
Traversing the Borders of écriture migrante and Transnational Writing in Québec

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Catherine Khordoc,

"Traversing the Borders of *écriture migrante* and Transnational Writing in Québec"

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Contents of **CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture 18.4 (2016)**

Thematic Issue ***New Work on Immigration and Identity in Contemporary France, Québec, and Ireland***
Ed. Dervila Cooke

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Abstract: In "Traversing the Borders of *écriture migrante* and Transnational Writing in Québec" Catherine Khordoc questions the relevance of the term *écriture migrante*, which has become a type of ghetto for writers who have immigrated, creating an implicit expectation that immigrant writers write exclusively about experiences of immigration and exile. She proposes a transnational approach as an alternative way of considering contemporary Québécois writing, examining works written by immigrants alongside works by non-immigrants. She discusses four novels, two by authors who have immigrated to Québec (Émile Ollivier and Dany Laferrière), and two by authors who were born and raised in Québec (Francine Noël and Dominique Fortier). These novels share a focus on multiple sites of belonging and a refusal to conceptualize identity, nation and culture along clear-cut lines. A transnational approach may offer a more coherent perspective on contemporary Québécois literature, which is preoccupied by questions of globalization, movement, transience, and hybridity.

Catherine KHORDOC

Traversing the Borders of *écriture migrante* and Transnational Writing in Québec

In December 2014, Nigerian author Ben Okri wrote in an article in the *The Guardian* in relation to Black and African writers that "We should not be expected to write about slavery, poverty or racial injustice. The greatest literature comes not from the heaviest subjects but from freedom of thought" (<<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/dec/27/mental-tyranny-black-writers>>). In Québec, there is a similar expectation that writers who have immigrated will necessarily write about experiences related to immigration, exile, and loss. However, as in the case of the implicit expectations regarding Black writers described by Okri, such stereotyping can become problematic. In the case of Québécois literature, some writers who immigrated to Québec initially welcomed the label of *écriture migrante* because it brought attention to their work and recognized the experiences of immigration of which they wrote. Yet other writers, including Emile Ollivier, whose work I discuss later in this article, have lamented the reductive nature of the term. While it was useful for a time, forming the basis for substantial reflection and discussion in Québec (see, e.g. Harel; Nepveu; Moisan and Hildebrand; Simon and Leahy), it appears that the term has indeed become a ghetto from which it is proving difficult for writers who have immigrated to break free. In 2012 Lise Gauvin suggested that the term *écriture migrante* may have become a label that conveniently marginalizes those writers identified with it: "une étiquette commode pour marginaliser les écrivains qui en font partie" (218) and Simon Harel observed in 2005 that "la version rassurante d'un exotisme qui permet à la communauté des lecteurs de contempler à peu de frais les figures du voyage et de la migration" (*Les Passages* 37). I would add to Harel's argument that this is not only "at low cost," but also at low risk.

The questions which underlie my reflections in this article include the relevance of the term *écriture migrante* and, more importantly, approaches which can be deployed to study Québécois literature in the hope of breaking down some of the barriers erected around (im)migrant writing. One of the ways this might be achieved is by analyzing immigrant and non-immigrant works together, rather than isolating works of *écriture migrante* from the Québécois canon. Moreover, an analysis of novels written by non-immigrant writers will illustrate how some of their works share themes and tropes that have been said to characterize *écriture migrante*. I posit that a transnational approach to the analysis of Québécois writing opens the possibility of examining contemporary literature in ways that are relevant to the times we live in: globalized times where collective and individual identities are multiple, complex, and ambiguous. Further, this approach contributes to the dismantling of the ghetto that has been erected through the *écriture migrante* label and it might, perhaps somewhat ironically, provide a more coherent perspective on contemporary Québécois writing. The term *écriture migrante* garnered significant critical attention throughout the 1980s and 1990s, and into the twenty-first century (for an overview, see Carrière and Khordoc). Pierre Nepveu felt that the term "migrant" was preferable to "immigrant" because the former refers to a more nuanced literary aesthetic that alludes to movement, wandering, and passage while the latter refers to the representation of the social phenomenon of immigration (233-34). And while many scholars and critics such as Nepveu, Harel, and Robert Berrouët-Oriol insist that the term should not necessarily refer exclusively to writers who have immigrated to Québec or their works and that non-immigrant writers might produce "migrant" works, very rarely has the term been applied to works of non-immigrants. The term is perhaps a victim of its own success and given the attention that the works of immigrant writers has attracted, it may have been too easy to situate authors and their works into this category simply because of their place of birth, regardless of what they write about, thus leading to the label having become in many ways exclusionary and ghettoizing. As mentioned, some writers did welcome the label, at least for a time.

