Othering, Negritude, and disillusionment in Maryse Condé's *What is Africa to me*?

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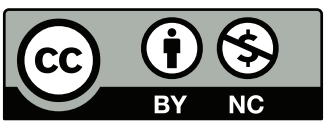
Abstract

In Maryse Condé's satirical autobiography, *What is Africa to Me?*, she recollects and re-evaluates her decade-long stay in four West African countries. The book also affords readers the chance to follow her trajectory from a racially Othered adolescent female to an ardent follower of Negritude, especially Aimé Césaire's brand, which she associates with her personal re-creation and the uplift of the whole of the Black race. Anchored in postcolonial and feminist perspectives on Othering, this paper examines the role that commodification, Negritude, and disillusionment play in the narrative. In this counter-discourse, pervasive Othering is perceptible in patriarchy, one-party governments, and the chasm between West Africans and diasporan Africans. It is argued that the writer's ultimate disavowal of Africa is principally a function of her objectification by the post-independence elite. The paper concludes that, far from being blameless, Maryse Condé herself contributes to the Othering of her husband, Mamadou Condé, and of Africa.

Keywords: Maryse Condé, Africa, Othering, Negritude, disillusionment



About the author

Professor of Francophone African Literature at the University of Ghana, *Augustine H. Asaah* has published papers on the subject in many prestigious journals and coedited books. His research interests include African Feminist Literature, Postcolonial Literature, and Africana Studies.

1 Introduction*

Well-known for the thematization of Africa in her novels, Maryse Condé, the celebrated French writer of Guadeloupian origin, has crafted an autobiography, *What is Africa to Me?*, in which she dwells on her ten-year-old sojourn in West Africa from 1959 to 1970, with a year's break in England. Instead of the translator remaining faithful to the title of the French original, *La vie sans fards* (literally "The Unvarnished Life"), he chose to give it the puzzling title, *What is Africa to Me?,* which is from the refrain in the famous Harlem Renaissance poem, "Heritage" (1925), written by Countee Cullen.

By its strategic intertextual link to a referent, rich in history and tradition, the translator, Richard Philcox, who happens to be the novelist's spouse, not only leverages this powerful cultural artifact but also directs attention from the rather vague "varnished life" to the stronger and more marketable operative word "Africa". While the emphasis on Africa in the English translation reflects the socio-political links between diasporic Black-centred movements and the continent, it equally serves to guide and sustain the reader's interest in the author's response (affective and political) to the soul-searching question of what the ancestral continent means to her at various stages in her life. As a corollary, the titular pre-eminence of Africa brings into sharper focus some of the overarching strands of this autobiography: the evolution of Africa as well as the author's dynamic reaction to Black-focused movements, such as the Harlem Renaissance, Pan-Africanism, and Negritude.

In her desire to bond with Africa, Maryse Condé (the pseudonym of Maryse Philcox) consecutively settles in four West African countries, namely the Ivory Coast, Guinea, Ghana, and Senegal. Her sojourn parallels the transatlantic relocation of female Caribbean characters to Africa, which she problematized in her novels *Hérémakhonon* (1976) / *Heremakhonon* (1982) and *Histoire de la femme cannibale* (2003) / *The Story of the Cannibal Woman* (2007). With respect to the problematic migration of Antillean women to Africa, three broad patterns of criticism emerge. A first group interested in the comparative analysis of protagonists from Condé's works and other Caribbean/Francophone women writers (for example, Simone Schwarz-Bart and Myriam Warner-Vieyra) involves scholars such as Okpanachi (1984), King (1991), and Tindira (2019). Critics Nyatetu-Waigwa (1995) and Gulick (2010), who instead situate the comparative analysis within Condé's novels, fall into a second group. Yet a third group is constituted by academics who limit themselves to a specific work by Condé. It is to the third category that studies dedicated to *La vie sans fards* belong. Examples of these are Alexis (2014), Bloess (2014), and Brodzki (2015), which demonstrate the manner in which the autobiography's enunciative, linguistic, and self-derisive features, among others, help to translate its themes. However, little or no attention has been paid to the network of Othering, Negritude, and disenchantment which subtends the evolution of the author/narrator/protagonist/focalizer across time and space. This will be the focus of this paper. It seeks to establish that Othering cyclically drives Maryse Condé towards Negritude, from Negritude towards disillusionment, and from disillusionment towards further Othering.

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2 Othering

If the self/other dialectic has a rich history in Western thought, from Plato to Jacques Lacan and Michel Foucault through Georg Hegel, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Emmanuel Levinas, Othering as an analytical tool in feminist and postcolonial studies is largely informed by the perspectives of luminaries, such as Beauvoir (1949), Cixous (2013), Spivak (1985), Said (1978), JanMohamed (1985), and Minh-ha (1989), on the subject. For example, Minh-ha (1989, 1), a postcolonial and feminist critic, traces the construction of the rigid We/They dichotomy to primordial times:

> The story never really begins nor ends … One can date it back to the immemorial days when a group of mighty men attributed to itself a central, dominating position vis-à-vis other groups, overvalued its particularities and achievements, adopted a projected attitude towards those it classified among the out-groups, and wrapped itself up in its own thinking, interpreting the out-group through the in-group mode of reasoning, while claiming to speak the minds of both the in-group and the out-group.

In the manner of these pacesetters, Brons (2015, 70) conceptualizes Othering thus:

> Othering is the simultaneous construction of the self or in-group and the other or out-group in mutual and unequal opposition through identification of some desirable characteristic that the self/in-group has and the other/out-group lacks and/or some undesirable characteristic that the other/out-group has and the self/in-group lacks. Othering thus sets up a superior self/in-group in contrast to an inferior other/out-group.

