problématique-monde* or “planetary problematics”: the world as a space of multiple and inevitable encounters, as an involved, simultaneously encouraging and troubling relational setup consisting structurally and thematically of links, interchanges, and frictions among individuals, groups, politics, places, and literary-cultural entities on scales ranging from the sub- to the transnational, the regional to the planetary, the human to the nonhuman, and the animate to the inanimate.

In focusing on Francophonie’s literary production as World Literature, our book attends to works in a plethora of French varieties worldwide by treating those texts as literary practices fundamentally engaged with and molded, at distance and in

situ, by this highly complex world structure and its issues.<sup>3</sup> The chapters revisit key aspects, moments, and whereabouts of recent Francophone literatures so as to canvas and problematize these literatures' very *worldedness* at a time the latter is becoming geoculturally as well as theoretically impossible to ignore and requires, accordingly, systematic and *appositely world-minded* critical reflection—hence the plea we enter, with some qualifications, in the final section of this introduction and across the volume on behalf of a World Literature approach to this Francophone corpus.<sup>4</sup> For, we contend, Glissant's world-relational ontology bears not only on writing and politics but also on making sense of the written word, political activism, and life generally in Francophone spaces—in brief, on critical interpretation. That is to say, the other face of this ontology is a reading model. Indeed, we discern a critical and critically worlded platform in Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*, in his poetics largely, and beyond it in much of Francophone literatures. This program, which we deem foundational to a World Literature-informed revisiting of these literary bodies, demands dealing with them, and not solely with their *littérature-monde* rebellious extension, as an art shaped by a world problematics—by conversations, transactions, clashes, overlaps, and cross-pollinations with a whole spectrum of worldly presences, influences, traditions, idioms, and so forth. Essentially on the same wavelength, we read post-Second World War Francophone literatures with the world-as-world. Not only do we not cast aside the “Francophone” category, as we will explain at greater length later on, but we also associate *littérature-monde* to it and read *for* the world in this entire literary domain as well as we do, conversely, for this body of work's own inscription into the world unfolding inside, across, and outside literary Francophonie's old and new abodes.

Thus, we ask, most basically, which world networks—and, more broadly, which kind of world—are Francophone writers part of? And, vice versa, which world or worlds, which networks of language, literature, race, ethnicity, gender, faith, material culture, and localities do these authors' works give voice to and power?<sup>5</sup> These webs, we stress throughout, bring into play a plurality: not—by a long shot—an egalitarian one, but one fraught with asymmetries and injustices and surely tilted to certain hubs of political-economic leverage and cultural prestige. At the same time, centers and margins alike, former French colonies, today's multiethnic and multiracial France, as well as the other sites enmeshed in this networked aggregate, all reveal themselves as crossroads at once geohistorically situated and of the bigger world, worldly. Together, they stage a mundane diorama of loosely organized yet mobile multiplicities differing from one another according to place, imperial past, postimperial developments, and so on.

In line with the Bloomsbury series' title, our book's refers to *Francophone Literature*. But—and we want to make this absolutely clear—the singular form harbors and *de facto* means multitudes, and so “literature” should be read as “literatures.” We attempt to capture this astonishing diversity and richness not just in the plural of our standard designation of the phenomenon at hand, “Francophone literatures,” as we do later, but also in the notion, upheld throughout the following fifteen chapters, that metropolitan French literature itself as conventionally taught and written on has

become, under the impact of the feedback loop generated by Francophonie's world literary apparatus, *no more and no less than just one of these Francophone literatures*.<sup>6</sup> In highlighting this plurality—one whose makeup is, to repeat, far from genuinely pluralist and democratic—we do not aim to disregard the continuities among those literatures conjoined by the “Francophone” common denominator, but to foreground, rather, a heterogeneous planetary reality, also acknowledging that the all-embracing Francophone perspective itself has not always done justice to such complexities either. As writing in a certain language and as a linguistically centered approach thereto, it can have and arguably has had unifying and even homogenizing repercussions insofar as it has lumped together the remarkably discrepant ethnocultural worlds both brought into being and into conversation by the dissemination of French across continents. That is why our introduction leads off with a brief and occasionally data-driven survey of what we would dub Francophonie's language *ecologies*, a concept meant to drive home the linguistic facet of the point we make apropos of Francophone literatures: the French-speaking world actually constitutes a world-system of “combined and uneven” worlds in which French and its users exist alongside and in interface with other tongues and dialects and those employing them within and across their own world-systems of language and culture.<sup>7</sup> In this sense, the idiom itself is “always already,” and eminently, worlded, albeit in ways seldom equitable or widely beneficial. But worlded are also the prose, poetry, and drama done in it, an idea rehearsed in the second segment of these considerations. We also show there how multilingual and multiliterary-multicultural ecologies go hand in hand. This situation, this world reality, is characteristic of literary Francophonie and, more specifically, of the “littérature-monde en français”—in an approximate translation, “World Literature in French”—to whose controversial “manifesto” we turn thereafter. The discussion of *Pour une littérature-monde* serves as a segue into the case section four of this introduction makes for the world-as-world or the world *qua* planet as an epistemological model for grasping the *monde* and the *mode* of *littérature-monde* and, subsequently, for a planetary, World Literature-oriented critical engagement with Francophone literatures. We close with a rationale for the book's structure and a chart plotting succinctly the intersecting trajectories of the chapters across the world problematics taken up by some of the most representative Francophone writers after the Second World War.