For example, Abla Farhoud, a Québécois author who immigrated from Lebanon in 1951 at the age of six, described what she calls "la parole de l'immigrant" as "la parole de l'immigrant est une étape ... dans la vie de l'écrivain immigrant, si toutefois il ne se laisse pas enfermer dans cette étiquette. J'étais loin d'imaginer que cette étiquette, qui m'a servi au départ, allait très vite devenir réductrice à mes yeux ... Immigrante, oui, mais immigrante n'est qu'une partie de moi" (56). As scholars and readers, we need to be cautious about our own expectations with regards to the immigrant experience. It is too simple to label a work of literature as *écriture migrante* because the biographical blurb refers explicitly to the author's immigration to Québec. The migrant label can act as a veil, unintentionally camouflaging other dimensions of these literary works. For example, in Farhoud's *Le Bonheur à la queue glissante* (1998), generally considered to be a migrant text, it is far too easy to ignore the fact that the main character's son suffers from an unnamed mental illness, which has an indelible impact on her own life. In another of Farhoud's novels, *Le Fou d'Omar* (2011), the main character also suffers from a mental illness and it is noteworthy that this novel, which is less emphatically about migration, has not received as much attention as her previous works which are more explicitly "migrant" with regard to dominant themes. Like Farhoud, Ollivier is also disappointed that critics seem to limit his literary and cultural contributions to his experiences of immigration. For him, "les territoires de l'écrivain-migrant, comme pour tout écrivain, sont ceux de l'imaginaire, des formes et des mots qui fondent le sens ou perdent sens, de l'ordinaire de la condition humaine, de ses violences, de ses échecs, de ses rêves et de ses aspirations" (*Repérages* 70).

In this regard, it is useful to reflect on the important manifesto and book on World Literature in French published by *Le Monde* newspaper and Gallimard in Paris in 2007, *Pour une littérature-monde en français* (LeBrès and Rouaud). Kateri Lemmens describes one of the main but implicit issues that have come out of this manifesto as follows: "les créateurs, écrivains migrants comme aussi écrivains 'indigènes' (des sédentaires qui écrivent dans la langue et dans le pays des origines) résistent de plus en plus aux catégorisations ghéttoisantes et aux grilles d'analyse réifiantes: l'écrivain, migrant ou non,

sent qu'il appartient d'abord à la littérature, à sa quête, à son projet et à ses exigences internes—éthiques, esthétiques ou existentielles. En effet, les écrivains dits "francophones" tout comme les écrivains migrants refusent souvent qu'on enferme leurs œuvres dans des catégories réductrices, lesquelles limitent la complexité inhérente à leur travail à des questions de nature identitaire, culturelle ou politique" (214-15). While the term "Francophone" can refer to those writers writing in French regardless of their origins, there is often debate as to whether it includes or excludes French writers. In this quotation, Lemmens alludes to the fact that, similarly to migrant writers, Francophone writers, taken to mean those writing in French from former colonial contexts, are often perceived to write only about colonialism and identity politics. This observation echoes Okri's words. Clearly, authors and critics are pushing back against expectations of what authors of certain backgrounds should be writing about in their fictional works. This leads to the second dimension of these reflections—the fact that there are many novels written by authors in Québec who are not of immigrant origin but who address themes that are often very similar to those considered the domain of migrant writers. These themes include the crossing of borders, questions of belonging and origins, the influence of multiple languages, nomadism, the culture shock between new and old traditions and rituals, and other similar tropes. Régine Robin, one of the first authors in Québec to be labeled as "migrant," notes that difficulties arise when we start to essentialize the writing of immigrants, declaring that we cannot point to specific characteristics that would isolate them from other writers and other texts: "On ne peut pas leur trouver des traits pertinents qui les isoleraient des autres écrivains, des autres écritures" (34-35). For Robin, there is nothing necessarily "migrant," aesthetically speaking, about authors who happen to have immigrated to Québec. She feels that critics and publishers should start from the principle that they are writers first and foremost and that as writers have the liberty to write about whatever they choose. Equally, a writer does not have to have experienced exile or immigration to write of themes and issues that are associated to (im)migrant writing. However, works by native Québécois writers are rarely labeled as migrant regardless what they choose to write about. For instance, Noël's *La Conjuración des bâtards* treats themes of nomadism, displacement, and living between cultures, yet it is not considered an example of *écriture migrante*.

