

The uncapturable contours of an author: Ambiguous postures in French media of transnational Francophone writers Fatou Diome and Alain Mabanckou

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Abstract

The Francophone authors Fatou Diome (Senegalese origins) and Alain Mabanckou (Congolese origins) are at the centre of this study on author postures in audio-visual media. The purpose of the study is to determine how transnational authors position themselves inside a central dominating culture and language, in this case France and French. Eight media samples for each author have been collected on Internet. The selection of the material was based on the most recent examples, a variety of modality-rich French media contexts, a representative view of the authorships and moments where identity positionings were activated. The theoretical framing leans on anterior results related to the circulation and reception of Francophone authors in Scandinavia and Sweden. Previous findings point Francophone authors as categorized through dichotomies, such as *exotic-authentic*, *national-transnational* and *local-global*. These oppositional terms have been used as analytical tools in the analysis of the data samples, in order to uncover how the author relates to these categories, takes advantage of them, and/or breaks with them in their construction of an author posture. The results show that Diome and Mabanckou adopt conscious strategies in order to avoid definitions, as well as to renegotiate concepts, such as 'national' and 'migrant'. Mabanckou's and Diome's appearances in the media sample shed light on how transnational authors cultivate a posture in movement, and develop strategies of 'reversibility', 'renegotiation', 'rebellion', and 'transgression of borders'.

Key words: Francophone literature, author posture, celebrity studies, transnational, world literature

1 Introduction

To become an established author in today's landscape of literary production is a complex process. A plethora of instances and actors, such as book-stores, journals, awards, libraries, book fairs, festivals, creative writing courses, book circles, contribute to the visibility and to raising the value of an author. These actors and interfaces connecting literary works and readerships are multiplying through accumulative possibilities for marketing and branding offered by digital media. In France, critical reflections on which authors are given access to the literary space and how these authors are named and positioned received substantial publicity in 2006 through the explosive manifesto "Pour une littérature-monde en français" (*Le Monde des Livres* 2006), signed by nearly fifty authors. Since this date, the production of scholarly work in and outside France on diversity in literature, on the concept of 'littérature-monde', as well as on 'Francophone' versus 'French' literature, remains vibrant (see Almassy et al. 2007, Bille Jørgensen & Baggesgaard 2015, Combe 2010, Hargreaves et al. 2010, Selao et al. 2013, Toft & Verstraete-Hansen 2009). However, few studies focus on the impact of audio-visual media in

processes of categorization and legitimization. In these settings authors appear with their body and voice, in order to claim a part of the literary space and participate in the shaping of their literary identity. This study aims at understanding strategies adopted by transnational authors in various modality-rich media, and how these strategies contribute to identity positionings. The increasing international visibility of transnational literature, together with its ambivalent allegiances motivate a study of how transnational authors position themselves in media, in order to create author postures that contribute to making their works matter and establish themselves in the literary market.

For this study, the transnational Francophone authors Fatou Diome (Senegalese origins) and Alain Mabanckou (Congolese origins) are selected as subjects for research. These 'Afropean' (Thomas & Hitchcott 2014: 3) authors have expanded their authorships consistently through moves from smaller to larger publishing houses, and, consequently, have been able to benefit from marketing and media resources in these settings (Hogarth 2018). In addition, the reason for choosing authors with African origins is not innocent. It seems adequate to choose data for analysis with the potential to present how origins and physical features are put afore by media, as well as by the authors themselves, in the performance of the authorial posture. The aim of the present study is to highlight how the richness of the authors' respective identities is used and made (in)visible, according to the context and media the authors engage with. Which features are emphasized in the strategies of positioning, and with which analytical criteria can features and strategies be described, in order to capture the contours of the author posture, as well as the process of creating it?

Diome and Mabanckou occupy prominent places in literary spaces both in and outside France and occur regularly in audio-visual media, even though Diome can be considered a minor author in comparison to Mabanckou, with his numerous awards, and literary and scholarly achievements both in France and overseas. Their positions in France are also qualitatively different, which the data partly will reveal. Still, Diome and Mabanckou have in common that their respective postures have developed over the years. Their ascension into the dimension of pampered writers who are regularly invited for panels, presentations and interviews has happened progressively from the turn of the millennium. The intention in this study is not to describe the development of the authors' careers but to observe the cultural reversibility and cultural play innate to public identity constructions of the focused authors.

A limited number of samples from different French media contexts where the two authors have appeared during the last decades, most often in connection to their publications, have been collected through google researches, with the authors' names as search words. This procedure has been hazardous, insofar as this type of data collection only can access material that actors behind the scene have decided to diffuse on the Internet. Some of this material is locked in archives and/or made accessible for individuals connected to the web from outside the Hexagon. Nevertheless, the procedure has uncovered aspects that point to ways in which these

authors choose to position themselves in the literary landscape, and how multimodal interactions allow for discursive play and movement regarding cultural, ethnic, and linguistic features. The authors' postures revealed in modality-rich media point to the importance of strategic identity positionings for transnational authors in a national literary context, and highlight strategies for challenging fixed norms and categories which tend to be outdated in a current world where culture is on the move.

The data collects as recent samples as possible, including a range of media, such as radio, television, and broadcastings from book-store events. The final selection of eight samples for each author has been established on the basis of what the samples reveal in terms of strategies and positionings. In the case of Diome, it has been necessary to track recordings back to the early 21st century, in order to grasp relevant representations of the author, for example, at the occasion of the publication of her flagship novel *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* (2003) [*The Belly of the Atlantic* (2006)]. Table 1 and 2 offer an overview of the collected samples.

Table 1. interviews with Alain Mabanckou in different media

Media channel	Programme/event	Original date of programme/event	Presenter(s)
<i>France inter</i> : radio channel. Accessed on Youtube.	"Le Grand entretien"	Aug 27, 2018	Léa Salamé, Nicolas de Morand
<i>Arte</i> : TV channel. Accessed on the channel's web-site.	"28 minutes"	Aug 27, 2018	Élisabeth Quin
<i>France 3</i> : TV channel. Accessed on Youtube.	"Drôle de rencontres"	May 29, 2017	Pierre Arditi
<i>France 24</i> : TV channel. Accessed on Youtube.	"À l'affiche"	Sep 27, 2016	Sonia Patricelli
<i>Arte</i> : TV channel. Accessed on V13point4: Youtube channel.	"28 minutes"	Sep 7, 2016 (date of publication on youtube)	Élisabeth Quin
<i>TV5</i> : TV channel. Accessed on Youtube.	"La Grande Librairie"	Sep 2, 2016	François Busnel
<i>TV5</i> : TV channel. Accessed on Youtube.	"L'Invité"	Mar 16, 2016	Patrick Simonin
<i>France inter</i> : radio channel. Accessed on the channel's web-site.	"Boomerang"	Apr 24, 2015	Augustin Trapenard

Table 2. interviews with Fatou Diome in different media

Media channel	Programme/event	Original date of programme/event	Presenter(s)
<i>France inter</i> : radio channel. Accessed on the channel's web-site.	"Dans tes rêves"	Mar 18, 2017	Laurence Garcia
TV5: TV channel. Accessed on the channel's web-site.	"L'Invité"	Mar 27, 2017	Patrick Simonin
Canal + : TV channel. Accessed on <i>Clique TV</i> Youtube channel.	"Le Gros Journal"	Mar 22, 2017	Mouloud Achour
<i>France 2</i> : TV channel. Accessed on <i>Ce soir</i> Youtube channel	"Ce soir ou jamais"	Apr 25, 2015	Frédéric Taddei
<i>France Musique</i> : radio channel Accessed on <i>France Musique</i> Youtube channel	"La Matinale"	Apr 22, 2013	Jean-Christophe Bourseiller
TV5: TV channel. Accessed on the channel's web-site.	"L'Invité"	Mar 20, 2012	Patrick Simonin
<i>Librairie Dialogues. Le choix a plus d'un titre</i> : book-store, Brest, France. Accessed on: <i>Librairie Dialogues</i> Youtube channel.	"Dialogues avec Fatou Diome, Partie 1"	Oct 20, 2008	Anonymous. Questions from audience.
<i>France 2</i> : TV channel. Accessed on <i>Ina Talk Shows</i> Youtube channel. Archive INA.	"Tout le monde en parle"	Sep 06, 2003	Thierry Ardisson

This study builds on previous research on the circulation and reception of transnational Francophone writers in Sweden and the Nordic countries (Lindberg 2018, Lindberg & Cedergren 2017, Cedergren & Lindberg 2017, Lindberg 2016, Lindberg & Cedergren 2016, Cedergren & Lindberg 2016, Cedergren & Lindberg 2015, Lindberg 2015, Lindberg 2010). These studies have revealed that norms and principles frequently activated and taken for granted in literary criticism are tested, compromised, and negotiated through encounters with transnational literature, in this case produced by Francophone authors. For example, in criticism on Francophone literature, the categorization processes are confronted with a range of dichotomies, such as *national-transnational*, *exotic-authentic*, *local-global*, which Scandinavian critiques interpret and reproduce with more, or less, awareness in their writing. Since these oppositional pairs are present at the core of interpretative endeavors regarding transnational literature, they are chosen as analytical tools in the analysis of the collected data. In the second and following part of this study, the afore-mentioned dichotomies are developed and problematized in relation to research in the field of world and transnational literature studies. A discussion of the transnational author posture as a concept will be developed in the third part, while the fourth part consists of a presentation of the results, followed by the final discussion.

