



## La Francophonie and beyond

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## *La Francophonie* and Beyond

Yves Clavaron

The notion of '*francophonie*' may be understood in different ways: it can designate the speaking of French; the geopolitical organisation and its numerous sociocultural satellites: *la Francophonie*,<sup>1</sup> which the "Organisation internationale de la Francophonie" (International Organisation of *Francophonie*, or OIF) is part of; the academic discipline which is part of 'area studies'; and its designated field of study, so-called Francophone literatures.

The French term 'francophone' has often been regarded as discriminatory as it refers to the literatures in French written outside of France and suggests a distinction between European *francophonie* and its deep-rooted tradition, and *francophonie* outside of Europe and the countries formerly colonised by France and Belgium. Therefore it would seem that major European literatures are contrasted with minor, peripheral extra-European literatures. David Murphy suggests that the term *francophonie* be 'decolonised' so as to refer to every culture where French is spoken, including France.<sup>2</sup> In fact postcolonial Francophone literatures are the equivalent of Commonwealth literatures from Anglophone countries, formerly part of the British Empire, and they have come to enter into dialogue with the postcolonial theories developed by Anglo-Saxon academics.

The reception of postcolonial theories in France has been problematic both because they came out rather late (the first works in the Anglo-Saxon world date back to the 1980s) and because they were polemical, notably among historians and scholars in social sciences.<sup>3</sup> The colonial (and postcolonial) question, which is becoming more relevant with the return of 'colonial memories', has always been debated with passion and vehemence in France. It is fair to say there has been a tendency in France to play down the role of colonisation in the history of the nation because it challenges the very foundations of French identity, namely republicanism and universalism. France is indeed a country that finds it difficult to admit that the Republic, one and indivisible, may be made up of different communities – even if it actually betrayed its ideals of universality in the colonies by creating the Code of Indigeneity ("Code de l'indigénat"). Besides, this practice is characteristic of the doublespeak perpetuated by Europe in the colonial context, when values of progress and equality were put forward while other standards were applied to 'indigenes'. Conflict is inevitable between a true 'mythology' of oneness associated with the Republic and ethnic diversity or communitarianism attributed to post-colonialism, which allegedly creates divisions. The crisis of the French model of integration and the growing affirmation of 'visible' minorities in the public space are now creating a new situation in which the multicultural dimension of French society has to be taken

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<sup>1</sup> In French, '*francophonie*' with a lower-case f refers to the community of countries which have the French language in common while with a capital F it designates all the official Francophone institutions. See Michel Têtu: *Qu'est-ce que la francophonie?* Paris: Hachette, 1997 (= Edicef).

<sup>2</sup> David Murphy: De-centring French studies. Towards a postcolonial theory of Francophone cultures. In: *French Cultural Studies* 13.2 (2002), 165-185.

into account. This article aims to explore the boundaries between literary *francophonie* and institutional *Francophonie*, especially in their relation to postcolonial studies and the Anglophone world in general.

### The Historical viewpoint

The way colonial history has been obscured in France is perceptible, for example, in the way Africa is nearly absent from the monumental work edited by Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de mémoire*.<sup>4</sup> It is true that French collective memory has repressed a historical experience full of tragedies and frustrations – a memory that has fallen silent in the social and political body since the independence of Algeria in 1962. However, it seems that colonial history has returned to the public and historiographical debate in France, especially after a law was passed on 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2005, intended to redeem the very idea of the colonial project and to restore a humanist vision to France's colonial activities and to question again its 'civilising mission'. The November 2005 riots that broke out in the poorer suburbs of Paris were an outcome of this crisis, an event so widespread as to give rise to questions about the fundamental principles of the Republic.