All of the texts I analyze in this article were published in Québec. The first two works, *Passages* (1991) and *Je Suis un écrivain japonais* (2008) fall into the immigrant category owing to the origins of their authors, Emile Ollivier and Dany Laferrière, respectively. Both were born in Haiti, but it is important to emphasize that immigration is merely one dimension of their works. The other two texts, *La Conjuración des bâtards* (1999) by Francine Noël and *Les Larmes de saint Laurent* (2010) by Dominique Fortier, both Québécoises by birth, are not usually considered to fall into the immigrant category, although these novels raise questions of multiple belongings, identities, languages, and transience in a similar way to works considered to fall under the immigrant category. What brings together the four novels under discussion is a conception of belonging and identity located in multiple spaces and multiple cultures. The novels are not bound by singular configurations of nation and culture, but cross borders, continents, and oceans in ways which question the concept of the nation. For Paul Jay, transnational works address issues of "mobility and displacement and thus shift the reader between multiple locations, engaging a new model of migration characterized by the back-and-forth movement of people across borders, at once insisting on the importance of location and deterritorializing the spaces in which their characters operate" (11). Although the term "transnational" is used in a broad range of disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, geography, and economics, its relevance in literary and cultural studies reflects the preoccupations that run throughout a broad range of contemporary works, allowing them to be examined through perspectives other than traditional national paradigms that have been dominant since the nineteenth century. Janet Paterson notes that "le transnationalisme implique un processus selon lequel des formations identitaires traditionnellement circonscrites par des frontières politiques et géographiques vont au-delà de frontières nationales pour produire de nouvelles formations identitaires. ... Le transnationalisme récuse les définitions identitaires fermées" (15; see also Dagnino; Sturm-Trigonakis).

Without effacing the national, a transnational approach questions and complicates what is meant by national adjectives is to identify a person, entity, concept, object or place such as "Canadian," "Québécois," or "French." The increasing concerns with globalization, (im)migration, exile, colonialism, border-crossings, place, belonging, identity, and culture inscribed in the works of authors regardless of their origins or personal trajectories cannot be examined through the relatively straightforward lens of nationalism because they do not easily fit within a single national category. As Jay notes, when critics focus on "migration and cross-cultural experience" (8) this can lead to a reconfiguration of spaces and the transnationalization of the study of what was previously a narrowly-focused US-American literature, for instance, as scholars in "African, Asian, Native American, and Latino/a literary and cultural studies" (8) to the broader understanding of "[U.S.] American studies" whose symbolic borders are more fluid. In a similar way, the works discussed in this article are Québécois, in part because of the conditions of their production, distribution, and mediatization. Yet they could also be treated as taking part in the hemispheric turn toward "American studies," thus complicating what is meant by the term "Québécois" and, more specifically, my article "Looking Beyond."

In what follows, I do not wish to minimize the sociological or lived immigrant experience thematized in many works of literature. Indeed, a great many works do emphasize immigration, and it is important and valuable to recognize these texts, study them and learn from them. My central point, however, is that this theme should not become a form of prison for writers, nor, for critics, should it become a form of blinkers, where we are unable to see anything in the text other than a sociological representation of immigration. Scholars and critics must pay attention to the ways in which their work, which too often seems bound to mechanical approaches to literary analysis and criticism, overshadowing complexities that arise in the text that do not fit squarely within the label. My aim in this study is

to participate, in some small way, to breaking down the stranglehold these simplistic labels hold over texts, authors, and critics.

Émile Ollivier is a well-known Québécois writer of Haitian origin who immigrated to Québec in 1966, after a stint in Paris. *Passages* is his third novel, published in 1991 in Montréal. An English translation bearing the same title came out in 2003. Ollivier's novels are usually set in Haiti and/or Montréal, and often depict characters' experiences of immigration, for example his posthumous novel, *La Brûlerie* (2002), which is set in a cosmopolitan Montreal, in a gathering place for displaced and diasporic characters. The title of *Passages* points unambiguously to the dominance of themes of movement or transfer between places and spaces. The novel is structured around three spatio-temporal axes: Montreal, Miami, and the village of Port-à-l'Écu in Haiti. In a complex narrative structure that alternates between past and present, between narrators and levels of narration, and between the three afore-mentioned locales, *Passages* tells several stories that initially seem distinct but that cross over in unexpectedly significant ways. The main narrative threads relate the stories of Normand, his wife Leyda, who live in Montréal, his lover Amparo, and Amédée Hosange, and his wife Brigitte who live in Haiti but are making plans to leave the island. Normand is a Haitian immigrant to Montréal. Unable to travel for many years due to his health, he makes a trip to Miami to escape the harsh Québec winter. His wife Leyda does not accompany him, due to work commitments. Upon his arrival, Normand runs into Amparo, a former lover, spending what are to be the last few days of his life with her. He dies suddenly of a heart attack in Miami, and about a year later, Amparo feels compelled to tell Leyda the story of these last days with Norman.