Thus conceived, Othering becomes a socially and politically constructed hierarchical binary arrangement that arbitrarily allows members of the in-group to arrogate to themselves quasi-divine rights of superiority, while at the same time condemning members of the out-group to inferiority. This dichotomous division is then used as the basis for the exclusion and oppression of the out-group by the in-group. At the heart, then, of colonialism, racism, ethnocentrism, sexism, misogyny, ultra-nationalism, religious fanaticism, objectification, homophobia, infantilization, zoomorphization, and many wars, is Othering.

Significantly, all of these pernicious phenomena abound in *What is Africa to Me*? It bears stressing then, from the outset, that Othering shapes the protagonist's evolution as she reacts to its force, falls prey to it, and facilitates its spread, both unwittingly and consciously. The depiction of the web of Othering, in the hands of Condé, a colonized female writer, constitutes a counter-history, a discourse from below, and a narrative from the perspective of the otherwise muted subaltern that challenges the grand narratives of empire-builders, nationalists, and patriarchs. At the same time, since her own complicity in Othering mimics ambient alienating practices, it becomes a *mise en abyme*, a microcosm of subalternization.

As a colonized female subject from the French Antilles and a descendant of former slaves, Maryse Condé has experienced and observed at first hand the rigors of Othering in her native Guadeloupe, and also in metropolitan France, where her ethnicity, social class, gender, migrant status, and later, her single parenting and distressed marriage cohere to render her susceptible to sinister reification and ostracism. In effect, her entire trajectory from the deracination-prone colonial landscape of Guadeloupe to the malignant sociocultural ecology of post-war France is dogged by Othering.

The racism to which Condé and her baby boy fall victim in France is imputable to Othering, the superiority complex of the in-group, that is, of Caucasians who arbitrarily and he-

gemonically set the standards both for themselves and for the racial Other. On the streets of Nice, she and her son are perceived as vectors of affliction, sickness, and contagion (14). The racial humiliation that she suffers on visits to Paris discourages her from viewing the French capital as "the City of Light, the capital of the world" (243), but rather as the place where she nightmarishly discovers her difference in Fanonian fashion (243). She has become a pariah.

It bears noting that Maryse Condé's experience of racial prejudice is not limited to France. In England she is equally subjected to exclusion, intimidation, and harassment on account of her pigmentation. Her Caucasian neighbours go to the extent of vandalizing her letterbox and throwing out her mail (227). Nor are her children spared the ordeal of racism, as they return from school on a daily basis with tearful stories about being shunned, being called monkeys, and being stigmatized as having a bad smell (228). Her last daughter, Leila, blames Maryse Condé for exposing her at a tender age to "the terrible experiences of uprooting, exile and racism," particularly in England (249). In short, Othering renders Condé and her children outcasts in France and the UK alike, thus dismantling, in a postcolonial counter-discursive gesture, the Enlightenment pedestal of these metropolitan powers.

Colonialism itself is driven by the myths of Eurocentric universalism, the Dark Continent, the White Man's Burden, and the civilizing mission of Empire building. Often, the perpetuation of Empire and the constructed European superiority are achieved by means of the hegemonic practices of acculturation, socialization, and deracination, as well as through stock dehumanization procedures such as zoomorphization, infantilization, and reification.

By the same token, Othering is responsible for the heritage of dependency and alienation that has become the lot of the Départements d'Outre-Mer (French Overseas Departments) or DOM. In the wake of the Second World War, Guadeloupe, Martinique, and French Guyana were converted on March 19, 1946 into the DOM, by a French decree, thus making them an integral part of France. Since its adoption, pro-independence movements have not been able to wean the DOM of France's overbearing imperial presence. As Condé (Pfaff 2015, 93–97), a member of the autonomy movement stresses, life in the DOM is dependent economically, politically, and culturally on a metropolitan centre to which they are bound across the ocean. She further explains that departmentalization, far from promoting integration, translates into prolonged colonization (Condé 1998, 3). As the cartographic configuration of hexagonal France necessarily excludes the presence of the DOM, they convey the image of accessories, appendages, and footnotes, visible, at best, in a distant periphery. In short, departmentalization has deepened the marginalization of *domiens* (inhabitants of/from the DOM) not only in the DOM themselves but also in France. Neither, can they, like their immediate neighbours from Haiti, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and the Dominican Republic, lay claim to autonomy and endogenous citizenship. Despite the existence and usage of the demonyms Guadeloupian and Martinican, there are no corresponding official nationalities.

In the same manner as Fanon (2008) and Condé (243) discover their subordination and reification only on their arrival in metropolitan France, many *domiens* do not recognize their inferior status on their native soil, as they are entrapped in a labyrinth of hegemony and subalternization. Glissant (1989, 23) explains:

> It is very often only in France that migrant French Caribbean people discover they are *different,* become aware of their Caribbeanness; an awareness that is all the more disturbing and unlivable, since the individual so possessed by the feeling of identity cannot, however, manage

> to return to his origins (there he will find that the situation is intolerable, his colleagues irresponsible; they will find him too *assimilé*, too European in his ways, etc.) and he will have *to migrate again*.[1]

The status of *domiens* predisposes some to homelessness, restlessness, and lack of self-belief, not too remote from Maryse Condé's sense of permanent insecurity and long bouts of depression in her autobiography. In order to justify the enslavement and assimilation of Antilleans, hegemonic colonial discourse, as she further emphasizes (Pfaff 2015, 187), has long portrayed Africa to them as a land of savages. As a corollary, the superiority complex of West Indians in *What is Africa to Me*? can be attributed to Othering, this internalized colonialism and paternalism that predisposes them to perceive their West African hosts as barbaric.