Some time before this crisis an essay written by historian Marc Ferro had unveiled the state's censorship and the self-censorship by the citizenry, which has made colonial history 'inaudible' in France.<sup>5</sup> As Hannah Arendt did before him regarding the Nazi and Stalinist totalitarian regimes,<sup>6</sup> Marc Ferro makes no distinction between imperialism and totalitarianism, the former giving rise to the latter. In fact the debate was mainly provoked by the polemical books written by Pascal Blanchard, Nicolas Bancel and Sandrine Bonnaire – they extend the metaphor of fracture and rupture to define the (post)colonial situation in France and note that the country is coming out of a long period of aphasia regarding memory. Their books show how French society has become a postcolonial society nearly half a century after the end of its empire.<sup>7</sup> To illustrate how some immigrants and their descendants have failed to integrate, they study the intercommunal relationships and the way suburbs have been ghettoised; the difficulty and blockages of integration; the manipulation of memories; the place of the *départements et territoires d'outre-mer* (French overseas Departments and Territories) in the national imagination; the debates on secularism and French Islam. They show that, although the Empire created the colonies, its influence did not stop when the colonies proclaimed their independence. And, in turn, the colonies profoundly changed the face of the Empire. Extending the reflection, Nicolas Bancel and Pascal Blanchard, together with Florence Bernault

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<sup>3</sup> See Yves Clavaron (ed.): *Études postcoloniales, Poétiques comparatistes*. Nîmes: Lucie Editions 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Pierre Nora (ed.): *Les Lieux de mémoire*. Paris: Gallimard 1984, 1986, 1992 (3 vols.).

<sup>5</sup> Marc Ferro: *Le Livre noir du colonialisme. XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle – XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle, de l'extermination à la repentance*. Paris: Robert Laffont 2003.

<sup>6</sup> Hannah Arendt: *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. New York: Harcourt Brace 1973 [1<sup>st</sup> ed. London 1951].

<sup>7</sup> Pascal Blanchard, Nicolas Bancel and Sandrine Bonnaire: *La Fracture coloniale. La société française au prisme de l'héritage colonial*. Paris: La découverte 2005; P. Blanchard, N. Bancel, S. Bonnaire: *Culture post-coloniale 1961–2006. Traces et mémoires coloniales en France*. Paris: Autrement 2006 (= Mémoires).

and Ahmed Boubeker, query the relationships of France with colonised countries<sup>8</sup> while the African continent is celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of the independence of the former French colonies, and the *départements et territoires d'outre-mer* are claiming new roles in the Republic.

However, a number of historians dispute the idea of 'endo-colonialism' and refuse to link immigration and colonisation. Eschewing penitence and repentance, Max Gallo's pamphlet *Fier d'être français* (Proud to be French),<sup>9</sup> Pascal Bruckner's *La Tyrannie de la pénitence* (The tyranny of penitence) and Daniel Lefeuvre's *Pour en finir avec la repentance coloniale* (Bringing colonial repentance to an end)<sup>10</sup> tend to deny the effects of colonisation on the metropole and its boomerang effect – a backlash upon the coloniser. In *Mémoires d'empire: la controverse autour du 'fait colonial'* (Memories of Empire: the controversy around the 'fait colonial'),<sup>11</sup> Romain Bertrand comments on the 2005 riots and says he finds it regrettable that the postcolonial grid should have erased a social interpretation as a result of an interpretation that is too systematically ethnic, while he also expresses fear about the way postcolonial studies are seen as a threat to established academic institutions. Allegedly, the riots in the suburbs did not stem from resentment regarding memory, but instead originated from issues of social exclusion. This is also Alexandre Mamarbachi's point of view, who emphasizes the social factor and finds it regrettable that the 'racial' factor should have been substituted for the social one.<sup>12</sup> Yves Lacoste considers the metaphor of the 'fracture' incoherent since it would imply the break-up of a compact unit, and prefers to assert that the (Republican) 'cement' has not yet set.<sup>13</sup> In view of the reactions provoked by their work, Nicolas Bancel and Pascal Blanchard have found it necessary to publish an answer to defend their position: "La Fracture coloniale: retour sur une réaction" (The colonial fracture: return to a reaction) in a themed issue of the journal *Mouvements*, entitled "Should one be afraid of postcolonialism?"<sup>14</sup>