A parallel storyline unfolds in Port-à-l'Écu, in Haiti, as a group of Haitians led by Amédée Hosange, discover that their village is about to become an industrial dumpsite. Planning their escape, they painstakingly build a boat, prepare food and water for the crossing to the United States, map out their trajectory, and set out taking all possible precautions. However, they are caught in a storm and their boat is wrecked. Many of the group die, their bodies floating up the beaches of Miami. The few survivors are rescued, only to be sent off to a refugee camp. The two main narrative threads cross when Normand decides to make the journey to the camp to meet some of the survivors, including Amédée's wife, Brigitte, who tells him their story. Later on, Amparo, herself a Cuban immigrant to Canada, originally from Syria, tells this story to Leyda, Normand's wife. The imbrication of narrators, narratives and chronologies forces the reader to constantly shift perspectives by having to keep track of which character is recounting whose story, thus creating a sense that one is always on the move, the themes of passage and movement never far away. According to Nicole Aas-Rouxparis, it is in fact the narrative thread itself that is the "site of "passages" (119).

Montréal, Miami, and Haiti, as well as the ocean separating the latter two, are equally represented. Miami is particularly symbolic as the "turnstile" between North America and the Caribbean and Latin America. It is also a hub for all those who remain, hesitating about the different directions they might take. By contrast with the cosmopolitan cities of Miami and Montréal, the village of Port-à-l'Écu in Haiti, on the northwest coast of the island is remote. Indeed, it is so remote that it does not appear on any map. "No need to search for this name on a map; there is none now. Port-à-l'Écu no longer really exists. It's nowhere to be found" (*Passages* 9). While globalization regularly brings to mind large cities where immigrants and refugees can find shelter and work, transnational writing, a term that Ulf Hannerz considers "more humble" than globalization (6), also reminds us of places that are often ignored, unnamed, devalued, be it by tourists or by multinational corporations looking for cheap labor. The mapping of marginal, remote places, including islands and vast, vague spaces like the American Midwest, is in fact a trope that appears not only in *Passages*, but also in *Les Larmes de saint Laurent* by Dominique Fortier, to be discussed later. While immigration and exile are indeed important elements of Ollivier's novel, it explores issues well beyond those of straight-forward immigration and integration into a new society. It intertwines the tension of forced migration, the risks of failure, and issues of illegal immigration, with those related to voluntary migration and the possibilities of relatively successful integration. It complicates and tangles the threads of belonging, with regard to community, collective and individual identity. Moreover, the points of intersection between the narratives bring together characters who are not from the place where the meetings take place, who are negotiating in one way or another how and why they find themselves where they are, who they are, where they are and whence they hail. With its tripartite narrative and geographical triangle, its structure and themes are constantly shifting through the constant dislocations with which the reader must contend. As Aas-Rouxparis observes, the passages in this novel are "Le passage est ainsi moins la trajectoire réelle entre des points précis dans le temps et dans l'espace que la transition entre deux états de conscience;" "ce cheminement est celui de la construction d'un moi inscrit dans le plein d'une *universalité* basée sur la diversité" (118). It is an example of a novel that should be discussed as much (or perhaps more) for its literary inventiveness as for its themes of migration and travel.

Laferrière, inducted into the Académie Française in 2013, is a well-established Québécois writer originally from Haiti, who won the prestigious Prix Médicis in 2009 for *L'Enigme du retour. Je suis un écrivain japonais*, published in 2008 and translated to English under the title *I Am a Japanese Writer* in 2011. While many of his novels are considered to be quasi-autobiographical recalling his life in Haiti and his immigration experience, this particular novel does not relate to his immigration to Montréal. Many of his works have been categorized as *écriture migrante*, especially his first work, *Comment faire l'amour avec un nègre sans se fatiguer* (1985) and others such as *Chronique de la dérive douce* (1994), which was recently reedited and expanded.