No less dehumanizing are the commodification, mythification, and instrumentalization that inform Maryse Condé's casting of Mamadou Condé, her husband, in the mould of the noble savage. She portrays him as a handsome, sensual, good-natured, weak-minded, and ill-educated African, inclined to unrestrained indulgence in alcohol, but who could nonetheless be used to exorcise her stigma as a young single Black mother in the conservative France of the 1950s (19–23, 92, 121). She additionally refers to him as a child (203). Remarkably, she also confesses to herself: "It [her stratagem] revealed my scheming selfishness and my profound contempt for [Mamadou] Condé whom I had no qualms exploiting" (135). In Guinea, she recognizes that Mamadou's wretchedness is not just a product of the suffocating corrupt Guinean regime, but also of spousal victimization: "I couldn't help feeling a deep sense of guilt towards him. A lying, unfaithful and cheating wife, I was not making his life any easier. It was obvious that I too was destroying him" (84).

The exploitation of Mamadou Condé by Maryse Condé is inclusive of the multiple cases of cuckoldry in France and Ghana, not least a very stressful week-long *ménage à trois* drama that has Kwame Aidoo, her live-in lover, the unwelcome Mamadou, and herself as actors, with their four children as spectators. While the distress of the children is worsened by their love for Mamadou, with its parallel loathing for the significant other, that of Maryse Condé is exacerbated not just by her keen awareness of this affective contrast but also by her own exploitative attitude towards Mamadou: "At that moment I broke down in tears. Tears of shame. Tears of remorse. I was all too painfully aware that I had *used and abused this man*" (203).[2] She confirms her guilt (276) after owning up to her shabby treatment of Mamadou: "I admit my behaviour towards him had been totally hypocritical" (202). The estranged husband remains the good-natured, child-like, and pliable Mamadou, the eternal victim. It can also be argued that her continuous usage of his patronymic, long after their divorce, is a further manifestation of a certain desire to exploit him. While her acknowledgement of the oppression and objectification of her husband reflects the temper of this Rousseaustic confessional autobiography, it foregrounds, at the same time, her wilful and unconscious Othering of Mamadou.

So too are the Othering reflexes of the Haitian agronomist Jean Dominique. In his capacity as man, half-caste, adult, and powerful public figure, he exploits and abandons the weak, female, young, Black, less exposed, and adolescent Maryse Condé, impregnates her, and abandons her to her fate. Gender, race, age, political power, and exposure all converge intersectionally as vectors of oppression against his hapless victim.

Another important aspect of Othering is objectification, especially sexual objectification. Objectification is the reduction of humans by torturers to the level of inani-

[1] All the cases of emphasis are by Glissant.

[2] My emphasis.

mate things. The patriarchal appropriation of Maryse Condé's body in Ghana by means of rape, sexual harassment, and sexual abuse at the hands of both the members of the Pan-African/socialist elite and the nascent comprador bourgeoisie falls under sexual reification. Prominent among the leftist objectifiers are El Duce (Beninese), Bankole Akpata (Nigerian), and Kodwo Addison (Ghanaian), all strongly connected to the Ghanaian president, Kwame Nkrumah, thereby suggesting an officialized dimension to the sexual violence. Addison was the director of Nkrumah's cherished Pan-Africanist and socialist project, the Kwame Nkrumah Ideological Institute at Winneba, some forty miles away from the capital, Accra.[3] He was also, according to Maryse Condé, one of the dauphins of Nkrumah (176). His fascist and Mafia-like name notwithstanding, El Duce was a key member of the editorial team of the bilingual newspaper, *The Spark/ L'étincelle*, the propaganda mouthpiece of the ruling socialist-inclined party. With respect to Akpata, his speech (Akpata 2017), "Philosophical Consciencism by Kwame Nkrumah: A New Development of Marxism in the Era of the Collapse of Imperialism and Colonialism in Africa", at the launch of Nkrumah's book on April 2, 1964 testifies to his strong links with the Ghanaian leader and scientific socialism.

The rightist objectifier is Kwame Aidoo, the opportunistic and elitist lawyer who capitalizes on Maryse Condé's self-destructive love for him to infantilize and victimize her for four years.[4] In the manner of a domineering and property-grabbing colonist, "he decreed a series of rules" for Maryse Condé's household, restricting the movement of her son and three daughters and consigning them to the basement where "the four children were virtually imprisoned" (181–82). Between the alternating pull of Eros and Thanatos, she starts to feel like a prisoner in her own house (201). It is with a shudder that the autobiographer recalls "the tsunami of a love affair" (269) with this living incarnation of arrogance and insensitivity, of machismo and domination (269).

In Cixous, Cohen, and Cohen's view (1976, 877), men often leverage their so-called in-group hegemony to sexually exploit and objectify women, configuring women as a "dark continent" that they must, of necessity, subdue and colonize:

> Men still have everything to say about their sexuality, and everything to write. For what they have said so far, for the most part, stems from the opposition activity/passivity, from the power relation between a fantasized obligatory virility meant to invade, to colonize, and the consequential phantasm of woman as a "dark continent" to penetrate and to "pacify."