The reason why the reception of the postcolonial question and Anglo-Saxon theories is problematic in France should be looked for in history. In postcolonial studies there is constant reference to history, whether it be to chronology (from the beginning of conquest, starting in 1492, to the independence movement in the second half of the twentieth century) or to the relationship between centre and periphery, West and East, North and South. Colonisation happened worldwide, and as suggested by Georges Balandier, "the postcolonial designates a contemporary universal reality".<sup>15</sup>

The colonial question, as addressed by postcolonial studies, is not homogeneous and, historically, the universalist project of cultural assimilation *à la française* is opposed to the differentialist perspective of preservation of identities *à l'anglaise*. French 'assimilationist' policy is proactive – it imposes France's traditions, customs and language on colonised territories, and its subjects must become 'French people',

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<sup>8</sup> Nicolas Bancel, Pascal Blanchard, Florence Bernault and Ahmed Boubeker: *Ruptures postcoloniales. Les nouveaux visages de la société française*. Paris: La Découverte 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Max Gallo: *Fier d'être français*. Paris: Fayard 2006.

<sup>10</sup> Pascal Bruckner: *La Tyrannie de la pénitence*. Paris: Grasset 2006; Daniel Lefeuvre: *Pour en finir avec la repentance coloniale*. Paris: Flammarion 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Romain Bertrand: *Mémoires d'empire. La controverse autour du 'fait colonial'*. Broissieux: Editions du Croquant 2006.

<sup>12</sup> Alexandre Mamarbachi: *Quand la fracture coloniale fait disparaître les rapports de classe*. In: *Contretemps* 16 (2006), 143-149.

<sup>13</sup> Yves Lacoste: *La Question postcoloniale. Une analyse géopolitique*. Paris: Fayard 2010.

<sup>14</sup> Nicolas Bancel and Pascal Blanchard: *La fracture coloniale. Retour sur une réaction*. In: *Mouvements* 51 (2007), 40-51.

even though they are not granted the same civic rights. Henri Lopès pays ironic homage to this practice in his book *Ma Grand-mère bantoue et mes ancêtres les Gaulois* (My Bantu Grandmother and my Gallic Ancestors).<sup>16</sup> The British, who favoured ‘indirect rule’ and sometimes ‘divide and rule’, alternated indirect administration of some regions and direct government for others, thanks to a political agent acting as advisor of potentates, who served as a mediator in the exercise of power. French activism was opposed to “a mixture of laissez-faire and niggling interference”<sup>17</sup> used by the British, at least when vital interests were not at stake. Relying on its republican ideals, France tended to deny the divisions between communities and to diffuse its language, whereas the United Kingdom exploited ethnic divisions and sometimes chose to restrict access to the English language. However, Kipling’s “White Man’s Burden” was not ideologically very different from Jules Ferry’s French “civilizing mission”: both systems were ruled by a “firm hand (without the velvet glove)”.<sup>18</sup>

The French empire was established through the creation of settlements and had its heyday at the end of the nineteenth century, like the Raj. However, a great variety of colonial practices can be identified on the British side with India, Australia, Nigeria and Jamaica, as well as on the French side with Quebec, the West Indies, Africa and Indochina. There is no unified model, and Anglophone and Francophone postcolonial studies must take into account these historical differences. Thus the case of Quebec is specific, since this French colony – New France – was colonised by the British and then by English Canada. In other words, the colonial system was applied to a white population of European origin who did not embody the alterity usually associated with the Other.<sup>19</sup> Ireland found itself in a similar situation, although it was not a colony to start with. The French West Indies have other specificities: the extermination of native populations living in the territory (Arawak Indians and Caribs); the plantation system which consisted of enslaving a population transplanted within a microcosm of exploitative capitalism; the integration of the former colony into the Republic as a *département*. The United Kingdom has nothing analogous to the *départements et territoires d’outre-mer*, and it is difficult to find in the United Kingdom such a complex relation as that between France and Algeria. It is fair to say that France found it hard to sever the link with its colonies and, contrary to the United Kingdom, it resisted decolonisation in a violent way (seen, for example, in the wars in Indochina and Algeria).