2 Transnational literature and (re)locations of literary norms and principles

Western culture has dominated the global literary canon for centuries. The reasons can be sought in cultural and linguistic hegemonies established by former colonial empires, like Great Britain and France, which have cleared the way for literary consecration processes exclusive of works originating from outside occidental geographic, cultural and linguistic areas. These limiting practices have led to the fact that Western literature has become universal and the world's literature. Harold Bloom's *The Western Canon: Books and School of the Ages* (1994) is one example of how academic work and the humanities have supported a view of national literature from Western countries as world classics. British and American literature in English is dominating Bloom's canon, together with literature from France, Germany, Spain, Scandinavia, and Russia. As the tradition decrees, the origins of this Eurocentric literary production are traced back in Bloom's work to Greek and Roman literature. The approach is repeated in Bloom's ulterior work, *How to Read and Why* (2000), whose title conveys normative overtones, not only concerning ways of and motives for reading, but also regarding literary choices.¹

The greatness and creative achievements of Western canonical literary works are undeniable. However, the cultural and linguistic narrowness in Western comparative literature in general remains problematic. The issue has steadily gained ground during the 21st century through post-colonial studies and the established field of *world literature* (see Damrosch 2003, d'Haen et al. 2013, Helgesson & Vermeulen 2016), which strives for cultural inclusiveness and broader conceptions of consecration processes and circulating literature in the world. It is not surprising that this turn in literature studies, towards cultures and languages outside the traditional Western ones, progressively emerges in parallel with a society both literally and digitally on the move. The digitalization of everyday life allows for connectedness and movement between people beyond time, space and place. Wars, climate catastrophes and unemployment force humans to move physically to safer geographical places. At the other end, work routine, boredom, humanitarian motives and curiosity, make humans in safe spaces explore places distanced from their own home.

National, cultural and linguistic boundaries are increasingly crossed and blurred in this context of mobility and displacement. The concept of *transnational* in literature reflects this contemporary context of movements away from a focus on the nation-state, in favor of an awareness of global conditions. Even though existing theoretical gaps regarding how *world*, *transnational* and *global* literature relate to each other are yet to be filled (Morgan 2017), it is possible to notice that world literature focuses on the circulation and consecration of literature, mainly in the

¹ By way of offering a complementary perspective on norms in language and literature studies, the results from an ongoing collaborative study in the time span 2000-2016, between the disciplines: Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French, and Comparative literature in Swedish higher education, show the prevailing domination of national white (and dead) male authors from the 20th century in theses on undergraduate and doctoral levels (Lindberg, Johansson, Cedergren, Schwartz & Edfeldt 2020).

Western world, while a *global* consciousness grasps universal and various cosmopolitan perspectives in literature (see Appiah 2006, Forte 2010, Gidwani 2006). *Transnationalism* in literature appears as more specific, framing points "at which two or more geo-cultural imaginaries intersect, connect, engage with, disrupt or conflict with each other in literary form" (Morgan 2017: 14). Authors labeled as 'transnational' are caught between these terms in the categorization processes occurring in their public performances. The following development of the dichotomies *national-transnational*, *exotic-authentic*, *local-global*, is an attempt to structure the constant oscillation between different poles, generated by the progressive, but still ambivalent, distancing from ideologies of national literatures and authorships.

2.1 National-transnational

Effects of an increased human connectedness and mobility are reflected in the global circulation of literature (Lindberg 2018). The concept of *world literature* has been alternating in research between, on the one hand, works with high quality and thereby legitimized for universal canonization, and, on the other hand, works that circulate the most in the global literary system (d'Haen et al. 2013, Helgesson & Vermeulen 2016, Rosendahl Thomsen 2013). Judging from the globally circulating literature associated with *world literature*, it is currently and foremostly represented by (im)migrant authors (Boehmer 1995, Rosendahl Thomsen 2013), frequently originating from former colonies of Western empires (Lindberg 2018). However, their literary production and circulation remain framed and conditioned by the realm of the occidental literary system of awards, translation and commercialization (English 2005). Even though recent conceptualizations include and underscore literary works originating from outside Western boundaries, if not associated with several geographical areas and cultures, the actual manifestation of various cultural and national identities in works labeled as *world literature* is rare or vanishing. In fact, *world literature* is less about a change in the established hegemony of cultures and languages, than a transformed paradigm allowing for cultural and linguistic encounters through literature (Rosendahl Thomsen 2008).

In Canada, for example, immigrant transnational authors, such as Kim Thúy and Dany Laferrière, have on several occasions been awarded with prestigious literary honors. In consequence, they have been able to accumulate their symbolic capital, and, in the case of Laferrière, earned the opportunity to be integrated in the French Academy (l'Académie française), which is the center of French cultural, linguistic and literary tradition (Steemer 2012). This type of legitimization by global cultural centres of peripheral literary spaces guarantees a relative diversity among worldwide circulating authors with a respected literary status. Nonetheless, these bicultural authors are not necessarily the most appropriate representatives in the transmission of, in the case of Thúy and Laferrière, Vietnamese and Haitian literary traditions (Kullberg 2016, Lindberg 2018). On the contrary, transnational and transcultural works can potentially be perceived as national and monocultural, since, in many cases, origins, as well as plurilingual and pluricultural aspects, are

overshadowed by the adopted literary language and culture. This critique of transnational world literature has recently been pushed to the forefront by scholars, such as Aamir Mufti (2016) and Anjali Pandey (2016). The critique principally targets the Western publishing system, and the tendency to establish practices that absorb minor cultures into an Occidental mainstream culture (see Moretti 2000). For example, Pandey (2016) offers insightful empirical data of this global assimilation and cultural homogenization, showing how diverse linguistic landscapes are rubbed out in transnational novels, through the usage of one language and a monocultural norm. According to this ambiguous context, *transnational* as a concept appears as both the opposite of and linked to the concept of *national*. The author labelled as transnational will be recovered and represented by one or the other side of the dichotomy *transnational-national*, depending on the context.

This reversibility in the mediatization of transnational authors contributes to a re-evaluation and relocation of established norms, which is highlighted in examples where the studied transnational authors are positioned and position themselves in audio-visual programs. In some examples, the transnational aspect is dominating, while in others the national aspect is foregrounded.

2.2 Exoticism-authenticity

As recently argued by the Indian scholar and fictional writer Namrata Poddar, the critical strand that Pandey (2016) and Mufti (2016) represent, sometimes tend towards "a continuous romanticization of cultural 'authenticity', as if it existed out there—in a pristine territory-of-sorts—a fixed set of signifiers inherent to a country or culture, waiting to be duplicated in fiction" (Poddar 2016, 92). Despite groundbreaking theoretical works on cultural hybridity, such as *The Location of Culture* (1994) by Homi K. Bhabha, persisting expectations on literature labeled as *trans-*, *world* and *extra-occidental* in the Eurocentric literary system nourish an idea of cultural 'authenticity', and a desire to read and receive stories that function as witnesses of verifiable realities and events.² The obsession with authenticity is particularly observable in the criticism of literature by migrant, transnational authors (Porra 2005, Ridon 2018). In fact, the origins seem to decide whether the author has the right to write fictionally about experiences of personal choice (see Cedergren & Lindberg 2017). At the same time, this search for 'true' stories is insidiously paired with a desire for entertainment, escapism and exoticism. The worldwide bestselling novel *La Tresse* (2017) [*The Braid* 2019] by Laetitia Colombani, labeled as a French author, is an interesting example of globally

² In *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), Ashcroft et al. suggest that post-colonial authors remove their writings from authentic experiences, since these will not be received as texts that can be legitimized in Western structural norms for circulation. Thereby, Ashcroft et al. indirectly state that there is a "true" post-colonial writing, in opposition to the "false" westernized text production. Ngugi wa Thiongo supports this line of thought in his essay *Decolonizing the Mind* (1986), whereas authors from a younger generation, such as Kossi Efovi and Taiye Selasi, claim literary freedom and that origins are fluid in a global world. Thus, literature cannot represent a nation or a specific culture (Efovi 1998, Selasi n. d.).

circulating literature, whose content suggests transnational extra-European storytelling, whereas the author has no anchorage in any of the represented cultures. In *The Braid*, three destinies in three locations: Greece, Canada and India, are knitted together. There is seemingly no aspiration in the text to authentically depict the characters or milieus involved, and up to now, no critique has seriously addressed the tendency towards exoticizing clichés with which the text is burdened (Lindberg 2017). On the contrary, the exoticism is waved as a selling brand, that the Swedish edition makes use of through the cover showing a romantic picture of a sunset somewhere in India.³ In addition, the novel has attracted an impressive variety of readerships around the world (Pan Macmillan 2018), indicating the winning concept of interlacing destinies from both the global South and the global North. As Graham Huggan already formulated it in 1994: "Exoticism relieves its practitioners [...] from the burdensome task of actually learning about 'other' cultures" (Huggan 1994: 26). Apparently, 'authenticity' is not what the market and the readers primarily search for, but rather what critics and gate-keepers in legitimization processes are observing as a sign of literary value, especially regarding transnational authors with origins in the global South, as has been observed in previous research (see Lindberg 2015, 2010).

Hence, the transnational author is systematically forced to move with dexterity between opposite aesthetic norms, *exoticism* vs *authenticity*, in order to sell and circulate, as well as rise in the consecration chain. The analysis below will offer examples of performances of this balancing act through the media in which Diome and Mabanckou have accepted to appear in.

2.3 Local-global

Despite the body of French national authors producing *world* writings, such as Le Clézio, Jean-Christophe Rufin, Colombani with her single novel, as well as Duras, the figurehead of the *nouveau roman* movement, it is relatively clear that literary works originating from migration currently are, involuntarily or not, intended for making known extra-occidental cultures and literatures on a global level. The bicultural, transnational and cosmopolitan outlooks simply seem to be the most capable of expressing, describing and translating local realities to a global readership.