## 1. Francophonie in the World, the Worlds of Francophonie: Linguistic, Legal, and Political Frameworks

Whether “Francophonie” is understood as referring to the world's population of French speakers or, more narrowly, to the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF), which was founded in 1970 to foster cooperation among French-speaking countries, the notion has been deployed basically to designate political, economic, and cultural ties binding Francophones together as a collective whole distinct from



its non-French-speaking “others.” Born under nineteenth-century French colonial imperialism—an inheritance they would never quite be able to shake off—the terms “Francophone” and “Francophonie” became widely employed only after the dissolution of France’s empire in the 1960s. Significantly, an internal tension marks this use in the postcolonial period. “Francophonie” shores up a linguistic connection between France and its former possessions—and, as such, it has come under scrutiny as a vehicle of neocolonial power—but the concept also calls to mind, through its very distinction from “French,” the many lives the French language leads inside and outside the French nation-state. Michaël Oustinoff captures this duality well in the glossary to *Traduction et mondialisation*, where he writes that

just like *arabophonie*, *hispanophonie*, *lusophonie*, and so on, Francophonie is a crucial, living feature of the contemporary world. In fact, it takes two forms. The first, belonging to the past, is a nostalgic Francophonie, more or less tinged with neocolonialism, that seeks to defend the French language in order to regain its former influence, against the tide of history. But there is a second, more resolutely modern form that is no longer centered only on France, a form that is fully open to the extreme diversity of Francophone worlds and is fully integrated into *globalization* and *cultural diversity*.<sup>8</sup>

To insist on the wide range of today’s Francophone literatures, as we do here, is, then, both to forefront the worldedness of Francophonie and to make visible the variety and disjunctions that must be taken into account by any study of world networks, literary or otherwise. That said, if we are to understand the organization of these multiplicities, we cannot discount the world-shaping force and effects of the reality covered by the first meaning Oustinoff assigns to “Francophonie.” Nor can we ignore that, strictly speaking, *arabophonie*, *hispanophonie*, and even *anglophonie* rarely occur as nouns in either French or English; Francophonie thus constitutes something of a *hapax legomenon*, pointing as it does to the world of worlds that it is part and parcel of and to the unique political history and institutional frameworks that have forged and bolstered it.

One path into this history takes us through the legislative management of French around the world. In France, we might begin our genealogy on October 5, 1958, with the adoption of the new Constitution inaugurating the Fifth Republic. While European countries such as the UK and Sweden have declined, like the United States at least at the federal level, to set an official language, France has done just that. The opening paragraph of Article 2 of the French Constitution, a segment devoted to “Sovereignty,” stipulates that “the language of the Republic shall be French.”<sup>9</sup> It bears noting that this passage did not appear in the 1958 text; it was proposed in a June 25, 1992, amendment to constitutional law. In the wake of this reform, the notorious Toubon Law, as it is known—it was named after the minister of culture and Francophonie who had pushed for it—was passed during the turbulent summer of 1994. A group of parliamentary deputies referred the act to the Conseil Constitutionnel. The council

ruled that its Article 11, which addressed freedom of speech and communication, contravened the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen.<sup>10</sup> Only two years later was an enforcement decree signed specifying how the law would be implemented. Officially, the new regulation concerned “the use of the French language” as well as the idiom’s “enrichment.” The legislature considered the latter indispensable given that the proposal formally prohibited all recourse to a foreign language (with English the implicit target here) in government and public-sector communications, as well as in the workplace, advertising, consumer-goods user manuals, and so forth. For instance, one would no longer speak of *e-mail* but of *courriel*—a Québécois contraction of “courrier électronique,” the term is, one might say, “Francophone.”

More importantly, the law’s opening article is relevant to the matter at hand. If the article’s first two paragraphs are unsurprising, the third quite unexpectedly references Francophonie. “[The French language] is,” we learn, “the privileged link among the States constituting the Francophone community.”<sup>11</sup> Here, “community” does not necessarily mean what it did for Charles de Gaulle in the late 1950s. Nevertheless, the term remains ambiguous, and yet it still appeared in the French Constitution at the time the Toubon Law was passed. This should have raised questions not only about the language of the law or about the place of the national language *in* the law but also outside the juridical context, namely, about Francophonie and its literary dimension. However, neither Francophonie nor the Francophone literary archive has been thoroughly examined from this legal perspective, even though such an angle is revealing, for the extent to which the language and its use have been regulated by the French legislature is truly striking. In the Constitution, language matters have repeatedly been the object of amendments reflecting the preoccupations of the moment, especially over the last decades. Taking all this into account, it is then less surprising that Francophonie makes for a major, passionately political issue, while, as remarked earlier, no equivalent situation can be said to exist for Anglophonie, Germanophonie, or Sinophonie.

The unique legal narrative delineated here reflects, no doubt, France’s linguistic situation, one that has had its implications on various scales. Within the country’s borders, the first and foremost consequence was that French became, by legislative fiat, the national language at the expense of all other tongues spoken in the Hexagon. This exclusive status is also markedly more restrictive than that of the official languages of most of France’s neighbors. Although they have established one or more official languages—sometimes more indirectly, as in Italy—these countries recognize the existence and use of regional idioms.<sup>12</sup> In France, the 1951 Deixonne Law, which predated the Fifth Republic, allowed schools to teach a number of languages described as “regional,” with Basque, Breton, Catalan, and Occitan among them. In July 2008, a new constitutional revision acknowledged these languages in Article 75, Paragraph 1 of the Constitution, which notes that “regional languages are part of France’s heritage,” even though, we should add, one might well question the actual institutional support of this “heritage.”

In any event, French got to enjoy, under the law, the same official role on the mainland and off it, that is, in what is commonly called “Overseas France” or, in

administrative parlance, the DROM-COM (“départements et régions d’outre-mer et collectivités d’outre-mer”), “overseas departments, regions, and collectivities” such as Martinique, Guadeloupe, and French Polynesia.<sup>13</sup> Local tongues, understood as regional, can be legally recognized here, though, as were, for example, Tahitian, in a 1981 decree extending the 1951 Deixonne Law, and four Melanesian languages in 1992. Tahitian is actually taught in schools and at the University of French Polynesia in Pape’ete. However, in March 2006, France’s Council of State annulled a provision of French Polynesia’s Assembly bylaws authorizing speakers to use Tahitian or Polynesian tongues in addition to French.<sup>14</sup> The same holds in Martinique and Guadeloupe, where French is the official language, but Creole is accepted in schools without being official. Once more, given the high number of legislative actions targeting language, we can only conclude that the employment and function of the official idiom are in France, quite characteristically, subject to legal prescriptions. We should keep this in mind, for it reflects a certain French vision of Francophonie that oftentimes crosses the linguistic into the cultural.