Seen in this light, sexual objectification is symptomatic of asymmetrical, institutionalized, and pathological gendered power relations. For her part, American feminist theorist Langton (2009, 228–29)[5] conceptualizes sexual objectification as the:

i. *reduction to body*: the treatment of a person as identified with their body, or body parts
ii. *reduction to appearance*: the treatment of a person primarily in terms of how they look, or how they appear to the senses
iii. *silencing*: the treatment of a person as if they are silent, lacking the capacity to speak

Such an attitude incites not only rape but also other forms of gender-based violence, including girl-watching and sexual harassment, as Condé remarks in Ghana: "From the very

[3] The institute was otherwise known as the Kwame Nkrumah Institute of Economics and Political Science.
[4] He is also known for his British accent and pride in African traditional practices.
[5] All the three cases of emphasis are by Langton.

start, my life in Ghana was not easy … and suddenly, I was exposed to the hunt [by predators]. The males who made advances seemed to expect and desire only one thing from me" (150). Subsequently, she not only describes Accra as a town circumscribed by vice, debauchery, and predation, the avatar of Sodom and Gomorrah (147), but also borrows from John Lennon the title of one of his songs, "Woman is the Nigger of the World" (145), to satirically communicate to her public the age-old objectification shared by women and Blacks.

Lennon's song is reminiscent of the "dark continent" trope used by Cixous, Cohen, and Cohen (1976, 877) to capture the colonialist disposition of certain males. For Jean Dominique, El Duce, Bankole Akpata, and Kodwo Addison, Maryse Condé represents a conquest that they feel obliged to add to their war trophies. Othered and reduced, as Langton (2009, 228–29) would say, to her body parts and appearance, Maryse Condé is denied agency, configured as mute, untamed, obscure, as a zone of anomy and deviation, all negative traits which seemingly impose on the superior patriarchal class the obligation of predation. El Duce reveals to her that he engages in philandering "because he felt obliged to do so as a man", and is never deterred by the rebuffs of his prey (152). In the positively transgressive manner of contemporary MeToo survivors, Maryse Condé reveals her sexual objectification by powerful patriarchs in the hope that it will empower other muted victims to name and shame their abusers, and to disincentivize this oppression.

Maryse Condé's toxic relationship with Aidoo provides a sadomasochistic twist to this tale of androcentric predation. To the extent that she sees in this self-conceited capitalist a kindred spirit, by reason of her own "arrogant petty bourgeois" Guadeloupian background (214), and willingly accords him the status of a cohabitant in her flat, one could contend that her reification by this calculating parasitic paramour is self-inflicted. Nevertheless, it could also be argued that he exploits her emotional vulnerability and visceral need for attachment, victimizing her by posing as a redeemer and symbiont.

Together with the many cases of ethnic conflicts and xenophobia in the Ivory Coast, before and after independence (35–36), Sékou Touré's ethnic cleansing of Fulanis (83, 99) that Maryse Condé condemns in Guinea also has Othering as a root cause. In both countries, members of arbitrarily constructed sacrosanct ethnic groups demonize those in the out-group as non-beings, non-entities, "excluded from the human race" (92).

Again, given that heteronormativity is arbitrarily held by members of the in-group of heterosexuals to be sacred, homophobic stigmatization becomes ineluctable. While the gaze of heterosexuals forces Leslie, the African American expatriate gay man in Ghana, into a shroud of silence and incomprehension, to the extent of foisting on him the Quixotism-inspired moniker, "Knight of the Sad Face" (160), Denis, Maryse Condé's oldest child, becomes the object of ostracism in England, earning for himself, in the process, the undesirable tag, "the unloved, constantly rejected" one (235). That the two gay men later become worthy wordsmiths attests to their creativity, intelligence, and sensibility, thereby shattering the false premises of their objectification. Thus conceived, a counter-discourse allows Maryse Condé to resist Othering.

3 Pan-Africanism and Negritude

From the Black consciousness days of Ethiopianism in the nineteenth century to the promise of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AFCTD) in the twenty-first century, through the many Pan-African congresses and Back-to-Africa agitations of the twentieth century, the term Pan-Africanism has been employed for diverse purposes. Associated with this trajectory are countless legendary figures, including the Liberian Edward W. Blyden, the Trini-

dadians Henry-Sylvester Williams and George Padmore, the Americans Alexander Crummel and W. E. B. Du Bois, the Jamaican Marcus Garvey, the Ghanaian Kwame Nkrumah, and the Egyptian Gamel Abdel Nasser. Despite its mutations and multifarious meanings, it is generally believed that up until the advent of Pan-African union for continental Africans in the 1960s, the Pan-Africanist ideal sought to unite all Blacks into one common family to confront their common enemy: Western imperialism, with its attendant racism and subalternization. Du Bois (1933, 247) asserts: "Pan-Africa means intellectual understanding and co-operation among all groups of Negro descent in order to bring about at the earliest possible time the industrial and spiritual emancipation of the Negro peoples."

The imperative of liberating Blacks from the negative gaze of self-imposed superior races was not lost on Malcolm X (cited by Condé 1998, 6) in this apposite submission: "If Africa changes, the fate of the black man throughout the world will change." To that extent, one could say that all the Black-centred movements that seek unity for both Africans and subjects of Black descent in the diaspora or project a global community of Blacks are Pan-Africanist in inspiration. In other words, Pan-Africanism is the umbrella family under which the various Black-centred movements fall. One such subset is Negritude.