Would French people – and French academics – find it hard to look the ghosts of their colonial past straight in the face, as suggested by the Anglo-Saxon doxa? The answer is obviously no, considering the present interest in the colonial period and the ever-greater number of works published, even though they represent a sore point in French consciousness – the Republic inherited from the Enlightenment.<sup>20</sup> As a way of explaining the near absence of the term postcolonialism in Francophone studies, Jean Bessière

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<sup>15</sup> Georges Balandier: Préface. In: Marie-Claude Smouts (ed.): *La situation postcoloniale. Les postcolonial studies dans le débat français*. Paris: Presses de la fondation nationale des Sciences politiques 2007, pp. 17-24 (p. 24).

<sup>16</sup> Henri Lopès: *Ma grand-mère bantoue et mes ancêtres gaulois*. Paris: Gallimard 2003 (= *Continents noirs*).

<sup>17</sup> S. R. Ashton: *British Policy towards the Indian States, 1908–1939*. London: Curzon 1982, p. 26.

<sup>18</sup> George Orwell: *Burmese Days*. Harmondsworth: Penguin 1989, p. 198.

<sup>19</sup> See Marilyn Randal: *Resistance, Submission and Oppositionality. National Identity in French Canada*. In: Charles Forsdick and David Murphy (eds.): *Francophone Postcolonial Studies. A Critical Introduction*. London: Arnold 2003, pp. 77-87.

<sup>20</sup> See for instance Claude Liauzu (ed.): *Dictionnaire de la colonisation française*. Paris: Larousse 2007 (= *A présent*).

notes that in France the questioning of colonialism has been part of the wider field of the critique of oppression in all its forms, in other words, another form of universalism.<sup>21</sup>

#### Language, Literature and Institutions

The term ‘francophone’ seems to be associated with colonialism: It was coined by Onésime Reclus in 1880, at a time when the Empire was expanding and when the *Alliance Française* was created with a view to diffusing French and compensating for the fact that the colonies were thinly populated.<sup>22</sup> *La Francophonie* was initiated in the period of decolonisation in the 1960s and has sometimes been interpreted as a neo-colonial strategy intended to make up for the loss of the ‘Greater France’, the outcome of the ‘civilising mission.’ The Commonwealth is a network that is more political and economic than linguistic, even if it is supported by the institution of the British Council to diffuse English. Its linguistic model is Anglo-American while *francophonie* has been influenced by the prescriptive policies of the Académie Française. The biennial summits of the International Organisation of *Francophonie* provide occasion for a show of the Francophone ‘family’, to which Qatar, inexplicably admitted as associate member at the Kinshasa summit in October 2012, brings its financial power. It is therefore no surprise that *Francophonie* and its linguistic protectionism<sup>23</sup> should be seen as a war machine by the Anglo-Saxons. At the same time the Anglophone world, which is less institutionalised but more powerful economically and politically, is seen as a threat by the Francophones.

In postcolonial literatures as literatures of disquiet the linguistic awareness of writers is indeed particularly sharpened<sup>24</sup> by the situations of multilingualism of post-colonial societies, by the processes of Creolisation or by the tensions between the different languages inherited from the colonial era. The very term ‘*francophonie*’ conveys the choices made by the Francophone institutions and critique, which insist on the significance of language and the relationship with the former colonial metropole. Conversely, postcolonial studies favour a historical approach – the long-lasting effects of colonialism and its discursive power – beyond the regional and linguistic varieties of European colonisation.<sup>25</sup> Thus Francophone studies pertain to a national logic and elude a transnational approach as required by the literatures of Africa and the Indian Ocean.

It is easy to denounce the paradoxes of *Francophonie* which are focused on its language and on a highly diverse group of nations “having the French language in common”, the set expression used by the OIF, while laying claim to a universalising ideology and a mythology inherited from the French Revolution —

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<sup>21</sup> Jean Bessière: Littératures francophones et Postcolonialisme. Fictions de l’interdépendance et du réel. In: Jean Bessière and Jean-Marc Moura (eds.): Littératures postcoloniales et francophonie. Paris: Champion 2001, pp. 169-195 (pp. 172-173).