The local and the global are depicted and linked at a range of levels in the transnational literature circulating in the world (see Moretti 2000, as well as a developed model and analysis in Lindberg 2018), which allows for a reading experience where movements between different levels, from a micro to a macro level or vice versa, become the *credo*. In Alain Mabanckou's novels, for example in *Demain, j'aurai vingt ans* (2010) [*Tomorrow I'll be Twenty* 2015], Congo, and the city Pointe-Noire, are often the background and the milieu of the plot, representing a micro level. Yet, global contexts and international events and encounters – at a macro level – are intertwined with local destinies. In the narrative

³ Claire Ducournau equally observes the importance of visual branding, in her ethnographic and data dense studies on the making of sub-Saharan African literature (Ducournau 2011, 2012, 2016).

language, literary associations alluding to a world canon are echoing, as well as Congolese references anchoring the storytelling in a local framing. Fatou Diome adopts a similar principle in *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* (2003) [*The Belly of the Atlantic* 2006], in which the point of departure is the island of Niodior, Senegal, and the point of arrival Paris, France. In this story about migration the text moves back and forth between these local places, just as it constructs an image of the tension between the global South and the global North. An aspect worth noting concerning this *récit* is that Paris becomes a representative of the global North, while the Senegalese island Niodior remains a specific locality (Cazenave & Célérier 2011). Northern locations in transnational literature tend to blur into one dominating culture, while the opposite pole tends to differentiate from other locations in the same Southern context. Nevertheless, from a structuralist perspective, Niodior turns into a representative of the global South. As a counter-example, the transnational author Léonora Miano breaks with the dichotomy local-global, when giving fictional names to all geographical locations in her African trilogy (Miano 2006, 2009, 2011). The reader meets characters and places on the Continent, which could be one of the six, leaving space for the imagination to link the stories to cultures and spaces other than the African ones. The outlook seemingly strives for a global perspective, where specific locations disappear in favor of the fiction and a universal dimension. This literary strategy can be interpreted as a means to escape categorizations such as national, transnational, exotic or authentic.

The dichotomy *local-global* emerges in transnational literature as a fundamental analytical tool to understand tensions underneath the surface of the story itself, and points towards the continuous movements in space and between levels in these literary narrations (see Hogarth 2018). However, this oppositional pair has, as yet, not been fully used to understand how the author posture is constructed through media. In the following, the identity positionings of Diome and Mabanckou in different media contexts will shed light on how the dichotomy *local-global* intervenes in the shaping of the author posture.

3 The transnational author posture

The concept of *author posture* is situated in a field where several overlapping terms come into play, such as, *ethos* – the author's general way of being (Viala 1993), and *author figure* – the author's literary identity internal to the textual production (Couturier 1995, Gardiner 2000). According to Jérôme Meizoz (2007), every author has his/her singular way to occupy a 'position' in the literary field (Bourdieu 1996). The ways in which this position is upheld translate the *author posture*. The posture is both rhetorical (textual) and based on action (contextual), according to Meizoz (2007), who tends to comprise both *ethos* and *author figure* in the concept of *posture*. The inclusion of the author's situated agency in the concept is particularly relevant for this study, since the media settings in focus invite the authors to act. Gérard Genette observes in *Seuils* (1987), that the literary text, and indirectly the author, are constructed and defined through thresholds surrounding the text,

categorized as peritextual features. In his theoretical framework, the literary text is described as the premise for the existence of an *author posture*, through the elements that condition how it will be perceived, such as, the author's name, main title and chapter titles, foreword, notes, and other significant features. These features are closely linked to the literary text and contribute to the construction of the literary artefact that will be available in the bookstores.

In Wayne C. Booth's *Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961), a distinction is made between the real and the virtual author. The latter is perceived through the literary text as the *implied author*, whose characteristics and intentions may or may not coincide with the real person. The *author posture*, however, is a wider concept, pointing towards the singular way in which an author occupies a position in a literary field (Meizoz 2007: 18). In order to conceptualize an *author posture*, contexts outside the literary text in which the author appears must be considered and used as complements to the work's construction of an author. The Genettian term for elements intrinsically connected to the literary text would be *peritext*, in opposition to *epitext*, which designates texts and discourses surrounding the literary text, yet not immediately associated with it. Interviews, letters, advertisements and critique form examples of *epitexts* anchoring the literary text in a social framing. It is worth noting that the threshold of *epitext* is not fixed to the same extent as that of the *peritext*. On the contrary, *epitexts* are continuously in movement and accumulation, creating pathways towards the public, and are, hence, means to glorify, criticize, distort and/or reinterpret the literary text. *Epitexts* and *peritexts* jointly form a body of *paratexts* where the contours of the author are present, though not necessarily distinct and fixed.

Through the concept of *posture*, Meizoz (2007) points precisely to the dynamic aspect of the author's literary identity. Through his works, Meizoz (2007, 2011, 2016) offers a panorama of postures adopted by French authors, which are decisive for the reception in various social settings. On an overall level, Meizoz shows that the acceptance of the publishing sector's insistence that authors accompany their literary works with their 'personality', can be rewarding concerning visibility and status. Authors who adopt a distant posture and refuse to participate in the construction of their public identity (for example Éric Chevillard, see Meizoz 2016) risk invisibility, while lingering in tight-knitted readership groups, being surpassed by rivals who easily display their public *persona*. However, as Meizoz explains through numerous examples, public exposure is charged with ambivalence for the authors themselves, partly because social encounters in real time are unpredictable, in comparison to the text production, in which the author is better positioned to be in control of his/her posture. The public sphere of literature, as it appears in Meizoz's work, is a stage for role-playing, where it becomes challenging to be true to oneself and to one's own values and artistic intentions. The question of 'authenticity' reappears in this context, not primarily in connection to the literary work, but to the author as a person and/or as a figure. Meizoz develops the authenticity dilemma in relation to proletarian authors and their struggle for

remaining true to their convictions after rising in the chain of literary consecration (Meizoz 2007).

Meizoz primarily bases his analysis of authenticity on literary texts and *peritexts*, and thereby activates the dichotomy *exotic-authentic* on an intra-textual scale. In this study on Mabanckou and Diome, the *epitexts* in which the author's *persona* is in focus, are the main unit of analysis, not the *peritexts*. Meizoz does not draw a distinct demarcation line between postures inside and outside literary texts, nor between *epi*- and *peri*-, probably because his point of departure is the posture in the author's literary discourse in various genres, which is progressively enriched with multimodal material external of the literary production. The authorial discourses occurring inside and outside the literary work are undoubtedly linked and intertwined. Nevertheless, the empirical data in Meizoz's work offers evidence that peritextual author postures often clash with epitextual author postures. This tension is of interest for further exploration in a media-saturated era where visibility and promotional space are transformed into symbolic capital that adds value to the author, even when they tend to sacrifice the reality of the original literary work (van Krieken 2012).

Without doubt, the density of information and the accumulation of literary products have pushed the literary business sector to use 'personalities' connected to the books for marketing purposes (Moran 2000). In this way, Meizoz's work relates to celebrity studies and recent frontlines in literary research studying the *celebrity function* (Ohlsson et al. 2014). In this field, several important aspects for the shaping of the author posture are highlighted. Firstly, a distinction is made between the author's cultural and mediatic capital. For example, several authors in the popular field have stocked an amount of mediatic capital, but none in the prestigious cultural domain, and vice versa. Regarding the transnational authors in this study, this aspect is activated through the authors' play between media and cultural contexts. Secondly, the celebrity function is to be valued in relation to cultural and geographical differences, which Oliver Driessens (2012) explains as follows: "Every culture or nation has its own heroes, stars and celebrities. Most of these people's fame does not reach beyond cultural or national boundaries, which makes celebrity culture essentially a plural and heterogeneous phenomenon" (p.3). This aspect needs to be observed regarding transnational authors, who are connected to several cultural and geographical spaces, thereby potentially possessing the means to reach out both with their *persona* and their works to culturally different readerships.

The author posture is never a fixed entity in this framing, but accommodates itself to new settings on the literary market, in order to maintain a space where the status and value of the author and the literary work are continuously negotiated. The current close connection between the author's media presence and the destiny of a literary work, motivates an exploration of how the author is presented in media, and how the author participates in the construction of his/her own public identity (Forslid et al. 2017, van Krieken 2012, Ohlsson et al. 2014). Transnational authors' adopted strategies are particularly interesting, since they frequently present acute

awareness of cultural construction and of culture on the move. However, examples from the rich transnational literature in France are passed over in silence in Meizoz's work, as well as in his adepts' research (see Meizoz 2007: 17), which abolishes a discussion of the colour of an author participating in visual media. The colour is inevitably involved in the formation of identity, and, thus, is integral to the author posture. In the French prime time programme "Le Grand Journal", on the *Canal +* channel (March 22, 2017, see table 2), Diome articulates the problematic fusion often made in current society between identity and colour:

L'identité, ce n'est pas quelque chose d'inné, ce n'est pas génétique. L'identité, c'est un apprentissage, donc, c'est une formation, une instruction, et ce sont des acquis. [...] la couleur est un simple hasard génétique. Si les gens ne sont assez intelligents pour aller au-delà de la couleur, behn, il faut qu'ils demandent au bon Dieu de changer sa palette. [Identity, that is not something innate, is not genetic. Identity is a learning process, and so, it is an education and an instruction, these are achievements. [...] The colour is a pure genetic coincidence. If people are not intelligent enough to go beyond colour, well, they have to ask the good Lord to change the pallet.]

Diome's words suggest that identity is not established once and for all, but, rather, is in constant movement, depending on experiences and contexts. However, the colour is fixed. The media contexts in which Diome and Mabanckou are appearing in the selected samples are white, insofar as a minority of the presenters' and the panel participants' origins can be traced through their names and features to geographical spaces other than France. This is the case concerning Mouloud Achour and Léa Salamé (see table 1 and table 2). Thus, the contrast between white and black is clearly exposed and fixed in the visual samples, immediately activating denomination processes through the lens of oppositional, concurrent, and sometimes overlapping paired terms: *national-transnational*, *exotic-authentic*, and *local-global*. These dichotomies will be used in the following analysis of the author postures of Diome and Mabanckou.