It is also worth asking, along the same lines, how the October 4, 1958 Constitution viewed Francophonie. Interestingly, the text makes no mention of French or regional tongues, as it does not reference Francophonie either. Nonetheless, Title XIV of the Constitution’s current version is jointly dedicated to “Francophonie” and “Association Agreements.” It was the constitutional law of July 23, 2008 that brought about this recognition of Francophonie. Article 87 stipulates that “the Republic shall participate in the development of solidarity and cooperation between countries and peoples having the French language in common.” This article existed previously in slightly different form: it was not “the Republic,” an allegorical designation of “France,” that was to take this initiative, but rather “the Republic and the Community.” Promoted by de Gaulle, the “French Community” was designed to bring together the independent countries mushrooming on the ruins of the defunct French empire. Logically, after independence, said “Community” quietly faded away. The new version of Article 87 is based, then, on a belated revision of the original text. Also, Title XIV now comprises, in complete form, Article 88, which stipulates benevolently that “the Republic may enter into agreements with countries that wish to associate with it in order to develop their civilizations.”<sup>15</sup> But, if Article 87 underlines the pivotal role of the French language for “the Republic,” Article 88 raises a few unanswered questions: What are “civilizations” exactly? How can one “develop” them? What sorts of “associations” and “agreements” could encourage such a “development,” and, more specifically, what would France’s role be in it? We should note that these “reforms” were brought forward during the presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy (2007–12), in between two significant political events, one being a speech given by the French head of state in July 2007 at Cheikh Anta Diop University in Dakar, Senegal, a talk that triggered a heated argument over Sarkozy’s vision of Africa and of the continent’s presence in history and in the world today, and the other a highly controversial debate over French and French national identity.<sup>16</sup>

Sparked off in November 2009, the dispute extended into the world of Francophonie, so it is worth asking at this point how the same dynamic of idiom and nationhood plays

out in the other twenty-eight officially Francophone countries on the planet.<sup>17</sup> Some of these are plurilingual, while elsewhere there are no other official languages besides French. In Europe, to start with, Belgium, Luxembourg, Switzerland, and Monaco are Francophone, but only the last of the four is exclusively so, the others being at least trilingual, and Switzerland even quadrilingual given that German, French, Italian, and Romansh are recognized inside its borders.<sup>18</sup> In Italy, French now plays a marginal role, but it has been the co-official language of the Aosta Valley since 1561. In North America, it has been the only official language of Québec since 1974, and in the province of New Brunswick and the Northwest, Yukon, and Nunavut Territories, it is a second official idiom—as is well known, at the federal level, Canada recognizes English and French. Haiti, in turn, is both Francophone and Creolophone. However, no Asian country is officially Francophone—and this includes a Middle Eastern state such as Lebanon—while in Oceania only Vanuatu is, even though it has adopted two other languages as well. By contrast, in sub-Saharan Africa, there are numerous Francophone countries. Here too, some of them—eleven, actually—are exclusively Francophone.<sup>19</sup> One of them is the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC, formerly known as Zaire), the country, we are told, with the largest number of potential French speakers on the planet. In ten other African states, French is among the several official languages.<sup>20</sup> As to the Maghreb, there are no officially Francophone countries here despite their high number of users of French—nearly two-thirds of the population in Tunisia and one-third in Morocco speak French.<sup>21</sup> Also, alongside French and one or more additional official languages, some countries promote what they call “national languages.” In Djibouti, for instance, French and Arabic are official, while Somali and Afar are “national.”

It also bears pointing out that the percentage of French speakers varies widely from one country to another across the Francophone world. Whether the language has official status or not is of relatively small consequence. What matters is its actual use. For example, unlike in Tunisia, in Burundi, where French is co-official, barely 8 percent of the population resorts to French, and in Mali, 16 percent, according to the OIF.<sup>22</sup> Vietnam’s situation is similar. Annexed by France in 1858, it was incorporated into French Indochina in 1887 before gaining its independence in 1954. Given its tumultuous history, Vietnam is sometimes viewed as partially Francophone in the collective French imaginary, and, revealingly, literature helps preserve this perception. However, less than 1 percent of today’s Vietnamese population actually speaks the language of the former colonizer.<sup>23</sup> A very different case is illustrated by Mauritius, whose National Assembly communicates in English. Otherwise, the country has no official language, although it has the largest proportion of French speakers (73 percent) outside Europe and the DROM-COM.<sup>24</sup> In Europe, the prize goes to the Federation Wallonia-Brussels, where the percentage is 98 percent, ahead of France and Monaco (97 percent), which are followed by Luxembourg (92 percent).<sup>25</sup> The OIF estimates, in fact, that French is the fifth most spoken language in the world, after Mandarin, English, Spanish, and Arabic.<sup>26</sup> Many of these calculations are based on numbers that comprise the *entire* population of officially Francophone nation-states, but the reality is

that, out of their 900 million residents, only one-third are speakers of French. We could expatiate at length on the interpretation of statistics, which, moreover, vary according to the weight one gives to different criteria, but we can still come quickly to a general conclusion: in the vast majority of countries described as Francophone, French has minority status, in the sense that less than half of the population uses it, if only because it is rarely the speakers' mother tongue.

For this and other reasons, and whether it is a (co-)official language or not, French rubs elbows with other languages all over the world. Sometimes these other languages were spread by colonialism, like English in Canada or Cameroon. Sometimes, and this is obviously the most common situation, they are national idioms. Burundi has made Kirundi official, and the same is true for Kinyarwanda and Swahili in Rwanda; Sango in the Central African Republic; Arabic in Chad, Comoros, and Djibouti; Malagasy in Madagascar; and Seychellois Creole in the Seychelles. As mentioned earlier, the DRC is supposed to be the most Francophone country in the world, but this claim must be put into context. The DRC indeed has 84 million inhabitants, but only 51 percent of them (42.5 million people) are Francophone, according to the OIF. While French is indeed its official language, the country also has four other national languages—Kikongo, Lingala, Swahili, and Tshiluba—not counting the approximately 200 idioms and dialects spoken locally, with Swahili rivaling French in terms of number of speakers as the former makes up for around 40 percent of the population, which is generally multilingual. Also, while French is hegemonic (at 70–97 percent) across the official channels of communication such as print media, radio, and television, as well as in literature, this is not the case with Congolese music, where Lingala reigns supreme.