As an Africa-focused cultural and political movement, Negritude (etymologically, "the condition of being black", and by extension, "blackness"), was founded in Paris in the 1930s by intellectuals of Black descent, notably Aimé Césaire, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Léon-Gontran Damas, and Jane and Paulette Nardal, all living in the diaspora. It sought, among other things, to counter Western racism, to reaffirm the dignity of Blacks, and to purge Blackness of all negative connotations and denotations. Given the long history of baneful slavery and colonialism inflicted upon Africans and Blacks in the diaspora (in the Americas, Europe, and Asia), the implicit and explicit principle of Negritude is the shared cultural and historical heritage of all peoples of African descent. As Jane Nardal (cited by Condé 1998, 2) puts it, "Negroes of all origins and nationalities with different customs and religions vaguely sense that they belong, in spite of everything, to a single and same race."

Without a doubt, Negritude shares the same overarching aim of earlier Black-centred movements, such as Nicolás Guillén's Negrismo in Cuba and the Hispanic world, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) founded by William E. B. Du Bois in the US, and the Harlem or Negro Renaissance movement in the US, clustered around a constellation of artists including James Weldon Johnson, Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, Duke Ellington, Ethel Walters, Alain Locke, Jean Toomer, Nella Larsen, and Countee Cullen. In his illuminating article, "The Twenties: Harlem and its Negritude", Hughes (1985, 32) emphasizes the fact that the Harlem Renaissance prefigures Negritude and shares with it many traits and themes: "Had the word *negritude*[6] been in use in Harlem in the twenties, Cullen, as well as McKay, Johnson, Toomer, and I, might have been called poets of negritude – particularly Toomer of the 'dusky cane-lipped throngs' with his 'memories of kings and caravans, high-priests, an ostrich, and a juju man.'" Hughes (1985, 34) adds, "To us, *negritude* was an unknown word, but certainly pride of heritage and consciousness of race was ingrained in us." References to some of these stellar creators abound in Condé's autobiography (165). Senghor (1971, 12–13) also acknowledges the impact of the Harlem Renaissance on Negritude.

If Negritude has its passionate followers like Langston Hughes, it also has many detractors, prominent among whom are Frantz Fanon, Wole Soyinka, Marcien Towa, Ayi Kwei Armah, and Calixthe Beyala. Although these critics largely remain Pan-Africanist in

[6] The emphasis is by Hughes.

spirit and in deed, they condemn Negritude for its reductionism and nativism. They also take exception to its narcissism, its lip-service to the cause of women, and its undue glorification of the African past, to the extent of denying the historical reality of violence and blood shedding in precolonial Africa (Chreachain 1992).

Pan-Africanism and Negritude overarch *What is Africa to Me?* in more ways than one. First, they jointly constitute the driving force behind Maryse Condé's decision to relocate to West Africa in search of much needed identity, solidarity, and healing. Second, at crucial points of her life, they represent for her credible means of counteracting diverse facets of Othering: racism, colonialism, slavery, reification, and alienation, and, by the same token, provide her with the grounds to assess African leadership as well as her own place in the postcolony and the We/Other tension. Third, she populates her autobiography with Pan-Africanist and Negritude figures in order to invest it with literary and historical credibility. Fourth, they direct readers in their appraisal of her ideological attachment to Césaire and Fanon, fellow Antillean intellectuals from Martinique.

Since Negritude provided some succour to racially abused Blacks, especially in France, it comes as little surprise that Condé, in *What is Africa to Me?*, should find in the movement not only a self-defence mechanism to ward off stigmatization but also an affective bonding to placate her bruised ego. Of particular interest to her is the poetry of Césaire who, over a long period of time, becomes her preferred poet and, even from a distance, her intellectual father. Césaire's prestige and aura are enhanced by the fact that he is credited with the very invention of the term Negritude (Césaire 1935, 1).

Maryse Condé ardently believes in the monolithic Pan-African model of Negritude and sets much store by Césaire's exhortation to Blacks to discover and appropriate Africa. Charmed by a certain idealization of Africa in Caribbean folklore and Césaire's poetry, Condé therefore first conceptualizes the continent as a paradisiac sanctuary and as an exotic object of literary interest, before proceeding to appropriate it through friendship with two Guinean girls and marriage to another Guinean, Mamadou Condé. In the early phase of their marriage, one of the major causes of friction between her and Mamadou emanates from his non-appreciation of Negritude poets, as she views this as a "bitter failure" (19).

Condé's decision to go to Africa, against all odds (separation from Mamadou, status as a young nursing mother, and warnings from friends, acquaintances, and officials) is ultimately informed by her faith in Césaire and her bonding with him: "I believed that if I could reach the continent sung by my favourite poet, I could be reborn. Restore my virginity. Regain my hopes. Erase the malicious memory of the man [Jean Dominique] who had hurt me so much" (22). Later, she remarks: "It was not until I discovered Césaire and the Negritude movement that I learnt of my origins and began to distance myself from my colonial heritage" (80), and again, "It was only when I discovered Césaire that I developed a more positive attitude to these experiences [of racism] and grew proud of my African origins" (243). At the port of Marseille, before her maritime embarkation to the Ivory Coast, she relishes and relives the Pan-Africanist creativity of the Jamaican Harlem Renaissance writer, Claude McKay, which "had inspired a literary cult and garnered praise from Césaire" (25). The combined aura of McKay and Césaire engenders these jubilatory nativist stirrings in her heart: "Roaming the Canebière …, I felt as though I was in touch with the writers of the Negritude movement. More importantly, the blood flowed through my veins with renewed elation" (25). Her bond with Negritude seems to have been particularly guided by the shared West Indian connection; both Césaire and McKay are fellow Antilleans, fellow Blacks in the diaspora, who have also, like her, lived in France.