4 The author embedded in media

The major part of the selected samples of media in which the authors Fatou Diome and Alain Mabanckou appear in are targeting a large variety of audiences (see tables 1 and 2), such as *France 2*, *France Inter* and *Canal +*. According to consumer statistics published regularly by the company Médiamétrie, the television channels *Canal +*, *France 2*, and *France 5* are those that attract most of the audiences. Among the radio channels, *France Inter* is in the top of the list of the most popular ones, while *France musique* has a relatively restricted auditory. The mentioned channels also are accessible internationally to the Francophone world. Despite a high audience score of these media, it is flagrant that the authors do not appear in media such as the very popular radio channel *RTL*, or the most attended television channel, *TF1*, according to Médiamétrie's latest statistics. It is possible that this observation points towards a 'diversity divide' in French public media, describing that different media consider to various degrees the representation of different

groups in society. Even though the issue is beyond the scope of this study, the observation indicates that the authors are situated and positioned in advance of their own performances, through the media settings to which they have been invited. The encounters between the authors and the media setting will be analyzed with a focus on the authors' strategies to position themselves. A semiotic-semantic approach will be adopted, in order to grasp the multi-modal aspects made use of in the positionings of the author.

4.1 Dressed for success: Authentic-exotic postures.

Alain Mabanckou is known for his personal dress style, and his appearance in the programme "28 minutes", on the channel *Arte* (August 27, 2018), on the occasion of "la rentrée littéraire" 2018, was not a disappointment regarding this aspect. The presenter, Élisabeth Quin, recognized that Mabanckou's novel, *Les Cigognes sont immortelles* (2018) [*The Cranes are Immortal*], stood out from the autumnal book flow, comprising 567 publications according to Quin. For this investigative and entertaining news programme, Mabanckou had chosen a hat in brown felt with broad brims, decorated with a black band matching his thick black spectacles' frame. The dark colours contrasted with his white shirt decorated with colourful guppy fish moving around all over the white surface. If the birds in the book title were discussed during the interview, these fish swimming under water were never commented on. The very first question to Mabanckou was about how to interpret the image of the cranes. The author began his answer with the announcement that "il faut toujours apprendre des choses sur les animaux, les animaux sont des philosophes en quelque sorte" [you always have to learn things about animals, animals are philosophers in a certain way].⁴ Mabanckou continued explaining that the title was inspired by a Russian song he had to sing at school, and every time he saw cranes flying above his head, he imagined that they were Russian soldiers that had died for their country. In the novel, African personalities who have sacrificed their lives for independency become the immortal cranes.

It is difficult not to suspect that the associative mind of the author had premeditated the discrete witticism identifiable in the contrast between the invisible fish under the surface, perhaps in lieu of subjects that are censured or taboo, and the visible birds in the sky, perhaps in lieu of accepted conversational subject in the specific public setting. Furthermore, his "mother continent", as Mabanckou names Africa in the short author portrait reportage inserted in the "28 minutes" programme, is a *locus communis* for exotic animals, and Mabanckou declared that we should learn from them. What can we learn from a fish? Several expressions in French contain the word 'fish' and one of the most common idiomatic formulations is 'être comme un poisson dans l'eau' meaning to be at ease in a situation or an environment. The natural easiness and cheerfulness Mabanckou displayed all along the interview could very well apply to the French fish-expression. Concerning the birds, the common expression 'drôle d'oiseau' inevitably crosses the mind,

⁴ Hereafter all translations are mine.

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meaning a strange, even exotic, person. In fact, the imagery constructed in this way by the author on the media platform comprises a range of associations. Through observations of the semiotic tension between the motives on the shirt and the title of the book, the overall pattern reveals an author who engages with joyful easiness with the situation and who is in complete control of the media setting. Nevertheless, he is an exotic outsider, different and deviant from the norm, intruding in the white space and dominating it with a smile. As an additional remark, on this specific occasion, the presenter, Elisabeth Quin, had adapted her outfit to the interviewee's 'wild life' theme, which could be observed through the leopard motives on her shirt, and the parrots balancing on her earrings, as if she conveyed an ironic message regarding French TV journalists, and their possibilities to move outside fixed categorizations (image 1).

Image 1. Mabanckou and Quin in "28 minutes", Arte (August 27, 2018)⁵



Mabanckou controls his posture partly through his way of dressing, which is further reinforced, for example in "À l'affiche" (Sep 27, 2016), where he wears a dark felt hat with a lighter band tied around it. His thick spectacles' frame is in transparent white. At this occasion, the soft clear blue colour of his jacket with broad lapels is broken by the clear read handkerchief in his breast pocket. The white shirt has two red buttons to match the red tissue. The red colour also perfectly matches the presenter's red t-shirt. Except for this type of seemingly well-thought fashion aesthetics, the data reveal that the hat is only worn when the interlocutor and presenter is a woman. The hat is a strong symbol, signaling power, even sexual power (see the use of the hat in Duras' work *L'Amant*, 1984 [*The Lover* 1995]), and in ancient imagery (Grantham 1949). The hat is taken off in encounters with men, signalling equal terms of exchange and interaction. No conclusions can be drawn

⁵ For copyright reasons the images are blurred.

from the samples gathered in this study, but the hat remains a symbol of power and superiority. In addition, in the encounters with male interlocutors, the chosen colours tend to be softer and more neutral. The blue lines on the grey jacket worn in "Drôles de rencontres" (May 27, 2017) form squares, which do not contrast much with patterns on traditional suits. The outfit chosen for "L'Invité" (Mar 16, 2016) is the most neutral one and similar to the one that the presenter, Patrick Simonin, wears. However, in "La Grande Libraire" (Sep 2, 2016), the TV plateau consists of two contemporary giants: Jean-Christophe Rufin and Alain Mabanckou, who could both be depicted as "France's literary globetrotters", which is the epithet given to Mabanckou in "À l'affiche" (Sep 27, 2016). The authors wear the same bluish-grey colours, but Mabanckou's jacket has visualized seams around the pocket, the elbows, and the lapels, and the white shirt is full of red dots. The outfit is crowned with a handkerchief gallantly inserted in the breast pocket. In this way, Mabanckou differentiates himself from the distinguished former diplomat and established French author, just as he displays efforts to meet with the pallet of colour nuances of his interlocutor and the presenter.

At one occasion, Mabanckou brings his personal tailor to the studio of "28 minutes" (Sept 7, 2016), seizing the opportunity to expose his view of fashion. Both Mabanckou and his tailor Jocelyn Bachelor have considered every detail of the formal Western male suit: hat, shirt, jacket, handkerchief, tie, and, finally, a brooch on the lapel. Bachelor is a devoted 'sapeur' (from the word 'la sape' meaning 'the dressing up'), that is a person who cultivates the fashion of the Western male suit but turns it into something more conspicuous and playful than the discrete business suit.⁶ This is one rare moment in the data when the presenter comments on the outfit;⁷ Élisabeth Quin remarks: "il y des oursons sur la veste et un chat dans la gorge de Mabanckou" [There are bear cubs on Mabanckou's jacket and a cat on his breast]. Mabanckou retorts with a smile by referring to his friend, the French author Jean-Baptiste Del Amo, and his recent novel *Le Règne animal* (2016) [*The Animal Reign*], that "c'est le règne animal, nous sommes à l'intérieur" [it is the animal reign, we are inside]. The message that the author conveys is not clearly articulated, but the imagery of animals is subtly justified and once again put on the table through the quoting of the French author. Apparently, the imagery is used this time with the purpose to reinforce the idea that the outside 'feral' culture has moved inside towards a 'domestic' one, and that two different worlds meet and merge in the studio. In this way, through the dress code, the prefix *trans-* comes into play and underscores the cultural encounter and mixed aspect that not only the author himself fuels, but also the media productions that invite him. In the conversation with Élisabeth Quin ("28 minutes", Sept 7, 2016) the link between language and clothes is further developed. Neither language nor appearance should, according to Mabanckou, be "muséifiées" ['museified']. Both need an external "puissance"

⁶ The culture of 'la sape' was born in Congo-Brazzaville and can be tracked back to the early 1930:s. For a nuanced discussion on 'la sape', see Thomas (2003).

⁷ In the radio programme "Boomerang" (Apr 26, 2015), the presenter Augustin Trapenard offers a description to the auditors of Mabanckou's clothes, which makes Mabanckou laugh.

[force] to remain dynamic. In this way, the playful aspect of identity construction and positioning is articulated, as well as language as a broad notion, including not only words, but all types of semiotic resources at hand.

Mabanckou’s use of clothes in the media hype that progressively has swirled up around him points to a posture that refuses to lock the author posture into a typical image of an intellectual author in the Western world. He does not allow the visual media codes to constrain his appearance to such a narrow frame. Instead, he claims his ‘singularity’ (Meizoz 2011) through his way of dressing, turning it into an art of expression and a way to dominate the screen and the interaction. Moreover, his chosen fashion style is perceived as exotic, which he emphasizes himself by frequent allusions to wild animals. At the same time, the adhering to the Congolese ‘sape’ culture, also points to a desire for expressing authenticity, in other words, something ‘true’ and ‘real’ about his identity. In fact, ‘la sape’ subtly conveys the idea that the dominating culture’s dress code is not authentic, and that the dominated culture has usurped it, brought it to life and refined it (Thomas 2003).