Je Suis un écrivain japonais is narrated by a writer who may or may not be Laferrière himself. Laferrière promised his publisher a forthcoming novel that will bear the title "I Am a Japanese Writer" even though it is made clear that he is not actually Japanese. One of the author's acquaintances asks if he is allowed to declare himself Japanese and wonders if he is prepared to change nationality. The

author replies that he does not want to change nationalities given that he has already done so once before. The principal question centers on what it means to be a Japanese writer: "What is a Japanese writer? Someone who lives and writes in Japan? Or someone who was born in Japan and writes in spite of it (there are nations that are happy without writing)? Or someone who was not born in Japan, who does not know the language, but who decided one fine day to become a Japanese writer? (Laferrrière, *I Am* 15). The novel also throws up other questions relating to the nature of citizenship, identity, language, and race. While Laferrrière admits that, yes, he is a writer and that he was born in the Caribbean, he questions whether this automatically makes him a "Caribbean writer." "The bookstore, the library and the university rushed to pin that title on me. Being a writer and a Caribbean doesn't necessarily make me a Caribbean writer. Why do people always mix things up?" (*I Am* 19). Questions of origin are not relevant to him and he does not understand what all the fuss is about: "Very naturally, I repatriated the writers I read at the time. All of them: Flaubert, Goethe, Whitman, Shakespeare, Lope de Vega, Cervantes, Kipling, Senghor, Césaire, Roumain, Aado, Diderot—they all lived in my village. Otherwise, what were they doing in my room? Years later, when I became a writer and people asked me, "Are you a Haitian writer, a Caribbean writer or a French language writer?" I answered without hesitation: I take on my reader's nationality. Which means that when a Japanese person reads me, I immediately become a Japanese writer" (*I Am* 20). The questions posed throughout the novel, both explicitly and implicitly, contest the categorization of literature according to national paradigms. By extension this problematizes the notion of *écriture migrante*. The narrator disconcerts the reader by affirming that if the title of the novel he is working on is "I Am a Japanese Writer," that does not imply that he is or will become a Japanese writer. Laferrrière makes clear that the title of the fictitious book, and moreover, the content of a novel, are not necessarily directly related to the author personally. For those who know Laferrrière's work, this is all the more problematic because he often declares in interviews that his books are usually about him.

Moving beyond the national categorization that Laferrrière so explicitly rejects here, one of the ways to analyze this novel is through an approach that reflects the multiple cultural, linguistic, and geographic pivots through which the novel's narrative threads weave, which again can be considered to place the text more firmly in the transnational camp than in the category of migrant writing. The novel that the narrator is proposing creates quite a stir, in Québec and further abroad, attracting the attention of the Japanese consulate in Montreal and starting a trend where other writers also reject national labels by adopting arbitrarily chosen national identifications: "'The title is 'I Am a Malagasy Writer' and it's written by a Japanese guy.' 'So what?' 'That's how young writers are displaying their contempt for literary nationalism. For them, a Japanese writer doesn't necessarily write a Japanese book. In fact, a Japanese writer doesn't even exist anymore'" (*I Am* 213). The narrator also gets involved with a Japanese underground female singer called Midori and members of her entourage. He also reads the works of Basho, a seventeenth-century Japanese poet renowned especially in the Western world as the master of haiku. The imaginary of this novel is not limited to Montreal (where most of the actual action happens) or to Japan, as many other national spaces crowd in, as we have seen in the reference to Madagascar through the Malagasy writer. Further, Icelandic singer-songwriter Björk figures as one of the characters (she is on tour in Montréal and is portrayed as fascinated by Voodoo art—a nod to Laferrrière's Haitian roots). My aim here is not to determine the legitimacy of Laferrrière's title, his narrator's claim or whether he achieves what is promised. Rather, it is to highlight, on the one hand, the arbitrariness of labels which are more often than not imposed by literary and cultural institutions, and on the other, the fictional imaginary in literature, and specifically in Québécois literature, which is not limited by geographical, cultural, or political borders: it is clear with this novel that the concept of *écriture migrante* is not a satisfactory one through which to try to understand Laferrrière's novel, even if questions of immigration are hinted at and the author himself, Laferrrière, did immigrate from Haiti to Québec.

I would like now to turn to two novels by authors who have not immigrated. Although these two texts evoke themes of immigration and travel, they have not, to my knowledge, been considered as examples of *écriture migrante*. One might ask why, given some of the common preoccupations between these two novels, and those that have been labeled as *écriture migrante*. It does lead us to believe that the personal, biographical details of the author influence how the works are labeled. In these cases, the novels are simply part of the Québec literary canon, without any additional qualifiers. *La Conjuration des bâtards* by Francine Noël (1999) is the third part of a tetralogy that began with the iconic novel, *Maryse* (1983) about a young university student in Montréal in the 1970s, living through the Quiet Revolution, the October Crisis, and Women's Liberation. In this third instalment, the born and bred Québécoise, Maryse has moved to Mexico with her partner and their two children. At about 500 pages, the novel is not only quite long, it is also complex, both in terms of plot and the use of formal elements such as narrative techniques, intertextuality, *mise en abyme*, representation of time, and magical realism. The setting alternates between Montreal and Mexico City, although the back-and-forth movement between countries is not as systematic as it is in Ollivier's *Passages*. Many thematic and formal elements in the novel are reminiscent of traits often present in works by migrant writers. Maryse's children, Alexis and Agnès, live between Mexico and Québec, both physically, and in terms of the languages and cultures to which they feel they belong. Montréal may be their parents' hometown, but for them, it is where they spend their holidays. They speak Spanish amongst themselves and especially when they are in Montréal for fear of losing their Spanish. Although Maryse and her partner do not take Mexican citizenship and remain Canadian, the children consider themselves transnational foreigners, "des aubains transnationaux" (206), but this status does not particularly disturb them. While they may be somewhat rootless, they are not especially bothered by this fact, since this is the only existence they have ever known. In fact, the younger child was adopted through an international agreement and was born in war-torn Lebanon, thus adding to her own sense of transnational belong-