Once in Africa, Maryse Condé's staunch belief in Negritude and Pan-Africanism is put to a severe test. During her stopover in Dakar, she is informed that Africans hate and despise Antilleans: "Because some of us have served as colonial civil servants, they treat us like lackeys only good for doing the master's dirty work" (28). The rift between West Indians and Africans becomes a leitmotif in conversations with her "compatriots" in the Ivory Coast as well. In the little Ivorian town of Bingerville, where she teaches, the Guadeloupian music teacher forebodingly tells her that Africans detest West Indians because they envy the confidence the French place in them: "the French trust us … because they consider us superior to the Africans" (33). The same woman rightly predicts the Chadian betrayal, humiliation, and banishment of the Guadeloupian Gabriel Lisette, the famous Pan-Africanist who had previously championed the cause of independence. Given this mutual mistrust, fuelled by Othering and the colonial strategy of "divide and rule", Condé makes this observation:

> French Antilleans lived solely among themselves. Throughout the African continent, a huge gap separated them from the Africans. I preferred to think that Africans didn't understand Antilleans' unwitting Westernization; that is what they found offensive. As for the Antilleans, Africa was a mysterious and incomprehensible landscape which, in the end, frightened them. (35)

Further, contrary to Maryse Condé's Pan-Africanist dreams for the Ivory Coast, given the federalist spread and name of its dominant party, the Rassemblement Démocratique Africain[7] (RDA) led by Félix Houphouët-Boigny, a driver, on the day of that country's independence, casts ominous doubts on the future and national cohesion of the country. Nonetheless, once in Guinea, her staunch belief in her idolized poet, Césaire, influences her crucial decision to repudiate her French passport in favour of a Guinean one, convinced that by virtue of that "material reappropriation of Africa," she has come to terms with herself and is "going one step further than the leader of the Negritude movement, [her] intellectual guide" (52).

When Maryse Condé finally meets Sékou Touré, the Guinean president, he has cause to remark, "So you are from Guadeloupe. You're one of the little sisters that Africa once lost and [has] now found again" (71). The same leader decrees a four-day national mourning on the assassination of the Pan-Africanist Congolese leader, Patrice Lumumba, on January 17, 1961, and would also do the same for Fanon, on the death of the iconic anti-colonial theorist and Pan-Africanist liberation fighter on December 6, 1961. In the case of Lumumba, Condé ominously observes that the ceremonial homage was converted into a fashion show and a logorrhoeic event by the political caste (69).

In Guinea as well, "the lost but found daughter of Africa" interacts frequently at parties with a host of Marxist-oriented Pan-Africanists of diverse origins, Antillean and African, attracted to Sékou Touré's "socialist revolution". Maryse Condé happily notes that the West Indians in Guinea, unlike their counterparts in Senegal and the Ivory Coast, are seldom inclined to form closely-knit communities, committed as they are to Marxism and the Guinean revolution (61–62). Some of the famous visiting revolutionaries and Pan-Africanists she meets on their visits to Guinea are Mario de Andrade of the *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola*[8] (MPLA), and Amilcar Cabral, leader of the *Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo Verde*[9] (PAIGC). Another is the Negritude poet from Guadeloupe, Guy Tirolien, once married to Maryse Condé's sister. In a true Pan-Africanist spirit, he serves as Niger's Commissioner for

[7] African Democratic Rally

[8] Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola

[9] African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde

Information and encourages her to faithfully love Africa, the common and long-suffering mother of all Blacks (39).

In the account of her time in Guinea, Ghana, and Senegal, Maryse Condé makes several references to Pan-Africanist institutions, such as Présence Africaine, Black Star Line, and *Encyclopedia Africana* (101, 147, 159). Also mentioned are Haitian exiles in search of the Pan-Africanist dream, countless marriages between Africans and diasporan Blacks, and her "ambivalent attitude" towards Léopold Sédar Senghor, the Senegalese president and co-founder of Negritude. There are also the legendary Pan-Africanist figures including Edmund W. Blyden, Luis Hunkarin, Lamine Senghor, Marcus Garvey, George Padmore, Richard Wright, Malcolm X, Julius Nyerere, and Agostino Neto. Also invoked is the presence of the many political refugees, asylum seekers, and freedom fighters drawn to Nkrumah's Accra, for a long time the Mecca of Pan-Africanism (148, 213). Condé deems it important to experience at first hand the workings of the "African Personality" in the Ghana of Nkrumah, then touted as the very fulcrum of Pan-Africanism and the best example of the Back-to-Africa movement, with the "return" to that country of George Padmore as Nkrumah's political advisor and William E. B. Du Bois as his mentor (154, 158, 159).