In addition, the focus on clothes draws the attention away from the skin colour, and the flagrant contrast between black minority and white majority in the French media settings. Mabanckou tends to elude the issue of colour, but it occurs that he addresses it directly, as in “Drôle de rencontre” (May 29, 2017), when he affirms that he never reflected on the fact that his childhood hero Zembla was a white man: “Vous savez, la question de la blancheur est une invention même de la civilisation occidentale” [You know, the issue of whiteness is an invention of the Occidental civilization only]. If Mabanckou clearly expresses that Africa had nothing to do with the construction of identity through colours, the author also addresses colour indirectly, as in “28 minutes” (August 27, 2018), when he says that “les dictatures n’ont pas forcément les mêmes couleurs, mais elles ont les mêmes conséquences” [dictatorships do not necessarily have the same colours, but they have the same consequences]. In this example, ‘colour’ is ambiguous, since it can be associated both with a type of dictatorial structure, and the colour of its leader. In this way, Mabanckou moves away from discourses on skin colour as linked to identity, language and culture.

Fatou Diome adopts other strategies and does not avoid the issue of colour in television interviews. On the contrary, she frequently refers to her own colour, as in the example from “Le Gros Journal” (March 22, 2017) when she describes the difference between identity and colour (see quotation in section 3). In several instances throughout the interview the word “black” is repeated. Furthermore, in the programme “L’Invité” (Mar 27, 2017), Diome is invited to talk about her recent publication *Marianne porte plainte* (2017) [*Marianne Files a Complaint*] and tells the audience that Marianne brings “de belles valeurs, même si je le dis avec une face de chocolat” [beautiful values, even if I say it with a chocolate face]. In “Ce soir ou jamais” (Apr 25, 2015) she also evokes colour and race by stating that “aujourd’hui, toute personne typée, avec un nez d’étranger (faisant un geste vers son propre nez) est considérée comme immigrée” [Today, every stereotyped person with a foreigner’s nose (making a gesture towards her own nose) is considered an

immigrant]. Already in "Tout le monde en parle" (Sep 06, 2003) Diome exposes through her real and literary investigations an acute awareness of colour and explains that, in exile, it is not necessarily the indigenous white racism that is the most terrible, but the one manifested by immigrants similar to oneself, trying to switch camp. The panel and the audience of the programme are white and chic 'à la Parisienne'. A palpable attentive tension is transferred to the screen through the camera capturing furtive, embarrassed smiles, as if Diome speaks too frankly about subjects that are taboo. When Diome approaches the autobiographical content in her novel *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* (2003) [*The Belly of the Atlantic* 2006], one of the white French actors in the panel bursts out: "Mais vous êtes Martin Luther Queen!" [But you are Martin Luther Queen!], followed by the author's satisfied but somewhat shy smile. At the end of the dialogue with the presenter, Thierry Ardisson, the white French actor speaks up again and addresses Diome: "Ca fait du bien d'entendre tout ça" [It is good to hear all this]. The reactions signal that Diome's intervention and discourse are perceived as a surprise, and a moment of sudden awareness for the small world in which the celebrity guests live and work.

At this moment in time, before 2005 when the *banlieues* in France started to burn (Fredette 2018), the debate about discrimination and segregation between white French-born and immigrant citizens had not yet reached its apogee. The strict demarcation lines and unconscious racism within French society (Fredette 2018) can be seen reflected by Diome's choice of colours in media interviews. In conformity with Mabanckou, her fashion style is also distinctive, and, in the case of Diome, black, red, and white or silver form the pallet of contrasting colours of the outfits ("Dans tes rêves", Mar 18, 2018. "Le Gros Journal", Mar 22, 2017. "L'Invité", Mar 20, 2012. "Tout le monde en parle", Sep 06, 2003), mirroring the distinct separation between ethnic groups in France. According to a study of linguists Berlin and Kay (1969), these colours are the most common ones in primitive stages of language development. In other words, it is possible to name them as original colours, or the roots for the naming of other colour categories. Thus, it is tempting to define these colours as 'authentic', reflecting the author's desire to occupy a space and to be legitimized as she is. On several occasions Diome returns to reminisce of her childhood, and the fact that she was the fruit of a forbidden relation, an illegitimate child, "une batarde" [a bastard] and an outcast, thus, 'inauthentic' ("La Matinale", Apr 22, 2013. "Dans tes rêves", Mar 18, 2018). At the same time, the author underscores that she was conceived out of love so strong that boundaries were transgressed, and was, thus, born from real passion. This paradoxical condition has made her struggle for her authenticity and her place in the world. Despite the fame, she remains uncertain about what position she can claim in various situations. As it is humorously described in the conversation during the radio programme "Dans tes rêves" (Mar 18, 2018), this uncertainty is reflected through her clothes and the fact that she remained with her jacket on in the studio until somebody told her that it was fine to take it off.

Additionally, jewels and female accessories come into play both to reinforce authenticity, but also to reverse it. In the samples, Diome wears a typical Senegalese

necklace (“L’Invité”, Mar 20, 2012), thick silver bracelets (“L’Invité”, Mar 27, 2017), ornamented rings, and frequently a pendant reminding of the ‘hamsa’, a Muslim symbol of protection (“L’Invité”, Mar 27, 2017. “Le Gros Journal”, Mar 22, 2017. “Ce soir ou jamais”, Apr 25, 2015). Geographical and religious identity markers are offered to the viewer through the jewellery, just as they also underscore the author’s ‘singularity’ (Meizoz 2011), and the exotic aspect of her appearances in the white media settings. In “Ce soir ou jamais” (Apr 25, 2015), Diome participated in a panel talk widely spread on the Internet, especially due to her finishing line: “on sera riche ensemble, ou on se noyera tous ensemble” [we shall be rich together or we will all drown together]. In the heated discussion that Diome dominated completely, she had the opportunity to express herself about the exotic gaze she negotiates every time she appears in French media. Through a harsh critique of European migration politics, she drew a parallel to the conceptualization of exoticism, by saying: “comme avec l’exotisme, l’Europe s’était arrangée le principe...précepte unique...unilatéral de l’exotisme. Les autres sont exotiques, alors que dans mon village il n’y a rien de plus exotique que quelqu’un d’Amsterdam” [just as with exoticism, Europe has arranged the principle... the unique... unilateral precept of exoticism. The others are exotic, while in my village there is nothing more exotic than someone from Amsterdam]. In this way, she indirectly states that she is not more exotic than the other five white panelists, and, if a more inclusive, bicultural and transnational outlook was the norm, this fact would have been recognized.

If the contrasting colours, black, red and white, serve the purpose of representing authenticity, an aspect that proves to be easily reversed and turned into exoticism, the abundant purple shawl, that Diome displays in four of the samples, points to an additional identity marker (“L’Invité”, Mar 27, 2017. “Ce soir ou jamais”, Apr 25, 2015. “La Matinale”, Apr 22, 2013. “Dialogues avec Fatou Diome”, Oct 20, 2008). The symbolism of the purple shawl mirrors Diome’s reflections on identity, exoticism, and tensions between groups in French society. In an interview carried out in Senegal (Facebook, 2018), and, therefore, not included in the data, Diome wears the purple shawl and explains its significance:

Vous savez, j’aime le mauve, parce que c’est une couleur qui ne peut pas être sectaire. [...] Si le mauve se met à être raciste ou sectaire, cette couleur-là (elle pointe vers son châle), elle disparaîtrait. Vous savez, parce que c’est une combinaison. Alors, vous savez, je dis que le mauve est comme le rouge chaleur africaine et le froid bleu européen. Donc, pour avoir du mauve, il faut additionner le bleu et le rouge. Après vous avez du mauve. Cela veut dire que si le bleu se met à détester le rouge, behn, le mauve n’existerait pas. Si le rouge se met à détester le bleu, behn le mauve n’existerait pas. Je suis une fille de l’entre-deux, de l’addition. [You know, I like purple because it is a colour that cannot be sectarian. [...] If the colour purple becomes racist or sectarian, that colour (pointing to her shawl) would disappear. You know, because it is a combination. So, you know, I used to say that purple is like the red African heat and the cold blue European. So, to have purple, you need to add blue and red. Then you have purple. This means that if the blue starts to hate the red, well, the purple would not exist. If the red starts to hate the blue, well, the purple would not exist. I am a daughter of the in-between, of the addition.]

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This explanation of the purple shawl emerges as the only concrete articulation of the fact that the author's way of dressing in her public performances is used to suggestively reinforce a posture. In this specific example, Diome addresses her identity as a mixture of cultures from two contrasting continents, Europe and Africa. They have merged and melted into one new colour that the author appreciates very much. The purple colour not only illustrates the transcultural aspect of the author's identity but also the author's vision of a non-sectarian humanity, guided by curiosity about the Other, as well as by identity that is in constant development and movement (image 2).

Image 2. Diome in "L'invité", TV5 (Mar 27, 2017)



To be perceived as exotic is not necessarily voided by the authors, as observed in the case of Mabanckou. In the case of Diome, the play with exoticism is addressed humorously in the radio programme "Dans tes rêves" (Mar 18, 2017), through the reply of a French author and lecturer in political sciences, Antoine Bueno, to Diome's story about her life: "Mais moi à côté (d'elle), c'est d'une banalité affligeante" [But I am an appalling banality in comparison (to her)]. The utterance is followed by giggling sounds from Diome and the presenter, Laurence Garcia, who adds ironically that Bueno should not devalue himself, and assures him that he has a rightful place in the programme. In this way, it is underscored that the perception of the author as exotic has its advantages, contributing to create interest and charisma around the author.