<sup>22</sup> Louis-Jean Calvet: La guerre des langues et les politiques linguistiques. Paris: Hachette 1999, p. 251.

<sup>23</sup> Boualem Sansal says that French is “the best kept language in the world”: Boualem Sansal: Où est passée ma frontière? In: Michel Le Bris and Jean Rouaud (eds.): Pour une littérature-monde. Paris: Gallimard 2007, pp. 161-174 (p. 171).

<sup>24</sup> Lise Gauvin speaks about a “linguistic hyperawareness”, Lise Gauvin: L’Ecrivain francophone à la croisée des langues. Paris: Khartala 1997, p. 7.

<sup>25</sup> See Ella Shohat: Notes on the Postcolonial. In: Social Text 31/32 (1992), 99-113.

French as a language that expresses culture and embodies human rights. Since the Renaissance, French has been associated with the idea of strength and national power, so that its universalising legitimacy has contributed to the centralisation effect noted in *Francophonie*.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, *Francophonie* is based on language and it is precisely for this reason that it is most unstable. In contrast to French literature, so-called Francophone literature belongs to a field that is often multilingual, even though regional languages play a significant role in France. Caught between a Francophone utterance and a speaker who is not French, the Francophone text is about “*telling in French* about realities which are removed from French culture and sensitivity”.<sup>27</sup> This enunciative tension in Francophone literature is contrasted to French literature, which posits a unity between language and culture. As a matter of fact, though Francophone literatures bring a perspective from the outside to French literature, this is done in a fashion that is closer to a form of rape than pacific enrichment, as in Ahmadou Kourouma’s and Sony Labou Tansi’s works. In the same way contemporary Francophone literature of the West Indies is distancing itself from French, if only because of the influence of the Creole language and ‘oralitude’, a term coined by Ernt Mirville to replace ‘oral literature’.<sup>28</sup>

Even if the French and the British empires resulted from similar historical processes, the situation is asymmetrical because of the Anglo-Saxon supremacy resented by the French. This evokes the “Asterix syndrome”, an image used by Salman Rushdie who, though English, compares Nicaragua’s struggle against the United States to that of the Gauls who resist Julius Caesar’s power in their tiny village.<sup>29</sup>

Antagonisms are sometimes stronger and the trend in postcolonial studies in the United States has sometimes been interpreted as a manifestation of American imperialism in the Third World. Could postcolonialism be the last attempt by the West to re-colonize the other? According to Homi Bhabha, creating a new theory on postcolonial literatures can be regarded as a new strategy exercised by Western elites who are keen to strengthen their own “power-knowledge”.<sup>30</sup> This suspicion, voiced by intellectuals from Third World countries, is often shared by the French, but for reasons that are obviously different. This is what François Cusset argues: the reason why the French are suspicious is that it is now America who decides what is French in terms of theory.<sup>31</sup> The paradox lies in the fact that postcolonial theory draws on several French thinkers (such as Deleuze, Derrida and Foucault) who have been sanctified – and sometimes grossly decontextualised – by American academia, but who are no prophets in their own land. Robert Young has thus concluded that Anglophone postcolonial discourse is “a *franglais* mixture [that] has enabled the development of a new disciplinary field and theoretical apparatus for the analysis of colonialism”.<sup>32</sup> Gayatri Spivak is one of the few thinkers concerned about contextual diversities, notably

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<sup>26</sup> See Véronique Porra: *Malaise dans la littérature-monde. De la reprise de discours aux paradoxes de l'énonciation*. In: *Recherches et Travaux* 76, 109-129 (p. 123), <http://recherchestravaux.revues.org/index411.html>, viewed 7 December 2012.

<sup>27</sup> Nimrod, *Pour une littérature décolonisée*. In: Le Bris and Rouaud (eds.): *Littérature-monde* (note 23), pp. 217-235 (p. 230).

<sup>28</sup> Ernest Mirville: Interview sur le concept d'oraliture accordée à Pierre-Raymond Dumas par le docteur Ernest Mirville. In: *Conjonction* (mars-juin 1984), issue 161-162, 161-164 (p. 162).