Beyond Congo and Africa, multilingualism has been, indeed, a characteristic of the francosphere. There are several explanations for this. Here, we will touch, briefly, only on some of them. Thus, outside Europe, French was initially no more than a language imposed by the colonizer. Everywhere, its spread is checked by other languages, both European and non-European. At the time when they won their independence from France—and DRC and Ruanda-Urundi (later Rwanda and Burundi) from Belgium as well—the African countries that emerged from the former empire often retained French, and the motivations for such a decision had to do primarily either with the economy or with international affairs. Domestically, French has sometimes also served as a compromise between several competing languages. In today's globalizing world, adopting French is ordinarily perceived as stemming from a desire to ease the country's integration into the world-system of relations. But a nation such as Equatorial Guinea presents a more complicated situation. Once a Spanish colony, it adopted French as an official language alongside Spanish in 1998. Yet rather than representing a reaction to globalization, which, in turn, might have suggested a response to the expansion of French's reach, this measure was primarily motivated by local realities—surrounded by two Francophone countries (Cameroon and Gabon), Equatorial Guinea was actually already partly Francophone (in 2018, the number of French speakers stood at just under 30 percent of the population). Conversely, English has gained ground steadily in Francophone lands after the Second World War, and this has only added

to their polyglot environment—as is well known, English exerts strong pressure in Canada, both in Québec and in bilingual provinces such as New Brunswick. What is more, nation-states that were never under English colonization are themselves becoming receptive to the world's twenty-first-century lingua franca, notably in Francophone Africa. In the aftermath of the massive Tutsi exodus to Uganda following the genocide and related policy decisions, English became one of the official languages in Rwanda in 2003. Today, Rwandans speak English more frequently than French, while Kinyarwanda is much more prevalent than either.<sup>27</sup> Also, in Burundi, an August 2014 decree, which has not yet been implemented, proposed making English the official language, alongside Kirundi, Swahili, and French, out of concern, according to the Burundian authorities, of becoming out of step with the standards of the East African Community.<sup>28</sup>

At any rate, it bears reminding ourselves that plurilingualism is part and parcel of Francophonie, namely, of those world territories set apart in the metropolitan public imagination, paradoxically enough, by the shared use of one idiom, French. The paradox is further compounded if we approach the problem of Francophonie's unifying language not through the lens of the countries where French is an (or the) official tongue but from the broader perspective of the OIF. Set up in 1967 as the *Assemblée parlementaire de la francophonie*, the OIF reunites countries where French is either a native or an administrative, cultural, or minority language. Eighty-eight states and governments belong to it, including former French colonies but also East European nations that have never been part of the French empire. The first members of the *Assemblée parlementaire de la francophonie* were all officially Francophone, but the organization expanded as soon as other membership principles (e.g., French as a language of culture) were adopted, and so Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, Moldova, and Armenia are now full OIF members, whereas the American state of Louisiana and Poland enjoy OIF observer status. This enlargement reflects the same logic as the creation of an international "Francophone space," which has continually opened up the new pathways and activity sectors listed on the organization's website. "Originally focused on cultural and educational cooperation," the OIF has acknowledged, "our mission has evolved over various summits and now includes politics (peace, democracy, and human rights), sustainable development, economics, and digital technology."<sup>29</sup> The shared language and its promotion have given rise to the creation of a common world sphere of operations that spans continents and is defined by the institutions listed in Article 2 of the charter adopted by the *Conférence ministérielle de la Francophonie* in Antananarivo, Madagascar, in November 2005.<sup>30</sup>

## 2. Multilingualism, Transnationalism, and the Literary Cultures of Francophonie

Derived from the heterogeneity of Francophone linguistic ecologies is the high number of other literatures thriving within them alongside French-language writing.

For the encounter and cross-pollination between Francophone and other traditions and, by the same token, the inscription of literary Francophonie into world aggregates, circuitries, and geographies of production, distribution, and recognition do not play out just at the outer borders of Francophonie. They occur *inside* the French-speaking world, too, from continental France itself, where Beur fiction is just one example, to Asia and the Caribbean. A salient case in point are the Francophone African countries, where, more than anywhere else on the planet, French is an official or co-official idiom. Most authors from this zone publish in French. Addressed by several chapters of our book, this situation raises a host of questions: these writers' relationship to French and their access to the publishing market in national languages; the reception of works written in French and the issue of audience more broadly; the coexistence of local literatures in different idioms, one of which may be standard French.

As diverse as the questions are the answers thereto, and it is noteworthy that the authors themselves have been rarely in agreement. Some, like Léopold Sédar Senghor, have extolled the use of French. Others, like Ahmadou Kourouma, the focus of another piece in our collection, adopt French also but view it and local languages such as Malinke as communicating vessels, working actively together through a process of intimate and mutual translation. There are, as well, authors inside and outside Francophonie who reject former colonial languages, thereby refuting Senghor's position, as did, most famously, Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o in another imperial context.<sup>31</sup> Finally, some claim that, through a long process of localizing appropriation, French has become a language of Africa, as Souleymane Bachir Diagne contends in *Penser et écrire l'Afrique aujourd'hui* (2017), a position another chapter of *Francophone Literature as World Literature* deals with.

Now, of course, the biggest hurdle for sub-Saharan African writers is most likely publication (especially in languages other than French), which would truly put linguistic diversity into practice. There are, unfortunately, few presses in Francophone Africa, and fewer still are those bringing out books in the national languages of their own parts of the world. Publishing a book in Wolof in Senegal or Fon in Benin, for instance, is possible but not easy. Even so, the volume in question, to be successful, would still need to be distributed under the right conditions and circulate effectively across the region's markets. A similar obstacle accounts for the low number of literary translations into African national languages beyond "a few bilingual texts (French into national languages) designed for educational purposes," as Lalbila A. Yoda describes the dire situation of Burkina Faso before concluding that "the language hierarchy, which places French front and center, does not allow a role for translation in the promotion of [Africa's] national languages or in the preservation of cultural diversity as recommended by most national, regional, and international guidelines and agreements."<sup>32</sup>

Adding to the stratification of the literary cultures of Francophone ecologies is the already noted presence of several former colonial languages. Cameroon's literature is, in this respect, just one instructive example among so many. The country boasts the widest linguistic gamut of Africa. French is among the 200-odd languages spoken there.



But so is English, which is employed in administrative subdivisions near the Nigerian border, and in which Imbolo Mbue, who was born in Limbe, one of Cameroon's partially Anglophone regions, has recently written and published her 2016 book *Behold the Dreamers*. We should point out that Mbue has been living in the United States since she was sixteen. Having immediately met with resounding success upon its publication, this PEN/Faulkner Award-winning novel was translated into French and in fact came out from Belfond the same year it was released by Random House. Nota bene, Mbue is not the exception here but the rule, which in turn bears out the multilingual condition of societies where French is an official or co-official language.