With time, Condé begins to dissociate herself from Césaire's idealism in preference for the realism and constructivism of another Martinican, Fanon, his former pupil. Condé (104–105) finds great merit in Fanon's (2004, 153) denunciation of Negritude's undifferentiated family for all Blacks:

> By integrating the former slaves into African civilization, the African intellectuals accorded them an acceptable civil status. But gradually the black Americans realized that their existential problems differed from those faced by the Africans. The only common denominator between the blacks from Chicago and the Nigerians or Tanganyikans was that they all defined themselves in relation to the whites. But once the comparisons had been made and subjective feelings had settled down, the black Americans realized that the objective problems were fundamentally different.[10]

Condé's own observation of the many clannish African Americans in Nkrumah's Ghana and the coterie-prone Antilleans in West Africa appears to support this view. If, as Condé submits, African Americans trooped to Ghana on account of American racism, the influence of Du Bois, and their dream of Ghana as "the homeland of the black man" (159), they comported themselves as if Ghana belonged to them (158), "did not mix with Ghanaians but rather, formed a superior caste protected by their high-ranking jobs and high earnings" (159). Further, they do not perceive Ghana/Africa as their native land, but rather the US, from which they derive not only a sense of security and a communal bond, but also abiding nostalgia (159). She deplores the "wall of incomprehension" (95) that separates the two groups from their host communities in the Ivory Coast, Ghana, and Senegal, a chasm which she attributes to ingrained reflexes of Othering, a cocoon mentality, and a superiority complex on the part of otherwise well-intentioned returnee and visiting Diasporans, including Richard Wright and herself (150–55, 198–99). She also documents the instrumentalization of Africans by some African American tourists, who experience Africa as intoxicatingly "barbaric" (199), an "exotic change of scenery from a harsh daily existence… shackled by the slow progress of their civil rights" (198), who indulge in sex tourism in Benin, and who buy certified family trees from a guild of famed historians (193, 199).

The gulf is also perceptible in the derogatory terms that West Africans use for Condé

[10] It is important to note, however, that people of black descent in the US now call themselves African Americans and not Black Americans.

and African American visitors. In Guinea, schoolchildren constantly bully and batter her son, Denis, for having a *toubabesse,* "white woman", as a mother (89). Touring Diasporans are mockingly tagged *Obruni* 'foreigners' *(sic)*[11] by Ghanaian children (190).[12]

Whereas Césaire unabashedly celebrates his spiritual bond with Africa in *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* and elsewhere, in a Pan-African gesture, Fanon (2004, 150) is more nuanced in his acceptance of African culture as a tool to combat colonialism and racism. Maryse Condé would later become Césaire's political opponent on the issue of independence of the DOM and of his role in the establishment of these overseas departments.[13] Few would, however, dare doubt the depth of Fanon's commitment to the Pan-African cause, since he commits class suicide by dedicating himself to the successful prosecution of the protracted Algerian war of independence against the French and also to the effective decolonization of Africa. The cliquishness manifest in the attitude and discourse of fellow Antilleans in West Africa is absent from his dedication to the African cause, and this, at the cost of his comfort, class, and health. This notwithstanding, it can also be argued that Fanon is in favour of a continental Pan-Africanism rather than a monolithic global Pan-Africanism.

Drawn to Africa by Césaire, Maryse Condé, like the adventurous Fanon, soldiers on. She persists in the desire to stay on in Africa, insisting that she has no intention of leaving Africa as she is persuaded that she will end up understanding the continent. Thereafter, she hopes to be adopted by Africa and given the chance to be proud of its treasures (121, 130).

4 Disillusionment

There are certainly moments of unmitigated bliss for Maryse Condé in all four of the West African states that she visits. These moments of satisfaction include her reunion with friends and family in the Ivory Coast and Senegal, the joys of motherhood, the kindness of complete strangers, and the unusual hospitality of Guineans despite their impoverishment by Sékou Touré. Also worthy of note is her fulfilment at seeing the fruits of her first attempts at writing in Ghana. On the whole, however, her decade-long stay in West Africa is anguish-laden: thanatic urge, depression, and self-doubt, with each ordeal lived as a station of the cross (288). Not only does she face material and financial challenges in the raising of her relatively large family, she is also confronted with the evaporation of her Pan-Africanist dreams.

Maryse Condé does not often feel welcome in host communities, does not adapt to local conditions, becomes a cultural misfit and, therefore, a socio-cultural outsider. In the face of the endless complaints from her elder sister and her personal limitations, she admits that she knows that Africa will never accept her (119). Her confusion is palpable in this confession:

> [W]hat tortured me was I couldn't figure Africa out. Too many contradictory images stacked up one after the other. You never knew which one should have preference: the complex and ageless one of the ethnologists; the one spiritualized to excess by the Negritude movement; the image of suffering and oppression by my revolutionary friends; or the one ripe for carving up by Sékou Touré and his clique. (119)

[11] The correct spellings and translations are *obroni* "white person" (singular) and *abrofo* "white people" (plural).

[12] She even suspects that the popular address, "Sister", used for her on the street, is not meant to show acceptance and solidarity but is rather "a polite form of saying 'Miss' or 'Mrs.'" (199).

[13] The motion for *La loi de départementalisation* was famously proposed in 1946 by Aimé Césaire, then the youngest overseas deputy in the French National Assembly.

The political leadership, Condé observes, is hardly capable of actualizing the legitimate aspirations of the governed and the dreams of diasporan Africans like her. In a dirge-like refrain (55, 66–69, 84, 87, 102–109, 157, 164–65, 212, 279–280), she lambasts the one-party state that thrives on sycophancy and careerism, cronyism and nepotism, rank corruption and personality cult, allowing the new oligarchical caste to live in obscene opulence while the majority of the citizenry wallow in stupefying penury in the Ivory Coast, Guinea, Ghana, and Senegal. The quasi-hermetic demarcation is coterminous with Othering and socio-political exclusion:

> Every day, the [Guinean] nation was divided more and more into two groups separated by an impassable ocean of prejudice...Whereas we lined up outside the state-owned stores for a few kilos of rice, the privileged few treated themselves to caviar, *foie gras* and fine wines where everything was paid for in foreign currency. (70)

And yet, by means of symbolic violence, propaganda, and hegemonic menticide, the underprivileged are indoctrinated by the in-group to accept marginalization and victimization as normal: "We prefer being poor and free to being rich and enslaved" and to eternally "wait for happiness" (68). For Mohome (1976, 181–82),

> [T]he expression "one-party State" can be nothing other than a euphemism for an oligarchy... The one-party system creates a climate in which the party barons live in opulent comfort and security, and the ordinary members of the party on false hopes and plentiful slogans, while the non-party people live by constant intimidation and persecution.