<sup>29</sup> Salman Rushdie: *The Jaguar Smile*. London: Vintage 2007, p. 131.

<sup>30</sup> See Homi K. Bhabha: *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge 1994, pp. 20-21.

<sup>31</sup> François Cusset: *French Theory*. Paris: La Découverte 2005.

<sup>32</sup> Robert Young: *Postcolonialism. An Historical Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell 2001, p. 18.

wondering about the translation of French in Anglophone critical discourse.<sup>33</sup> Even if the claim for a French ‘cultural exception’ is more the expression of a supremacy that is challenged than a fight for cultural equality, it is indeed the hegemony of the American and Anglo-Saxon theoretical approach which is questioned. The multidisciplinary approach of postcolonial studies has been felt as a threat by French academia which, traditionally, compartmentalises disciplines.

Postcolonial studies are disputed in so far as they tend to reduce everything to the colonial question, which, it is argued, explains the set of post-imperial practices nowadays. Therefore literature is read through the colonial filter by Gayatri Spivak and Edward Said, who revisit British and French realist novels of the nineteenth and early twentieth century and look for sometimes minute traces of imperial power. According to Said, Albert Camus is the only widely acclaimed writer from French Algeria, whose colonial consciousness came rather late, in the light of a French colonialism that was reluctant to forego its colonial power. In his “contrapuntal reading” of Camus’ *L’Étranger* (The Outsider), Said restores an Algeria that Camus had obscured and dismissed from his narrative, in favour of a sanitised image of the historical experience. So it would seem that an Algeria ‘francofied’ by French colonisers is correlated with the erasure of the Algerian referent which becomes insubstantial, and with a universalising interpretation of the novel – a reflection on the human condition – according to which the French presence becomes a timeless essence.<sup>34</sup>

Apart from its overly broad perspective, postcolonialism is also blamed for its ahistorical and idealistic critical approach, which seeks to give coherence to very diverse experiences and tends to erase the national contexts from which the works emerged. Viewed through the prism of a global analysis, the colonised only exist through their colonial status and their resistance to Western hegemony – their only *raison d’être*. *Francophonie* can therefore be seen as a remedy for the pitfall of standardisation: arguably it offers a unique approach to globalisation as a way of qualifying American superpower and marking its specificity in the contemporary global world. Defending the French language is a way of allowing nations to express their own cultural identity. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, however, the notion of ‘Francophone studies’ has been more frequently associated with that of ‘postcolonial studies’ in the French literary critique, notably thanks to Jean-Marc Moura.<sup>35</sup>

### *Post-Francophonie?*

In the wake of Rushdie’s already quite old claims in the Anglophone world,<sup>36</sup> the *Manifeste pour une littérature-monde* (Manifesto for a world-literature), published in March 2007, proclaims the end of *Francophonie*, the return to the world of literature and the emergence of a “constellation” where “the

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<sup>33</sup> Gayatri C. Spivak: *Outside the Teaching Machine*. London, New York: Routledge 1993, p. 34. In a chapter on Foucault, “More on Power/Knowledge” (pp. 27-57), she finds it regrettable that there is no exact English equivalent for the French “pouvoir”.

<sup>34</sup> Edward Said: *Culture and Imperialism*. London: Vintage 1994, p. 217.

<sup>35</sup> Jean-Marc Moura: *Littératures francophones et théories postcoloniales*. Paris: Puf 2007.

<sup>36</sup> Salman Rushdie: “Commonwealth Literatures” Does not Exist. In: *Imaginary Homelands*. London: Granta 1991, pp. 61-70.



centre” is relegated to “the middle of other centres”.<sup>37</sup> This manifesto was amplified by a collection of 27 chapters published in the same year by Michel Le Bris and Jean Rouaud, *Pour une littérature-monde* (For a world-literature).<sup>38</sup> The aim is to create a new literary cosmopolitanism freed from the nationalist stranglehold, to think anew the architecture of the literatures written in French in a more open way in order to move beyond *Francophonie* and into ‘*post-Francophonie*’.