As one might expect, Canada makes for a great case study in this regard. If Québec has been vigorously defending a Francophone heritage striving for preeminence, New Brunswick has adopted a more moderate approach to the language issue, more specifically to the traditional clashes between French and English. On this topic, the final chapter of Acadian author Germaine Comeau's 2008 novel *Laville* presents, via its female narrator, a fascinating take on the idiom in which one expresses himself or herself. "Authors," writes Comeau, "always place themselves at the frontier between the word (their speech) and their thought. The structure of their speech is intimately connected to their way of telling reality. Perhaps we use an English structure with French words. Or perhaps we simply speak English with French words after all."<sup>33</sup> The title of the chapter is "Connivence," and there certainly is, we might gloss, connivance between the narrator and the character she addresses in a sort of concluding dialogue, but this mutual "support" or at least interaction also occurs between the two dominant languages that shape thought and the writing that gives it form in the novel. And such a reciprocal "reinforcement" is not the sole linguistic formula of this sort boosting the originality of New Brunswick's literature. Mixing up French, English, and even some Aboriginal Canadian languages, *chiac*, for example, is an Acadian vernacular worth mentioning here. Françoise Daigle's highly ambitious novel *Pour sûr*, which has won numerous literary prizes since it came out in Montreal in 2011, is only one of the remarkable texts in this idiom.<sup>34</sup>

But French-language bodies of work and even entire literatures in French have popped up and sometimes have been thriving in places that are not officially Francophone. We come across such a flipside of the Canadian setup, if you will, primarily in Asia and Africa. In the postcolonial era, several Southeast Asian countries formerly under French colonial rule illustrate this situation, in particular Vietnam (here, Anna Moi's name comes to mind first) and, to a lesser extent, Cambodia (Soth Polin, who mainly wrote in Khmer, published her novel *L'Anarchiste* in French in 1980).<sup>35</sup> To them, one should add India, on which Vijaya Rao, a contributor to our book, has done some groundbreaking research, bringing to light the literature in French that cropped up around Puducherry (Pondicherry), a former French trading post on the Indian subcontinent.<sup>36</sup> Otherwise, it is surely a truism that some of the most substantial outcomes of literary Francophonie have historically clustered around the Mediterranean. For the recent past, one might adduce Egypt (and mention figures such as Edmond Jabès, René Cossery, and Joyce Mansour), and for today, four of



the five countries of the Maghreb (Libya is the exception), where, we should recall, French is not an official language even though it serves as *lingua franca*, primarily in administration and cultural production. While Mauritania's literature still remains little known to outsiders, the rest of the region has for decades been alive with the output of some of the greatest and most successful Francophone writers ever: Kateb Yacine, Rachid Mimouni, and Assia Djebar in Algeria; Driss Chraïbi and Tahar Ben Jelloun in Morocco; and Albert Memmi, Hélé Béji, and Abdelwahab Meddeb in Tunisia. A similar case is presented by Lebanon, with Andrée Chedid, Vénus Khoury-Ghata, and Amin Maalouf, to name only a few of its most canonical writers, and even by Syria, with poet Adonis, who, like the three Franco-Lebanese authors just enumerated, divides his time between Beirut and Paris.

Whereas the contacts and creative synergies between Francophone (or, in Lebanon, Anglophone) languages and literary traditions, on one side, and, on the other, Arabic or Berber idioms and texts are sometimes weak in these areas of the francosphere, numerous writers make use here of two or more languages, as does Moroccan Abdelfattah Kilito, for instance. Some of his titles are as revealing as they are flippant, such as the 2008 *Tu ne parleras pas ma langue* (Thou Shalt Not Speak My Language), which was composed in Arabic and afterwards translated into French, and the 2013 *Je parle toutes les langues, mais en arabe* (I Speak All Languages, but in Arabic), written in French, and where Kilito comments on the French public's ignorance of Arabic-language literature.<sup>37</sup> In his 2007 story collection *Le Cheval de Nietzsche*, Kilito returns to the situation of the bilingual author in North Africa by asking:

What language do you dream in? The bilingual person can't escape this rather silly question. . . . I'd be tempted to respond differently depending on who asks. Would I give, then, an Arabic speaker the same answer as I would a French speaker? I'd probably feel guilty—and for good reason—if, guided by my own interests at that moment, I cheated in my answer. At any rate, what is the point of saying that I dream in French or Arabic? I do indeed have an interest here, though: you don't favor one language without a reason.<sup>38</sup>

In *Je parle toutes les langues, mais en arabe*, he pursues this line of reflection, explaining in more detail the intricacies and challenges of the linguistic environment in which Moroccan authors cannot but operate:

What is it like for those who write in Arabic? In a sense, they too have a forked tongue, not only because they generally know French, more or less, and French phrases and expressions slip into their texts, but also because, above all, their literary models are in French. As for the others, the "Francophones" (a word with multiple connotations), they insist on the fact that they speak Arabic and that this shows in their work; they write, of course, in French, but this doesn't mean Arabic is forgotten, they assure us. They invite us to read their texts as palimpsests, then: behind the French letters are Arabic letters—impure writing is met with muddled reading.<sup>39</sup>

To borrow some catchphrases from Kilito himself, one can say that it is in large part in its own, intrinsic linguistic “palimpsest” that Francophonie masks or reveals that it is “a word with multiple connotations,” thus connecting directly with a broader, World Literature context. On the European side and particularly in France, the “masking” has been going on pretty well, unfortunately, for here a striking asymmetry bears noting, which has to do precisely with how Arabic-language writing has been treated by the book industry. That is, this literature is definitely the other literatures’ poor cousin at all the major French publishing houses with the exception of Actes Sud/Sindbad and barely reaches fifteenth place among literatures translated into French, at 0.6 percent of the total number of works translated or about thirty fiction books yearly. Moreover, authors rendered into French are often Egyptian, Palestinian, or Lebanese, whereas Maghrebin Arabic-language writers are underrepresented, as if North African literature were essentially Francophone.<sup>40</sup> For instance, Ahlam Mosteghanemi, an Algerian novelist of resounding success across the Arabic-speaking world, gets little attention in the Francophone sphere, particularly in France, whereas she has been extensively translated into English in recent years.<sup>41</sup> Similarly, thanks to Paul Bowles’s English version, Mohamed Choukri’s *Le Pain nu* (*For Bread Alone*) garnered international accolades in 1973, while it was another seven years before this text was translated into French by Tahar Ben Jelloun.<sup>42</sup>