ing. Interestingly, she and her brother are more concerned with their parents' rootlessness than their own. In a reversal of the usual parent-child relationship where parents worry about children, they feel that in order to prevent their parents from being perpetual wanderers, they themselves must provide them with some kind of anchor.

Languages are also inscribed in this novel in multiple ways. Some of the dialogue is in Spanish in the text, accompanied by a footnote providing a French translation—a feature that we often see in migrant writing. Furthermore, there are frequent passages commenting on language, on the overt influence of English on French in Québec and on Spanish in Mexico. Characters often comment on each other's accents, attempting to identify their place of origin based on their accent. But transnational movements create confusion, and accents that might have once been indicators of national or regional identity belie such simple identifiers. During an international conference being held in Mexico City, and in which Maryse and many of her friends and colleagues participate, language is one of the topics being discussed. One of the speakers states that languages do not have intrinsic value *per se*, but that language is imposed by those with power. This is clearly a statement about the effects of colonialism and war, and the choices about the language in which writers write, a common theme in postcolonial writing and theory. The speaker, who happens to be speaking in Quechua, a Native South American language once used by the Incas, further states that creole languages and slang are a form of resistance against powerful, dominating nation-states. This point about languages links to the first part of this tetralogy, *Maryse*, in which the main character reflects on the French she will use to write her first texts: some form of standardized continental French, or the French of Québec, with its anglicisms and archaisms. While this is a common theme in postcolonial writing and in Québécois literature since the 1960s, it is also manifest in works of *écriture migrante*, such as Farhoud's *Le Bonheur a la queue glissante*, as characters ponder their own mastery of French, how to express or translate ideas into another language, or indeed, the choice of language to speak or write.

Just as languages and accents are shown not to reflect identity in this novel by Noël, the question of citizenship and nationality is also problematized. When Maryse is asked her nationality, she replies that she writes in French, thus avoiding having to give an unequivocal answer as to whether she is Québécoise or Canadian. This conversation, which takes place in English, illustrates that, for Maryse, language takes precedence over national identity, while also underlining the frequent multilingualism of those who are transnational. Toward the end of the novel, Maryse and others die in a terrorist event during the conference. When the local newspaper mentions the citizenship of all the victims, Maryse is identified as being Québécoise, but Canada expresses its displeasure, claiming her as Canadian. This diplomatic faux-pas starts a trend, as other countries start claiming the deceased as their own, thereby calling attention to the blurred lines between legal citizenship and national or cultural identity: "On avait classé les cadavres selon leur passeport ou les déclarations de leurs familles, mais à y regarder de plus près, il s'est avéré qu'un ressortissant français était arménien, un Américain, israélien, le Suisse, albanais, la Marocaine, berbère, une Anglaise, indienne et l'Indien, pakistanais, la Congolaise était kényane, le Péruvien, quechua, un Mexicain, guatémaltèque, un autre, américain et agent double, *et cætera*" (*La Conjuración* 427). In a previous study, I state that Noël's fiction is "generally regarded as being unapologetically nationalistic" in reference to Québec nationalism (231). While there are many instances of discussions related to nationalism in this novel, it focuses extensively on themes of globalization, mobility, displacement, and ambiguous national and linguistic identities. In fact, I would argue that this work could be categorized as *écriture migrante* owing to its themes, as well as its formal characteristics. If it might be somewhat disconcerting to categorize *La Conjuración* in such a way, this is likely due to the fact the biographical information we have about the author suggests she is not an immigrant (either to Québec or to Mexico). Because the (im)migrant label seems to confer some form of authenticity or testimonial value to the narrative, it becomes awkward to use it to identify works that treat immigration within fiction. The fact remains, nonetheless, that works such as this one, written by non-immigrant writers, simply do not get categorized as examples of *écriture migrante*. Further, in the case of this particular novel, as with the other two discussed, it is more pertinent to consider their transnational dimensions, allowing us to examine immigration certainly, but without being limited to the sociological phenomenon of immigration.