Considering that French literature is the expression of the French nation, *francophonie* appears as a virtual territory in which the use of the French language makes sense and delineates a space that is distinct from French literature while being still utterly in the grip of Francophone institutions. *Littérature-monde* includes French literature and encourages one to rethink regional models from area studies in favour of the transnational and transregional dimensions. The aim is to challenge the hierarchy set up by *francophonie*, which tends to relegate extra-European literatures to the margins. *Littérature-monde* must favour a dialogue between the different Francophone regions and rethink the relations between centre and periphery in view of the movements of migration, exile and diaspora.

Decentring the francophone world means disputing the Parisian centre. Jacques Godbout wants to “alert Paris to its provincialism”<sup>39</sup> in the same way as Dipesh Chakrabarty wanted to “provincialise” Europe.<sup>40</sup> The Francophone world is the only postcolonial domain where the European capital – in this case Paris – is predominant, which is no longer true of London, Lisbon or even Madrid (or Barcelona) when compared with New York, São Paulo and Buenos Aires. The centralised world of publishing was globalised in a portmanteau word, Thomas C. Spear’s *Galligrasseuil* (a conflation of the names of the publishing houses Gallimard, Grasset and Seuil).<sup>41</sup> The Francophone literary world is thus still dominated by the French-Parisian centre, as noted by Pierre Halen.<sup>42</sup> Unlike *francophonie*, which is centred in the literary capital of Paris, *littérature-monde* in French is meant to be multi-centred. And yet, except for Quebec, the fact that the literary institutions of most Francophone countries (publishing, critique, distribution network) are poorly developed is a hindrance when they want to go beyond national borders to reach a broader Francophone readership.

The power and influence of language is as blatant in the *littérature-monde* in French as in *francophonie*. Yet “nobody speaks Francophone. It is not written either”, as Tahar Ben Jelloun objects.<sup>43</sup> Michel Le Bris wants to free the French language from its pact with the nation, but such a position may mean a return to

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<sup>37</sup> Le Monde des livres. Manifeste pour une littérature-monde. 16 mars. See [http://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2007/03/15/des-ecrivains-plaident-pour-un-roman-en-francais-ouvert-sur-le-monde\\_883572\\_3260.html](http://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2007/03/15/des-ecrivains-plaident-pour-un-roman-en-francais-ouvert-sur-le-monde_883572_3260.html), viewed 7 March 2012.

<sup>38</sup> Le Bris and Rouaud (eds.): *Littérature-monde* (note 23).

<sup>39</sup> “dénier la province parisienne”, Jacques Godbout: La question préalable. In: Alec G. Hargreaves, Charles Forsdick, David Murphy (eds.): *Transnational French Studies. Postcolonialism and Littérature-monde*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press 2010, pp. 103-111 (p. 110).

<sup>40</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty: *Provincialising Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 2007.

<sup>41</sup> Thomas Spear: (R)Evolution. In: Hargreaves, Forsdick & Murphy (eds.): *French Studies* (note 38), pp. 164-177 (p. 165).

<sup>42</sup> See Pierre Halen: Notes sur une topologie institutionnelle du champ littéraire francophone. In: Papa Samba Diop & Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink (eds.): *Littérature et sociétés africaines. Regards comparatistes et perspectives interculturelles*. Tübingen: Gunter Narr 2001, pp. 55-68.

<sup>43</sup> Tahar Ben Jelloun: La cave de ma mémoire, le toit de ma maison sont des mots français. In: Le Bris and Rouaud (eds.): *Littérature-monde* (note 23), pp. 113-124 (p. 120).

the old myth of French universalism.<sup>44</sup> *Littérature-monde* in French must break away from Francocentrism and the imperial connotations of *Francophonie*, presented as a grand narrative by the 2007 manifesto and, paradoxically, stop being monolingual so that all the specificities and variations of French can resonate. *Littérature-monde* can be envisaged as a form of *post-francophonie*, which entails moving away from a chronological perspective linked with neo-colonialism to a globalising perspective and a definition of ‘world poetics’ within a precise corpus that favours aesthetics over identity. Post-Francophone consciousness, which allows a revising of French universalism into a transnational framework, is a way of thinking beyond the colonial and postcolonial banner.