The back-and-forth across languages, the translation fervor, and the overall polyglossia of Francophone ecologies are more subdued in France than in other countries, given the relatively constrictive norms limiting access to linguistic alternatives. Nonetheless, the latter are not entirely absent even though, again, as *the* “language of the Republic,” French should be, in principle at least, *the* language of French literature as well. Despite the impression most dictionaries, textbooks, and anthologies of French literature are wont to give, the *actual* literary environments historically developing inside metropolitan France have not lacked in plurilingualism.<sup>43</sup> But, if so, where should one place, one might ask, literatures written in languages today considered regional or in by- (or inter-)national idioms spoken in areas straddling the French border? Or, taking up a historical perspective now, what should one make of the poetry the troubadours wrote in Occitan? We might note that, oddly enough, these authors are better known in Italian schools than in French schools. Millions of Sicilian, Lombardian, and other Italian high school students are familiar with the names of twelfth-century poets from the French region between Périgord and Limousin such as Bertran de Born, Bernard de Ventadour, and Arnaut Daniel because Dante Alighieri mentions them in *The Divine Comedy*, which the same students read assiduously. In Brittany and Corsica, to take only two more examples from inside the Hexagon, the situation is similar. In 1975, journalist and writer Pierre-Jakez Hélias had great success with his semiautobiographical novel *Le Cheval d'orgueil* (*The Horse of Pride*). Originally written in Breton, the book was translated into French by the author himself, and it was in this language that it was distributed, not in the original. One might also mention here Marc/Marcu Biancarelli, who is, along with Jérôme Ferrari, without a doubt, among the best-known Corsican writers. Writing in Corsican, Biancarelli is

published in Corsica's main city, Ajaccio. While Ferrari writes in French and won the Goncourt Prize in 2012 for *Le Sermon sur la chute de Rome*, Biancarelli has little chance of being awarded anything in Paris. True, he has been translated into French—by Jérôme Ferrari.

In other parts of continental France, literary cultures in languages other than French have been thriving in border zones on both sides of the French frontier. Roussillon, an area roughly corresponding to the Pyrénées-Orientales *département*, has been nurturing a Catalan literature that nearly a third of the local population could potentially access and among whose authors one might mention Jordi Pere Cerdà, a poet whose French name is Antoine Cayrol.<sup>44</sup> Showered in literary prizes across the border in Spanish Catalonia/Catalunya, Cerdà is not well known, however, in France beyond the Pyrénées-Orientales, or Northern Catalonia, as the Catalans call this French region. The situation in Alsace, whose linguistic history has swung back and forth from one language to another, is not the simplest either since literature from this small border region is trilingual: French, German, and Alsatian. On the one hand, it makes sense to cast, say, Strasbourg writer Sebastian Brant/Sébastien Brant out of the bosom of French literature, as it were. Published in Basel, Brant's 1494 *Das Narrenschiff* was one of the most widely read works of the late Middle Ages—in Brant's time, Strasbourg did not yet belong to the kingdom of France but only became part of it after the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia. On the other hand, dealing with a writer like René Schickele in a similar fashion proves tricky. Schickele was born in Obernai, 20 miles southwest of Strasbourg, in 1883, during the period when Alsace was annexed by the German Empire. Figurehead of literary Expressionism, major cultural go-between of his time, friend of Thomas Mann and Stefan Zweig, and longtime resident of the Black Forest, Schickele wrote mostly in German. A little before the rise of Nazism, he left Germany for Provence, where he died in 1940. After bringing out his last two German books in Amsterdam, he published his last novel in French in 1938.<sup>45</sup> Born German by force of circumstances, Schickele became a French national in 1918, after the Treaty of Versailles was signed. The description of his status varies from one critic to another, however. Schickele is alternately presented as a Franco-German writer, an Alsatian writer, a German-speaking Alsatian writer, and a German writer of French origins. In any event, he is no more acknowledged in French-literature anthologies than Bernard de Ventadour. It is nonetheless true that he saw himself as a “citoyen français *und deutscher Dichter*”—a “French citizen and German poet.”<sup>46</sup>

While Schickele's case is rare in France, it is much less so in Europe and elsewhere in the world. Luxembourg is one European region where, like in Alsace, literature is done in three tongues: German (with Josiane Kartheiser as a prime example), French (we would mention here only Jean Portante, author of the 1997 novel *Mrs Haroy ou la mémoire de la baleine*), and *lëtzebuergesch* (a name familiar to some of us might be Roger Manderscheid). Moreover, Luxembourgian writer and singer Claudine Muno has achieved the feat of publishing fiction in four languages: the three mentioned earlier, as well as English, an idiom currently on the rise in predominantly Francophone areas of literary production. Outside Europe, this multilingualism—authors working

in at least two idioms or different authors writing in different languages in a largely Francophone linguistic ecology—is even more widespread. And yet, to reiterate, holding the pride of place in the Francophone world-system as it does, France remains an exception, primarily on the mainland, but also, if to a lesser degree, in the DROM-COM. Truth be told, it must be said emphatically that France is one of the rare French-speaking countries where the employment of language is subject to such a prescriptive management. This situation is the result of both cultural tradition and a long-standing tendency toward political centralization, which, as we saw earlier, manifests itself in the legislation of norms surrounding language use.