4.2 Remaining in movement. Postures in-between locations and categories

Identity issues are systematically approached in the interviews with Mabanckou and Diome, who are frequently confronted with questions about language, origins, belongings, migration and travel. Consequently, the author posture is formulated in this span of categories attempting to capture them. Mabanckou makes constant efforts to resist fixed categorizations, which is articulated in the discussion about migration with Augustin Trapenard, in the radio programme "Boomerang" (Apr 24, 2015):

Le mot "migrant", ça me dérange, parce qu'à chaque fois qu'on impose un mot à une population donnée, eh, behn, le mot perd de sa beauté dans les dictionnaires. Je pense à ce qui en train de se passer... "migrant" est devenu presque synonyme d'"errant", alors qu'en poésie "errant" est quelque chose de beau. Nous les humains sont destinés à nous déplacer dans un monde qui devient de plus en plus planétaire. Nous demandons l'immobilisme, là où il faut être plus ouvert, plus hospitalier. [The word "migrant", it disturbs me, because each time you impose a word to a specific population, eh, well, the word loses its beauty in the dictionaries. I think of what is happening right now... "migrant" has almost become synonym for "wanderer", while in poetry, "wanderer" is something beautiful. We humans are destined to move in a world which is becoming more and more planetary. We are asking for immobility when we must be more open, more hospitable.]

Mabanckou recognizes the paradoxical fact that the term 'migrant' has negative connotations, while other meanings comprised in the synonym 'wanderer', such as mobility, curiosity, and openness, are poetic and positive. The mobility of the human condition is also addressed by Diome in "Ce soir ou jamais" (Apr 25, 2015), where her interpretation is much more ideological and political. Diome puts afore that the only mobility made visible is that of immigrants, while people are travelling and moving around all the time. The freedom of mobility depends on your passport, in the author's view, stressing the fact that she can get a visa to come and give lectures at European universities, but her brother, who does not have a formal education and who would just like to work, is not allowed to cross borders. Migration is a core issue in Diome's entire authorship, and, in the media interventions, she discusses migratory conditions that are rarely made visible, for example, how women left behind are managing their daily life when the husband goes abroad for work. This topic is developed in her novel *Celles qui attendent* (2013) [*Those Who are Waiting*] that she presented in the programme "L'Invité" (Mar 20, 2012).

Both Mabanckou and Diome critically address borders and categorizations as harmful for both societal and individual development. Through irony, imagery, and humour, they position themselves as rebels against fixed boundaries. The motive for inviting Mabanckou to "Boomerang" (Apr 24, 2015) is to promote his new novel, *Petit Piment* (2015) [*Black Moses* 2017], telling the story of an orphan born in Pointe-Noire. Mabanckou states the following about the main character: "Nous sommes toujours défini par les autres, et le Petit piment refuse la définition des autres." [We are always defined by others, and Black Moses refuses others']

definitions]. Mabanckou admits that he identifies with his orphan personage and he states that he is a rebel in his writing. Moreover, writing from a child’s perspective is, according to the author, a way of resisting adult norms and given facts (“Boomerang”, Apr 24, 2015). Diome is also a rebellious writer and declares in “Dans tes rêves” (Mar 18, 2017) that it is not a coincidence that she was born in 1968: “J’écris avec la colère, mais jamais sans poésie et rêve” [I write with rage, but never without poetry and dream]. Mabanckou develops this rebellious posture during the interview with Nicolas Demorand, in “Le Grand entretien” (Aug 27, 2018), where he states that

[n]ous, les écrivains, la seule arme que nous avons, c’est l’arme de l’indignation. Cette indignation doit être sans faille. On n’a pas les moyens de séquestrer la liberté et l’expression.
[we, the authors, the only weapon we have, is the weapon of indignation. This indignation must be infallible. We do not have the means to imprison the freedom of expression.]

These authors obviously seek to negotiate and break with norms and definitions taken for granted. They proceed by intelligibly addressing i) localities as a means to negotiate nationalities, and ii) transnationalities as a means to negotiate definitions of globality and universal consciousness. In the modality-rich discourses that the authors contribute to activating in the data, the dichotomies *local-global* and *national-transnational* are twisted, crossed and intertwined. The following examples present how local representations are linked to efforts to reformulate the notion of the national, and how representations of transnationality are used to rethink global consciousness.

4.2.1 Local-national

On several occasions, Diome explicitly presents herself as a French citizen. Her hometown is Strasbourg and her region Alsace. The first thing that the author announces on the air in “Dans tes rêves” (Mar 18, 2017), is: “Je ne parlerai pas sans ma choucroute alsacienne” [I will not speak without my Alsatian sauerkraut], referring to her specific French accent, which is, ironically, primarily marked by her Senegalese origins, by Serer, Mandinka and Wolof language variations. Through this location of herself, she positions the author Fatou Diome as a voice of France. This strategy is further utilized in the dialogue with the audience in the bookstore *Librairie Dialogues* (Oct 20, 2008) in Brest, a locality geographically placed at the opposite point of Strasbourg. Both cities are situated in the outskirts of the Hexagon, distanced from the cultural melting-pot of Paris. In this provincial context, the potential readership visible in the clip is white, and, hypothetically, constitutes the representatives of the individual destinies that Diome writes about in her novel *Inassouvies, nos vies* (2008) [*Unsatisfied, Our Lives*], which is the topic of the dialogue.

Diome states in the video clip that “parler de l’Afrique n’est pas un métier” [speaking about Africa is not a profession], defending her right as a French citizen and author to approach the subjects she finds interesting. The slices of life described in the story are French-European, and the main character reflects on solitude in

modern Western society, through encounters with different people living in a French suburban neighbourhood. Simultaneously, Diome positions herself as African, when she declares that “notre littérature est née d’un besoin de parler de l’Afrique” [our literature is born from a need to speak about Africa], but that there is no need today to repeat what Senghor and other African authors already have achieved. In fact, the author has chosen to offer perspectives from inside France throughout her novel, while applying an assumed foreigner’s gaze on the topic. This is articulated through passages of the novel highlighting how old people are treated in French society, which Diome comments on by expressing that old age has become a criterion for exclusion. While referring to the well-known Malian author Amadou Hampâté Bâ and his aphoristic wording: “un vieillard qui meurt est une bibliothèque qui brûle” [an old man who dies is a library that burns], she critically compares two perspectives of old age, from inside France and from inside Africa: in France one leaves old people to die in their solitude, while in Africa, old people are venerated for their knowledge and wisdom. In this way, the locally situated encounter with the audience in the bookstore serves the purpose of claiming a posture as a French national writer while maintaining an African outlook.

Diome reinforces the French part of her author identity in her most recent book, *Marianne porte plainte* (2017) [*Marianne Files a Complaint*]. Situated between the genres of novel and essay, the text rapidly develops towards a defense of French national identity. In “Le Gros Journal” (Mar 22, 2017), to which Diome is invited in order to discuss her work, the author reminds the audience that

La France a apporté le droit de l’homme. La France a apporté l’universalisme. Ce sont aussi les lumières. [...] La France du droit de l’homme est aussi la France de la colonisation, la France de l’esclavage [...] La France est suffisamment belle comme elle est pour pouvoir assumer sa part d’ombre et sa part lumineuse. [France has brought human rights. France has brought universalism. These are also enlightenments. [...] The France of human rights is also the France of colonialization, the France of slavery [...]. France is sufficiently beautiful as she is, to assume her shadowy part and her luminous one.

Through this *plaidoyer* for a nation, the author justifies herself as one of the legitimate spokespersons for the French nation, because she is not turning away from violent and shameful aspects of French history and identity. In fact, Diome decisively shows the way towards an inclusive, tolerant and forgiving view of the homeland, qualifying herself to be a national authorial voice among the others.

Mabanckou does not claim a space in the national field of France as clearly as Diome, probably because he already has been integrated into the French literary landscape in several symbolic ways: in 2015 he was elected a Chair at the prestigious Collège de France (see Porra 2018), and in 2018, the French president proposed that he lead the International Organization of la Francophonie (IOF), which Mabanckou refused in a public letter, arguing that the French language cannot be imposed from above, and that the organization gives too much power to France over former colonies (Chrisafis 2018). These issues are further discussed in an interview with the author in the programme “Le Grand entretien” (Aug 27,

2018). For example, Mabanckou frankly declares to the journalist Nicolas Demorand that “le français est la langue de la dictature” [French is the language of tyranny], and that “la francophonie est le néocolonialisme tant que cela ne vient pas du peuple” [the Francophony is neocolonialism as long as it does not spring from the people]. With this critical stand, Mabanckou makes use of his power position, as an author consecrated by French cultural institutions, in order to denounce French language and literature as a norm constructed from above and from the centre, that is the former empire. In his view, the French language develops from the roots, in different localities where it is used. Mabanckou’s position is unclear, since he has accepted to be a representative of the French literary institution, and still chooses to criticize its foundation. This ambiguity is addressed slightly differently by Véronique Porra (2005, 2010, 2018), who argues in her research that the acceptance of Mabanckou at the core of French cultural institutions is double, since they both guarantee a relative visibility to marginalized literature from France and render the large majority of Francophone literature imperceptible. The choice of the ‘happy few’ simply reduces possibilities to understand the multitude of creations produced in the margins of the central French national literature production. In addition, Mabanckou puts afore his scholarly and literary merits, while critique and media focus on his origins (Porra 2018).

In his media performances, Mabanckou tries to manoeuvre around this type of tensions and traps, tending to capture the author either in the French or the Francophone category, where France is the norm and Francophony a deviation. Contrary to Diome, who links her identity to geographical margins in France, Mabanckou proceeds by closing in on the centre, that is Paris, attempting to re-localize and re-formulate this cultural space.