Moving from the notion of *francophonie* to that of *littérature-monde* implies a change of scale. At the same time, the Francophone space appears extremely fragile: *littérature-monde* in French refers to very dispersed territories which consist merely of isolated and dispersed ethnic groups and of individual phenomena. The formula ‘littérature-monde in French’ implies a small world – “having the French language in common” – within a larger world, but the intermingling of Francophone zones within other linguistic areas fosters linguistic, cultural and literary contact zones. This is shown in Christopher Miller’s and Bill Marshall’s studies on the French and Francophone Atlantic world.<sup>45</sup> *Littérature-monde* in French is obviously played out in the Atlantic space in a way consistent with the phenomena described by Paul Gilroy about the Black Atlantic world, drawing notably from foundational experiences like the triangular trade, slavery and the plantation system.<sup>46</sup>

One of the ways out of the aporia of *Francophonie* lies in the new approach to literary history advanced by Christie McDonald and Susan Rubin Suleiman in their book *French Global*. Far from the universalising and assimilationist aims of the ‘civilising mission’ and of the centralising ideal of the Republic, they rethink French literary history, not in terms of diachrony and national borders, but according to a global paradigm praising mobility, exchanges and transfers, in order to deal with literatures in French from a world perspective: “The challenge is to read these works in relation to the globe: as world, as sphere, as a space of encounter with others and with the very idea of otherness.”<sup>47</sup>

## Conclusion

The question of *Francophonie* and the debates with postcolonial studies are probably inherited from history and from the conflicts related to the colonisation of the world by the two major European powers of the nineteenth century, the United Kingdom and France, but also from the way the whole world was remade under the domination of the United States. Running counter to the colonial binarism and its vertical

<sup>44</sup> Michel Le Bris: Pour une littérature-monde en français. In: Le Bris and Rouaud (eds.): *Littérature-monde* (note 23), pp. 23-53 (p. 47).

<sup>45</sup> Christopher L. Miller: *The French Atlantic Triangle. Literature and Culture of the Slave Trade*. Durham: Duke University Press 2008; Bill Marshall: *The French Atlantic. Travels in Culture and History*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press 2009.

<sup>46</sup> Paul Gilroy: *Black Atlantic. Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1993.

<sup>47</sup> Christie McDonald and Susan Rubin Suleiman (eds.): *French Global. A New Approach to Literary Theory*. New York: Columbia University Press 2010, p. xvii.

antagonisms, a certain vision of the world is aiming today to favour an entropic mixture of cultures and a euphoric reconciliation of contraries, while postcolonial spaces, both Francophone and Anglophone, strive to create places of solidarity and reconciliation by practicing hybridity. Thus postcolonial theory sometimes conveys a pluralistic and compassionate discourse which obscures the violent forms of acculturation and transculturation arising from the imposition of certain models of culture as well as resistance to them.<sup>48</sup>

Even though theorists sometimes tear each other apart, the practices of postcolonial writers tend to be less dissonant, if only as a result of the unifying role played by Western literary criticism and publishing houses, which favour a homogeneous literary practice in the Francophone and Anglophone domains, based on parody, the use of quotations and the eclecticism of their references. For *francophonie* to yield to a true *littérature-monde*, there would need to be a Francophone space as powerful economically as India, which created a few significant publishing houses well placed to compete with the Western ones. Unlike 'World fiction' (or Anglo-World literature) and what David Damrosch now calls 'World Literature', *littérature-monde* in French is not read worldwide, far from it. Hence the significance and the necessity of translation, so that Damrosch can argue that "works become world literature when they gain on balance in translation, stylistic losses offset by an expansion in depth as they increase their range".<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Daniel-Henri Pageaux: *Trente essais de Littérature générale et comparée ou la corne d'Amalthée*. Paris: L'Harmattan 2003, p. 283. The term 'transculturación' comes from the Cuban ethnologist Fernando Ortiz.

<sup>49</sup> David Damrosch: *What Is World Literature?* Princeton: Princeton University Press 2003, p. 289.