The politics of language regulation has been undoubtedly conspicuous. Apropos of this politics, Louis-Jean Calvet speaks of “*politologie linguistique*,”<sup>47</sup> or linguistic politology, “for,” observes Calvet, “behind every language policy is a politics in the broader sense.”<sup>48</sup> More to the point, the politics in question here is national or, better still, nationalist. For, in a country like France, the notion of a unique language continues to serve as an emblem and conduit for national sentiment in an age where the tensions between the diversification of identity formation across the metropolitan territory and the Jacobin ideal of linguistic homogeneity are bound to soar. Against this constraining backdrop, the Franco-Greek Vassilis Alexakis—who, born in Greece, resides mainly in France and writes in both French and his native language—presents us with a fascinating exception. Alexakis decided to learn Sango, the co-official language of the Central African Republic, an experience he relates in his 2002 novel *Les Mots étrangers* (*Foreign Words*). Reviewing the book, *Libération* critic Jean-Baptiste Harang comments that “Sango is not an easy language. Its use in writing is limited. Besides, it is far outside our Indo-European linguistic habits (it really forces us to twist our vocabulary), and there’s no shortage of reasons not to learn it. But, as [Alexakis’s] narrator puts it, awakening suddenly one night, ‘Having no reason to learn a language is no reason not to learn it,’ and on the following page, after rubbing his eyes: ‘I hope Sango will one day do me the courtesy of explaining to me why I learned it.’”<sup>49</sup>

### 3. “In the Midst of a Renaissance,” or The Hexagon No Longer Holds

The persistence and even widening of economic and social inequalities between the North and the South, the acceleration in population migration triggered by such ever-exacerbating disparities, as well as other kinds of displacement, flow, and relocation of people, capital, goods, and information have over the last decades increasingly belied the Jacobin and other ideals of stability and homogeneity, linguistic and otherwise, pulling away, in the process, national territory, identity, and idiom from one another. Undeniably, this multilayered decoupling has been a global development and, as such, has also affected France, the French language, and the literature produced and

published in it. The nation's "family romance"—in Marthe Robert's sense of *le roman familial*—has thus been taking a more and more pronounced planetary turn, for while France's literary and cultural romance with itself continues to express a "more or less primitive desire to recast life under ideal circumstances,"<sup>50</sup> these circumstances, even if they were to be brought together and successfully managed within a specifically national framework, would still have an inevitably macroscopic, indeed, worlded purview. For, nowadays and in the foreseeable future, every family romance of this sort, whether literally familial or ethnocultural, characterizing, that is, entire polities, is likely to inscribe itself into—to interpolate and interpellate—the world as a whole, precarious and ever-morphing as this whole is. At once instrument and effect of this inscription into the world-as-world, Francophone literatures are, we insist, part of a World Literature itself marked by fluidity, complexity, and promise as by worrisome proclivities, old and new.

Reading *this* world's literatures of French expression according to the narrow rationale of area studies is making, we think, less and less sense. At a time when, in keeping with human communities worldwide, aesthetic production grows more and more mobile, diasporic, multiethnic, and multiply connected economically, culturally, geographically, and politically, Francophone authors' passports and national affiliations furnish, of necessity, limited insights into these writers' works. In fact, separating authors into national categories no longer is in the twenty-first century—if it ever was—a straightforward operation. Such classification would not pay off, critically speaking, either, and this is precisely what Alain Mabanckou underscores in a 2006 article provocatively titled "La francophonie, oui; le ghetto, non. La littérature francophone n'appartient pas aux lettres françaises" (Francophonie, Yes; The Ghetto, No: Francophone Literature Does Not Belong to French Letters). In this chapter, Mabanckou confesses that "in my classroom in Michigan, I mix everything together. I don't care about the writers' nationalities. The question I ask is the following: 'Is this text written in French or not?' If it is, then it's a Francophone text. Consequently, when I'm dealing with a literary theme, I take care to avoid the French/Francophone distinction."<sup>51</sup>

Mabanckou's point is well taken. Moreover, if the old, colonial, and neocolonial logic that has made metropolitan French literature the axis on which "non-French" (but Francophone) literatures have hinged for a long time has always been fallacious, that logic is even more so today, in an era profoundly defined, despite bloated anti-immigration rhetoric and bureaucracy, by residential mobility, unstable or plural citizenship, competing political allegiances, and similar realities that have rendered inadequate the fixed and monistic identity rubrics to which legislatures are ordinarily partial and under which authors—and oftentimes the meanings of their works too—are chalked up. Born in 1955 in Hungary, residing in France since the late 1970s, and writing in the national language of her adoptive country, Eva Almassy, for example, projects herself in the "Emma la Magyare" chapter from *Pour une littérature-monde* onto the character of Emma, who "had to fight to get an exit visa [out of her native land]. Her world consisted of a single country: Hungary." In France, on the other hand, "she had to fight to get a residence permit."<sup>52</sup> Mabanckou himself was born in

the Republic of the Congo, was naturalized in France, and has been teaching in the United States, at University of Michigan and then UCLA. Gao Xingjian, laureate of the 2000 Nobel Prize in Literature, has a similar profile. Born in China, he became a French citizen in 1988 and expresses himself in both French and Chinese. No wonder his biographical presentation shifts from one critic to another, and so does Wajdi Mouawad's. Described by commentators as a naturalized Canadian Lebanese dramatist, a Canadian of Lebanese descent, or a Lebanese-Canadian, Mouawad lives mainly, but not solely, in France. In fact, a large number of Francophone writers residing in France or elsewhere in the northern hemisphere hold two passports.

Indubitably, citizenship, national belonging, political loyalty, and idiom in the twenty-first-century Francophone world are as many-sided as anywhere on the planet. These elements may or may not mix—let alone match—and so they may run parallel, across, or counter to each other, as the case may be, giving birth to subjectivity aggregates not only hard to sort out critically but also often met with essentialist, ethnocentric, nationalist, chauvinistic, or racist reactions intent on “safeguarding” the “true” or “truly French” nature of France’s official language and, in the final analysis, “true Frenchness” itself. This is basically the agenda behind the two mainstream concepts of Francophonie itself, which, much like the abovementioned identity ingredients, frequently reinforce and intermingle with one another even though there are situations when they operate, or are treated, rather, as distinct or even diametrically opposed. One is largely political, and in this particular context “Francophonie” is spelled with a capital F; the other is, roughly put, cultural and designated by lowercase “francophonie.” If we do not adopt this dissociation here, that is because, in practice, the two are intimately bound up with each other. Joining them are, first, their shared concern to protect the “integrity” of French from actual or imaginary “external threats” and, second, a simplistically conceived center-periphery dynamic according to which the marginality of one pole—the formerly colonial terrain of today’s linguistic and literary Francophonie—is construed “ambiguously” as suggestive of a political, neocolonial subordination to the other, as Mabanckou remarked in his 2006 piece and again a year later. “The notion of Francophonie,” he reflects, “perpetuates ambiguity. [Francophonie] isn’t necessarily something to denigrate, but, because of the term’s unavoidably political undertones—and never has a notion been so fiercely contested—its most merciless prosecutors deem it an extension of France’s foreign policy in its former colonies!”<sup>53</sup>