At the occasion of the promotion of his essay *Le Monde est mon langage* (2016) [*The World is My Language*], Mabanckou is invited to the programme “À l’affiche” (Sep 27, 2016). The presenter, Sonia Patricelli, evokes the chapter in the book where Mabanckou writes about Paris and the area Château Rouge. She half asks, half states, that the quarter is “un petit Afrique” [a little Africa], followed by an embarrassed laughter by the author. Mabanckou answers that for him, the Château Rouge area is the “tour de Babel” [tower of Babel], where many languages exist on equal terms. He explains that the quarter offers an image of the actual multiethnic France, where also white people are living. In this way, the author defends a nation with many faces, languages and cultures, living together in equality. Nevertheless, the perception of this area inside Paris is that of a deviation from the norm. It is an exotic place which is not recognized or legitimized. The marginalized position of Château Rouge is also revealed by an error occurring in the interview with Élisabeth Quin (“28 minutes”, Sep 7, 2016), who confuses Château Rouge with the quarter Château d’Eau, situated in a different area of Paris. Mabanckou, however, does not correct the presenter, as if it would have been inappropriate.

This incident can be interpreted as an image of forces at play in the circulation of literature. The visible and accessible literature on a national and global level is the top of an iceberg. Actors and authors at this level of selection and privilege have

limited visibility and understanding of what exists under the surface (Lindberg 2018). In the same way, the media setting offered by "28 minutes" (Sep 7, 2016) does not have the tools to go beyond the surface. Mabanckou that is received, is the awarded author, translated into several languages and consecrated by the French institutions, not the author from below, whose French is partly forged in a multilingual, 'un-situatable' and 'un-pronounceable' Parisian area.

Mabanckou challenges this type of reductionist views and blindness to complex conditions and identities, which reflects the tension between French and Francophone in the national literary landscape. Through his different public mediations of African Francophone authors, for example at Collège de France, but also in the TV-studio of "À l'affiche" (Sep 27, 2016), where he retells the story of how he first met with the Congolese author Sony Labou Tansi, Mabanckou offers visibility to the diversity of literature in French, stemming from African languages and cultural spaces. Significantly, at the reception of the prestigious Renaudot literary award (2006) reported on "28 minutes" (Sep 7, 2016), Mabanckou comments on the distinction of his novel *Mémoires de porc-épic* (2006) (*Memoirs of a Porcupine* 2011) as follows: "Cela représente le combat que je mène pour que les littératures africaines ne soient pas toujours mises au rez-de-chaussée des lettres françaises" [This represents the struggle that I am carrying forward, so that African literatures will not always be placed at the ground level of French letters]. Mabanckou, thus, underscores hierarchies in the literary landscape, as well as the marginalized position of African Francophone authors. The focus on the Parisian local area Château Rouge in *Le Monde est mon langage* (2016) [*The World is My Language*], and in television encounters, enables opportunities for the author to publicly negotiate the perception of a central place. Mabanckou challenges the established identity of Paris as white and homogenous, arguing that the city consists of a diverse pallet of ethnic origins. Nevertheless, the traditional conception of Paris seems difficult to displace. Despite the barriers Mabanckou's vision encounters, the author has managed to challenge fixed categorizations that correspond neither to the author posture Mabanckou is constructing, nor to his conception of France as a nation.

4.2.2 Transnational – global

If anchorage in localities form one category of tools in the negotiation of the author posture in relation to the nation of France, an anchorage in transnational representations is also identifiable in the material, which allows for positionings in relation to international perspectives.

For example, in "À l'affiche" (Sep 27, 2016), Mabanckou is presented with Congolese steelpan drums as background music, reflecting his being a Congolese author, having a Chair at the prestigious Collège de France and teaching in California. Because of the music, the focus of the description is centered on the author's ethnicity, while situating him not only as transnational, but also as being part of the cosmopolitan elite, always on the move between contrasting locations. His modern nomadic life reflects an openness towards a global world. Mabanckou

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explains this global perspective through the interconnectedness between cultures in the TV-programme "28 minutes" (Sep 7, 2016):

Nous sommes entrés dans une ère où les cultures vont picorer les unes dans les autres pour créer cette civilisation qu'il [Édouard Glissant] a appelé le rhizome, c'est-à-dire que l'on ne peut plus enfermer l'identité sur une seule couleur, sinon elle est sclérosée. [We have entered an era where cultures are freely picking from one another to create this civilization that he [Édouard Glissant] has called the rhizome; in other words, you cannot lock up the identity in one colour any longer or it becomes fossilized]

The importance of ongoing cultural mixing and movement in Mabanckou's discourse is put to the forefront of this statement and is further underscored in the programme "À l'affiche" (Sep 27, 2016) through the recycling of the passage: "les cultures vont picorer les unes dans les autres", from the quotation above.

In addition, the media settings in which Mabanckou appears show an awareness of Mabanckou's multiple belongings, mainly between Africa and France. Systematically in the programmes, the author is confronted with questions about his Congolese origins, which are followed by wider interrogations about his relation to France, and to other cultural spaces. The questions about origins are relevant, insofar as the majority of Mabanckou's fictional works are situated in a Congolese cultural space. The author also claims to embed a Congolese rhythm in his use of French language. In "Drôle de rencontres" (May 29, 2017) he states:

Cela ne me dérange pas d'écrire ou de m'exprimer en français. Il y a toujours derrière mon français le rythme congolais, le souffle congolais. Les mots sont français, mais la chair à l'intérieur, les palpitations, eh behn, cela relève peut-être d'un univers congolais [It does not bother me to write or express myself in French. Behind my French there is always a Congolese rhythm, the Congolese murmuring. The words are in French, but the flesh inside, the palpitations, well, they probably stem from a Congolese universe].

In this way, Mabanckou strongly reclaims his roots and the influence of one specific culture in his creative writing. At the same time, he steadily underscores in the interview that he belongs to France through France's history of colonialization. He believes that today there is no point in using the terminology of French literature, since there is only Francophone literature including all authorships which use the French language to create literature. He continues by peremptorily stating that "l'imaginaire européen est à bout de souffle" [the European imagery has run out of steam]. He explains that, if Europe is running out of inspiration and imagination, it is partly caused by the lack of respect, interest and understanding of cultures and languages in former colonies that European countries were so keen to conquer. This blindness becomes an impoverishment of European indigenous culture and literature. A remedy is possible, but as long as "la France ne connaît pas les noirs qui vivent sur son territoire" [France does not know the black people living in its territory], a cultural dynamism cannot be put in place.

At this moment, the presenter, Pierre Arditi, redirects the author, encouraging him to speak rather about America. In this cultural space the author notes an

experienced flagrant difference in relation to France, regarding how African cultures are studied and made visible in higher educational institutions. The author attempts an analysis and expresses that France has not come to terms with its history and, therefore, retains many taboos, in contrast to America, where these issues seem less painful and difficult to approach. In “Le Grand entretien” (Aug 27, 2018), the author summarizes his American experience by saying that “L’Amérique a fait de moi ce que la France n’a pas pu faire” [America has made of me what France could not make]. In this way, the author manifests a posture in movement, where encounters with unfamiliar cultures and languages function as additions and means to forge a global outlook in which diverse and broad perspectives increasingly can be included.

Both Mabanckou and Diome forcefully make use of perspective reversals in the media samples. This strategy is one means of resisting the definitions that position them as outsiders in French cultures. Through their different forms of eloquence, they both defend and criticize the nation of their citizenship. The message that Diome conveys in the TV-studio of “L’Invité” (Mar 27, 2017) points towards a strife for openness concerning the state of France’s relation to the world: “Le nationalisme (rire), comme l’a dit Einstein, c’est la rougeole du peuple. Donc, je pense que la France n’acceptera pas ce mal-là.” [Nationalism (laughter), as Einstein said, is the people’s measles. So, I do not think that France would accept that kind of evil]. Through the support of one of the western world’s scientific cornerstones, Einstein, the author rhetorically manages to strengthen her argument about the impossibility to accept strict national interests in a global world. When the presenter, Patrick Simonin, comments on Diome’s writings, he says that “c’est un cri d’amour, et aussi un cri de résistance” [It is a scream of love, as well as a scream of resistance]. Diome answers as follows:

Oui, tout à fait, je ne suis pas venue chercher du travail. Je ne suis pas venue en tant qu’immigrée, et je dis, quand une femme rejoint son domicile conjugal, ce n’est pas un contrat de durée déterminée. Je suis venue faire ma vie avec quelqu’un. Donc, l’histoire en elle-même...c’est terminé. J’ai choisi de rester. Mais en tant que citoyenne, libre de rester ou de partir, j’ai choisi de rester, donc, je défends aussi ma part de France, parce que, c’est une société dans laquelle je vis, dans laquelle je participe, donc, tout ce qui touche cette société me touche aussi. [Yes, that is right, I did not come to look for work. I did not come as an immigrant, and, I mean, when a woman rejoins her marital home, it is not a fixed-term contract. I came to live my life with somebody. Well, the story itself... that is over. I have chosen to stay. But as a citizen, free to stay or to leave, I have chosen to stay, so, I defend my part of France, because it is the society in which I live, in which I participate, so, everything that touches this society touches me.]

Diome’s intimate revelation of how she is linked to France across cultures addresses the nation as a part of her identity, and, therefore, her eagerness to participate in its construction and defend its values. Both authors stress the addition and not the division as an important function for both personal and national growth. Nevertheless, Diome does not avoid the subject of reasons for travelling, such as tourism, war, poverty and employment (“Ce soir ou jamais”, Apr 25, 2015). The

negative consequences following these movements are also present in her discourse. For example, the global outlook she nurtures is frequently marked by her awareness of sorrows and separations that the simple desire for dignity can provoke. In the radio programme "La Matinale" (Apr 22, 2013), the author is invited to speak about her novel *Impossible de grandir* (2013) [*Impossible to Grow up*], in which a sentence reoccurs regularly. "Je veux seulement marcher" [I just want to walk]. Diome explains that she was inspired by Paco de Lucia and his musical work "Solo quiero caminar" for this *leitmotiv*. In the author's view, this music translates the message that Diome wanted to transmit in her novel, that is the difficulty and the desire to walk straight and independently through life. Dignity and independency can be even more challenging to achieve in a migratory life, especially if the original culture is perceived as subordinate.