The last novel I analyze is *Les Larmes de saint Laurent* (2010) by Dominique Fortier and published in English under the title *Wonder* in 2014. Like *Passages*, this novel is structured in three parts, which appear almost as three separate novellas through most of the novel. The thread that links them only becomes evident in the last few pages of the novel. The first section, titled "Monsters and Marvels" describes a colonial setting in Martinique, at the turn of the twentieth century, where French colonizers and their servants trade places for a day in celebration of Carnival. However, one of the actual servants injures the son of a Frenchman while dressed as a master, winding up in jail. When the Pelée volcano erupts, destroying the entire town of Saint-Pierre and killing all of its inhabitants, his prison cell ends up saving his life. The lone survivor of the Pelée volcano, Baptiste Cyparis gets his freedom back and is recruited in his capacity of miraculous survivor to the Barnum and Bailey circus, whose most popular attractions are human curiosities. He travels by train across North America with the circus, eventually marrying one of the other circus performers and adopting her son. There is much emphasis on the criss-crossing of the United States, as the circus travels by train from town to town. Although their movements across the country are not aimless, for Baptiste and his fellow circus acts, the continent remains largely anonymous as they never really get to see the towns where they stop; the continent is vast, dark, non-descript, unremarkable, as the train travels on its set tracks through the night, in order to arrive the following morning at the next destination. The circus, a symbol of rootlessness and transience, is eventually burned down by Baptiste, in an act of enraged jealousy. The second part of the novel, "Harmony of Spheres" shifts from the New World to the Old World, from colonized world to colonizing. A young English boy, Edward Love, who stands out because of his odd

behavior and unusual interests, grows up to be a mathematician. He meets a young woman, also odd in her own way, as she likes to put her ear to the ground in order to listen to the sound made by the earth. The mathematician and the musician discover an affinity, marry, and spend their honeymoon in Italy. This section of the novel also ends in tragedy, as his wife dies in childbirth, giving birth to twins, a boy and a girl. Lost without her, Edward immerses himself in his mathematical research, while his mother raises the children.

These first two parts of the novel are grounded in historical facts: the Montagne Pelée did actually erupt in 1902 and the sole survivor was named Baptiste Cyparis. Augustus Edward Hough Love (1863-1940) is the renowned twentieth-century mathematician who discovered, among other things, Love Waves, which are linked to the eruption of earthquakes. The narratives woven around these historical facts are fictional, as is the third part, titled "Love Waves" (even in the original French). This part brings us to Montréal and Mount Royal Park in particular where two characters are introduced, although their names are not revealed until the end of the novel. Their surnames indicate that each is related to the main characters in the two previous parts, Cyparis and Love. It is important to note, that in a subtle way Fortier suggests the theme of immigration, as the descendants of Edward Love and Baptiste Cyparis must have made their way to Canada at some point before the two contemporary characters were born. Fortier also hints at the *métissage*, hybridity or transculturation that has shaped these two characters, through the prior migration or perhaps nomadism of their ancestors. Immigration in this novel is not explicitly developed as a theme, and questions of exile or integration do not come into play. However, notions of belonging and rootedness (and rootlessness) are emphasized and in fact, feelings of exile are not necessarily connected to physical place. Edward Love, for example, lives in exile after losing his wife, and Baptiste Cyparis feels some sense of belonging, ironically, after he joins the circus. This novel shows that mobility, migration, racial and cultural mixing, are not actually new, or exclusive to the late twentieth or early twenty-first century, and that Québec's society is dominantly composed of people who have immigrated, be it recently or long ago. The novel itself migrates between Martinique, England, and Québec in ways that can seem arbitrary.

More fundamentally perhaps, *Les Larmes de saint Laurent* evokes the itinerancy that François Paré describes as being the "form of creative instability" that is manifested by migrant and non-migrant writers alike: "Cette itinérance n'appartient pas qu'aux individus migrant ou immigrants, ceux qui se déplacent réellement et élisent domicile dans un autre pays, sur un autre continent: itinérance, mot que je préférerai à migration pour le moment, est la forme d'instabilité créatrice qu'adopte toute conscience diasporale, même les peuples autochtones enracinés dans un territoire depuis des siècles" (4). Paré points to the creative possibilities that are created in writing, regardless of whether one has immigrated or not. It is not the physical act of immigration that leads to writing that can be considered transnational, but rather an awareness of the world, of the possibilities beyond one's immediate surroundings. Paré's notion of *itinérance* is reminiscent of Glissant's *Tout-monde*, of the contemporary novel's ability to travel across the world (129).