The commentary was occasioned by the publication of *Pour une littérature-monde* three months after the March 16, 2007 historic appearance in *Le Monde* of “Manifeste pour une littérature-monde en français” (Manifesto for a *littérature-monde* [World Literature] in French). Sponsored by Le Bris, a writer and organizer of the Étonnants Voyageurs festival in Saint-Malo, Brittany, and by Jean Rouaud, a novelist known in particular for the 1990 *Les Champs d'honneur* (*Fields of Glory*), the proclamation gained the support not only of Mabanckou but also of forty-three other cosigners, including Tahar Ben Jelloun, Maryse Condé, Édouard Glissant, Nancy Huston, J. M. G. Le Clézio, Anna Moï, Wajdi Mouawad, Boualem Sansal, Dai Sijie, and Abdourahman Waberi.<sup>54</sup> In the book, the goal of all these luminaries of French-language literature is to move

away from what is commonly called Francophone literature and toward a “littérature-monde en français.” In effect, they do not hesitate to pronounce literary Francophonie dead, considering it to be the obsolete manifestation of the very neocolonialism denounced by the “prosecutors” Mabanckou referred to the year before. “Let’s be clear: the emergence of a consciously affirmed, transnational world literature in French, open to the world,” the “Manifeste” states boldly, “signs the death certificate of so-called Francophone literature [*francophonie*].”<sup>55</sup> Now supposedly defunct, the latter is to be replaced by a hopefully more egalitarian literature model. This would do away with the historically hegemonic Hexagonal center, substituting it with a “heterarchically” set up *archipelago*, one redolent, of course, of Glissant’s geocultural imaginary—after all, Glissant has also endorsed the manifesto. As the *littérature-monde* proclamation announces, rather buoyantly,

It looks to us like we’re in the midst of a renaissance, of a dialogue in a vast polyphonic ensemble, without concern for any battle for or against the preeminence of one language over the other or any sort of “cultural imperialism” whatsoever. With the center placed on equal footing with other centers, we’re witnessing the birth of a new constellation, in which language, now freed from the burden of its exclusive pact with the nation, from every other power hereafter but those of poetry and the imaginary, will know no other frontiers but those of the spirit.<sup>56</sup>

“Now a world language that has permanently escaped from metropolitan control,” French is at long last unyoked from France, and so is, more broadly, the Francophone world overall from the cultural authority of the French nation-state.<sup>57</sup> Following from these twin critical moves is the no less controversial “de-cent[erring of] a model of French studies that was focused exclusively on the [H]exagon.”<sup>58</sup>

It is not the first time that such radically transformative operations have been proposed.<sup>59</sup> But it is in *Pour une littérature-monde* that they provide, more forcefully than anywhere in pre-2007 French and Francophone literature and scholarship, a steppingstone for an uncompromising, if at times problematic, rationale for “World Literature in French.” This is a two-pronged argument aimed, in one direction, at emancipating literary Francophonie from French privilege, bias, patronizing attitude, and “ghettoizing” treatment of the former colonies, and, in another, at sanctioning and building on the incorporation of French *and* continental French literature into the bigger world, on the worlding of a language and even of a national literary patrimony, which, we are informed, can no longer be monopolized—understood, assessed, and even claimed—by or within metropolitan France.<sup>60</sup> In this sense, and responding to the critical mass of French-language literature accumulated across the world as well as to the sheer fact that the same “‘world’ has been creeping into the place occupied by the term ‘French,’”<sup>61</sup> *Pour une littérature-monde* did “create,” as a critical-theoretical manifesto, a “point of no return.”<sup>62</sup> “What is clear,” Jacqueline Dutton aptly maintains, “is that before the *littérature-monde* manifesto burst on to the literary scene, thrusting itself into academic discourse, contemporary understanding of world literature in French



was evolving more calmly out of the various strands of postcolonial, francophone, transnational, transcultural, and world literature studies.”<sup>63</sup> The manifesto put an end to this quiet evolution, advocating polemically for

“world literature” . . . because literatures in French around the world today are demonstrably multiple, diverse, forming a vast ensemble, the ramifications of which link together several continents . . . [but] also because all around us these literatures depict the world that is emerging in front of us, and by doing so recover, after several decades, from what was “forbidden in fiction.”<sup>64</sup>

It would be helpful to situate this endorsement and Le Bris and Rouaud’s initiative in the context of French cultural politics—as well as French politics generally—of the second half of the third millennium’s first decade. Symbolically enough, the “archipelagic” or worlded rethinking of Francophone literatures was spearheaded by the *littérature-monde* group between two major, extremely controversial political events entailing the reassessment of France’s colonial past. One was the February 2005 law regulating the approach to the “French presence” in North Africa in school textbooks; the other, the July 2007 speech given by President Sarkozy in Dakar. Note, too, that, predating by a mere few months the 2008 constitutional reform mentioned earlier, Le Bris and Rouaud’s undertaking was also prompted by the literary prizes given out in Paris in the fall of 2006. As they write,

In due course it will perhaps be said that this was a historic moment: in autumn 2006, five of the seven French literary prizes—the Goncourt, the Grand Prize for Novels of the Académie Française, the Renaudot, the Femina, and the Goncourt for High School Students—were awarded to foreign-born writers. A random coincidence, among publishers’ fall catalogs, uniquely concentrating talent from the “peripheries,” a random detour before the straying channel returns to the riverbed? A Copernican revolution, rather, in our opinion.<sup>65</sup>

While the awards may signal a sea change, the way the manifesto handles this mutation has met with varying degrees of enthusiasm, ranging from flat-out dismissals by critics who saw in *Pour une littérature-monde* a sort of “retro,” “Anglophile,” and romantic move itself dismissive of postcolonial and postmodern political-aesthetic concerns and accomplishments to more favorable reactions that would, nonetheless, involve important reservations and queries.<sup>66</sup> Sympathetic as we surely are to Le Bris, Rouaud, and their group’s intervention, we, too, think that it invites a whole spectrum of questions. Here, we will limit ourselves to a few that strike us as both intertwined and more significant in light of our book’s focus. In posing them, as well as in offering some answers, we hope to ford the gap between Francophone literatures and studies, on one side, and, on the other, a *littérature-monde* mode of writing and reading critical of the colonial, postcolonial, Gallocentric, and French nation-state-beholden legacies of Francophonie but also of itself and, not in the least, of its natural ally, the World Literature approach.