In addition, when quoting Diome's novel *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* (2003) [*The Belly of the Atlantic* 2006], the presenter, Thierry Ardisson, states the following in "Tout le monde en parle" (Sep 06, 2003): "partir, c'est devenir un tombeau ambulante" [departing, that is to become a travelling tomb]. The author explains that the image illustrates the people you are obliged to bury in your memory, dead or alive, because of the mental and geographical distance. Still, Diome underscores her positive attitude towards explorations of the world. She offers her own travel experience, from the small island Niodior, to the mainland in Senegal, to bigger cities in Africa, to Europe and to other continents. The widening of geographical circles has helped her to progressively gain familiarity with different corners of the world, she explains in the programme. It is possible to interpret Diome's interventions on the topic of travel and migration as a gain, since she seems to express that it is an enriching and dynamizing force ("Ce soir ou jamais", Apr 25, 2015). Nevertheless, this positive outlook is mitigated by her acute awareness of the challenges, both on an individual and a societal level.

If Mabanckou's transnational profile, including Congo, France and California, is frequently addressed by media productions, Diome seizes the opportunity to present herself as an author who is also between locations. This is illustrated in "La Matinale" (Apr 22, 2013) through Paco de Lucia's music, as well as two other pieces of music that Diome has chosen for the occasion, namely, the Senegalese Douga music, accompanied by the traditional instrument kora, and the second part of Haydn's fourteenth symphony, the Surprise. The former allows the author to talk about her roots and the traditions of the people that she is connected to through her birth and childhood. The latter allows the author to signal that her culture consists of classic European references. The presenter, Jean-Christophe Bourseiller, asks her why she has chosen this piece from Haydn. Diome answers: "Parce que je suis la surprise amoureuse de mes parents [...] et je trouve que la vie elle-même n'est qu'une vaste surprise. Merci, la vie" [Because I am my parents' surprise in love [...] and I find that life itself is a vast surprise. Thank you, life]. The three musical works summarize the author as anchored in Afrika, Europe and in a third cultural space, on this occasion Latin America, as if the transnational posture was translated through a triangular formation, where one point represents ones' origins, a second

point new citizenship, and a third a cultural space in exploration. Diome and Mabanckou share this triangular transnationalism in the discussed media samples and take advantage of it to promote an inclusive outlook on the world, where belonging resides in a continuous development through a life in movement.

5 The uncapturable contours of a transnational author

The purpose of this study has been to explore and understand Francophone transnational author postures in French media settings. The authors Alain Mabanckou's and Fatou Diome's appearances in media samples accessible on the Internet, i.e. *epitexts*, have provided the material to analyze how authors make use of the modality-rich contexts, in order to position themselves and to negotiate categories and frames in which the media production receive them.

The authors immediately emerge as deviating in these media contexts, since their skin colour contrasts with a white norm. The visual difference sets in motion questions of origins, belongings and differences at other levels. The authors approach the issue of colour and identity in different ways. Diome tends to adopt a strategy of explicitness, where she regularly refers to her own colour, and shows that she is aware that her skin makes her a strange element in Western media settings. In this way, it is possible to observe that she relieves her entourage of the burden to overtly articulate the tension of a situation where the majority is white and the minority is black. Furthermore, she insists on the superficiality of colour and conveys a message that identity is not a fixed category, but rather is in constant movement. Diome tries to go beyond colour by focusing on all people's continuous identity development. The purple shawl she regularly wears, is a representative example of the effort to transmit that a unique identity is not constructed in isolated and sectarian spaces, but through the mixing of entities, analogous to the purple colour that would not exist without the fusion of blue and red.

Mabanckou proceeds in a reversed and subtler way, by explaining that African people did not invent the concept of white colour. Contrary to Diome, he does not take the responsibility to relieve the white context of the potential tension experienced by the visual contrast between white and black. Instead, he argues that colour is not an issue in the cultural context where he was brought up, while observing that French society is ignorant of the cultural contribution of its black inhabitants. He positions himself as African and intellectually more developed, since going beyond colour is not problematic for him as it appears to be for the French society and white people living in it.

A critique of the invisible sectarianism of France that both authors recognize and relate to, is translated by Diome's way of dressing, with the primary colours, white, black and red. Mabanckou, for his part, cultivates the Western dress code that he transforms and refines, in order to convey a message of power and superiority, as well as of cultural mixing. The uses of clothes are also strategies to underscore both authenticity – the authors' origins and true person, and exoticism – the authors' strangeness and foreignness. In fact, for the white gaze, authenticity is strangeness in this context. The jewellery that Diome wears signal her authentic self as Muslim

and from Senegal, while, at the same time, the accessories become symbols of Otherness in the media contexts. Mabanckou's play with clothes reveals that he is dressing consciously, on the one hand to express his authentic self, on the other hand to show that he is at ease with the fact that his fashionable style is perceived as exotic. He does not hesitate to reinforce the exotic aspect through the imagery of wild animals, and even turns it into a threat to the domesticated, civilized French-European setting. The examples in the study show how the authors are making visible, and articulating the norms taken for granted in the French media settings and in society at large. The authors break with these norms and use them to position themselves as 'rebels in writing', which is a description that they both have recourse to in their self-definitions.

It is their writings that have brought them to a celebrity status inside France, which, in turn, has helped their texts to reach global circulation and recognition from abroad. Their position in the literary field is most probably the reason for the multiple invitations to different media platforms, where they are not only confronted with questions about their work, but also expected to offer answers on societal challenges, such as migration. Diome chooses to seize these opportunities to speak frankly about her convictions concerning the issue, while Mabanckou avoids ideological statements, and tries to approach any issue from a literary and cultural perspective. The authors' postures are different (Lindberg 2016), 'engaged', in the case of Diome, and 'intellectual', in the case of Mabanckou, but they send out similar messages about a society in need of more openness towards the world.

Both authors are French citizens. They are frequently forced to defend their French nationality by negotiating expectations on them as authors with diverse origins. Diome proceeds by literally situating herself in the very depth of France, in order to claim her knowledge of and belonging to a country. She does not deny her African culture, but formulates her desire to write freely, and to focus on France as well as on the African continent. Thus, she renegotiates national identity from a local place, turning it into a space open to the world, through the example of herself and her story. Mabanckou, for his part, chooses Paris as a local place, the cultural centre of France, to problematize a white, homogenous norm that he cannot see describe the France of today. The author underscores the mixed nature and diversity of one specific area in Paris and presents it as a model and a mirror of reality. However, the marginalized aspect of this part of Paris is revealed in the media samples, and the discursive renegotiation of national identity is truncated.

Moreover, the authors are received and depicted as experts of their country of origin. Systematically, they are invited to talk about their original cultural space, opportunities they do not hesitate to use, in order to promote both their own *persona*, and African cultures. However, both authors strategically and abundantly make use of cultural references both from Africa and from different parts of Western culture to effectively situate themselves as global citizens, whose general knowledge comprises the global South as well as the global North. This feature is further underscored by the transnationalism, in these cases a triangular

transnationalism, underscoring a point of origin, a point of new citizenship and a point of exploration.

These examples show how the authors manage a balancing act between acceptance and negotiation of categories. The media interventions set in motion the dichotomies *authentic-exotic*, *national-transnational*, *local-global*, and the authors reveal an awareness of the powerplays at stake in these dialogues. They take on the challenge with confidence and ease when they act out a posture which makes use of several modalities afforded in the contexts they appear. In comparison to the authors' literary texts and the accompanying *peritexts*, these *epitexts* allow the authors to enter the media scene, where they do not hesitate to act with their body and their voice. The author postures constructed through this unit of analysis confirm and reformulate postures in their written production. However, the authors' different performing strategies in the media settings do converge towards a common posture, where 'reversibility', 'renegotiation', 'rebellion', and 'transgression of borders' are characterizing features.

In current research on transnational and transcultural literature, a rich terminology with the aim to grasp boundless features is steadily increasing. From the 1990's, terms such as *hybridity*, *diaspora*, *transculturation*, *subaltern*, *hegemony*, *detrterritorialization*, *rhizome*, *mestizo*, *Eurocentrism*, and *othering*, have been established and widely used to designate literature by migrant authors or by authors from the global South, most often former imperialistic colonies (Gunn 2001, Hargreaves 2005). These terms have insidiously become ways to differentiate a dearth of literary works that resist incorporation in the national canon. It is a form of *detrterritorialized* literature, defined by Elleke Boehmer (1995) as "writing which foregrounds and celebrates a national or historical rootlessness" (239-240). The author postures emerging in this study, however, rather point towards freedom of belonging, and a grounding in various locations in the world, through continuous encounters and addition of cultures and languages. The authors rather cultivate a posture of literary *explorations of territories*, that is a reformulation of what territory is in a global world. Diome regularly returns to Senegal, where she has readership. Mabanckou is not authorized to cross the Congolese borders, but continues to write stories situated in Congo. His books are translated in English and he is invited to various English-speaking contexts. The multiple cultural interfaces they have access to in the world signal also the difficulties to maintain a monocultural, Westernized intellectual profile, by which the media productions are usually marked.

The above-mentioned terminology attributed to transnational authors is often endowed with negative connotations, since they reflect a deviation from the normative nation-state's literary field. Nevertheless, in the data one term is recycled by Mabanckou, and that is *rhizome* (Deleuze & Guattari 1980), related, in this context, to the law of infinite "addition", a word recurrently used by both authors. The image of an assemblage that grows in many directions through continuously added material and connections, suits Mabanckou's and Diome's representations of themselves in the media samples. They are anchored in a culture that they define as

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moving in a direction of an increasingly planetary outlook. Their postures defy categorizations and promote a consciousness made up of movement and uncertainties, travel and encounters, where identity is fluid, and the contours of an author vanishing, so that renewal always can be let in.

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