While the transnational might sometimes be perceived by some critics as disconnected from the local, it is important to emphasize that this is not the case in any of these four novels. As Maureen Moynagh points out, "It is not a question of conceiving the transnational as a kind of deterritorialized abstraction hovering somewhere above the earth-bound places where people live; rather my interest in the transnational imaginary ... has to do with embedded, place-specific, material, and historical relationships that nonetheless operate across national borders" (145). The representation of space in these novels is intricate, and the reader is given a clear sense of geography and of specifically defined locales. At the same time, although all four of these novels have Montreal in common, they also resist an unequivocal or unexamined attachment to one single place, city, or country. By giving significance to multiple sites, across national borders, languages, and cultures, these texts themselves migrate metaphorically. Gauvin points to the fact that Québécois literature is shaped by the dual polarization of an imaginary that is inspired at once by discoverers, adventurers, nomads, like Kerouac (of French Canadian origin) or Poulin (*Volkswagen Blues*) and sedentary settlers of territory (15). It is important to note that in the novels just discussed, there is evidence of displacement and mobility, exile and discovery, as well as the rootedness to place that develops over time. This sheds light on the evolution of Québécois literature, which traditionally focused on the taming of a forested territory and settlement, and of preserving a language, a religion, and a culture. In an age of globalization, international (im)migration to and from various corners of the world, and of multiple identities, we may wonder, as Lemmens does, whether Québec identity has come to be at home with distance: "Ne peut-on pas dire dans ce contexte que les écrivains 'Québécois' d'aujourd'hui, 'natifs' ou immigrants, qu'ils soient voyageurs ou sédentaires, ayant grandi—ici ou ailleurs—en contact avec un cosmopolitisme de plus en plus entraînant, soient *habités par la distance*, pour détourner l'élégante formule de François Paré?" (218).

In the four texts studied in this article, institutional considerations render these texts "Québécois." They are published in Québec, written by authors who hold Canadian citizenship and who are considered Québécois, they are reviewed in mainstream Québécois media, and awarded Québécois or Canadian awards (and in some cases, international prizes as well, but nonetheless, as Québécois writers). However, many of the thematic and formal literary qualities of the four texts studied in this article illustrate that while they are Québécois, more importantly, they are Québécois in a transnational way. The transnational character of these texts creates a layer of complexity to what is contained in the term of Québécois literature. They cross boundaries and borders, contest notions of nationalism (Québec nationalism or otherwise), and challenge the assumption that identity is unidimensional. These novels circumvent clear-cut, straightforward national labels, although, at the same time, it is difficult to avoid them entirely. National categories are not about to disappear, but as readers and critics we need to remain aware of their instability and their limitations. As Ulf Hannerz notes with some irony,

transnationalism has the tendency "to draw attention to what it negates—that is, to the continued significance of the national" (6).

In conclusion, I return to Okri's article on "Mental Tyranny" in which he calls on readers, scholars and critics, and students to read the writing of Black and African writers as they would any other writers: for what they actually write and not what is expected they should write about. Similar constraints of expectation, albeit with somewhat different subjects and themes, often apply to writers with a background of immigration. The context in Québec is interesting because Québécois literature since the 1960s has been conceived in light of a nationalist project helping to create and reflect a distinctive national identity (distinctive from the rest of Canada and from France as well). The emergence of the phenomenon of *écriture migrante* in the early 1980s caused a certain rupture in this project. Many scholars and critics claim that *écriture migrante* is part and parcel of the defining character of Québec's national canon. The ways in which the phenomenon has been conceived and examined by the critics have meant that it has been integrated into Québec's literary traditions while at the same time, paradoxically, creating a separate category of literary works that are, for the most part, determined by authors' biographies. The purpose of this article was to throw light on how the distinction between *écriture migrante* and writing by non-immigrant writers is artificial when the literary qualities are the focus of analysis. As such, different approaches to contemporary writing in Québec need to be explored in order to draw out some of the common characteristics of Québécois literature, both migrant and non-migrant. A feminist, thematic, or even more formalist approach could also blur the lines between these two corpuses within Québécois literature. In this instance, it is by examining the transnational dimensions of these works—and there would have been many others to choose from as examples, such as works by Nicolas Dickner, Jacques Poulin, Monique Proulx, Mona Latif-Ghattas, Monique Bosco, Régine Robin—that the proverbial walls of the ghetto around *écriture migrante* might be eradicated.

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