He further avers, "A one-party system, a caste system and a racist system are serpents from the womb of the same mother--dictatorship" (Mohome 1976, 177). Thus defined, the post-independence, mono-partisan, and apartheid-like tyrannical order becomes an extension of the racist/colonial oppression from which the so-called nationalists and Pan-Africanists had sought to free Africa.

The organic link between colonialism and post-independence oppression is not lost on Ousmane Sembène, who becomes Condé's godfather in Senegal: "Unfortunately, our leaders…are the colonizers' best pupils. That's why independence and colonization are so similar" (127). His scorn echoes the sarcasm of Caristan, her Martinican colleague at Bingerville: "It [independence] won't change a thing! The Whites will continue to lay down the law. Like Senghor, this Houphouët-Boigny is their creature. I don't know how many times he's been a minister in the French government. He's a pawn" (45).

Apartheid-like segregation is also subversively mirrored in the neo-colonial educational environment that makes it possible for expatriate staff to despise their African colleagues, get paid three times the salary for the same work because of their skin colour, and live as sacred cows in Senghor's Negritude-oriented and "socialist" Senegal (280–81). Further, the violation of the basic dignity and rights of the citizen derives from political high-handedness. Military take-overs that are ostensibly carried out to redress this Othering do not, as the Ghanaian example illustrates, offer any redemption (251, 257).

Equally damning are Condé's brutal and energy-sapping experiences in Ghana, where she is raped and sexually objectified on countless occasions. Nor does Nkrumah's Ideological Institute, where she works as a French teacher, and which has been constructed as the intellectual heartbeat of Pan-Africanism, offer any solace, as she is sexually abused at will by its director. Of this institute, she writes, "As soon as I set foot in Winneba, I realized that I had been parachuted into an Africa totally different from the one I had known. In

this Africa, there was no place for me, for this was the Africa of the powerful and those who aspired to become powerful. The students didn't bother to attend my classes" (166–67). As she becomes increasingly disillusioned and deflated, a good friend sarcastically remarks, "Poor Nkrumah! Nobody cares about developing and modernizing Africa. His magnificent institute is too busy boozing, feasting and screwing" (172). This is against the backdrop of the flamboyant establishment of the institute in February 1961 to "assemble in a single place all the devotees of the African nationalist movements, so that they could teach and propagate the common ideals of pan-Africanism and socialism" (164). However, both African socialism and Pan-Africanism evoke glamour and the display of power, but very little by way of substance and achievement.

Negritude also disappoints Maryse Condé because of Senghor's francophilia (127) and Césaire's monolithic approach to Black unity. Negritude, or hallowed Blackness as anti-White racism, is rooted in racism (104–105). No less significant is the fact that Negritude's essentialism belongs to the same lexical range as mystification, immobility, fossilization, and commodification. Against this backdrop, reciprocal gestures of Othering by both West Africans and Diasporans lead her to this conviction: "Negritude was nothing but a wonderful dream. That colour meant nothing" (159). In short then, independence, African socialism, Pan-Africanism, and Negritude, shorn of their glitz, are presented, in a counter-discursive mode, as instruments of Othering.

Arguably, the most traumatizing of all Condé's West African experiences is her humiliating and unjustified deportation from Ghana, consequent upon the ousting of Nkrumah in the 1966 coup.[14] Accused of being a spy by the new pro-West government on account of her Guinean passport and earlier stay in Guinea, she suffers detention for four days under harrowing conditions. As a reflection of her unhomeliness and the brittleness of the Pan-Africanist project, she is later declared a *persona non grata* and given a twenty-four-hour reprieve to leave Ghana. By reason of its Kafkaesque dehumanization, the high-handed military order becomes nothing but Othering. She compares the excruciating pain of this deportation to the uniquely painful loss felt at the death of her mother. In both cases, a cord, a twine, a bond appears to have been irremediably broken. Both her mother and Africa have ceased to be a source. To aggravate her loss, her self-centred lover, Aidoo, finally breaks up with her on account of her four children, although she has sacrificed so much to sustain this four-year addictive and self-immolatory affair.

These sordid anxiogenic experiences, provoked by Othering, culminate in Condé's disavowal of Africa. At the end of her odyssey and in apparent response to Cullen's soul-searching question, *What is Africa to Me?*, she stresses that Africa is not worth her love (6). Such is the depth of her frustration that she later bitterly complains about the disenchantment that Negritude has deceptively lured her and other diasporan Blacks into:

> I question the fact that Negritude perpetuates the notion that all blacks are the same. This is a totally racist attitude inherited, in fact, from whites who believe that all niggers look alike… It is not true. Every black society is different from the others. The proponents of Negritude made a big mistake and caused a lot of suffering in the minds of West Indian people and black Americans as well. We were led to believe that Africa was the source … that we would find a home there, when it was not a home. Without Negritude we would not have experienced the degree of disillusionment that we did. (Maryse Condé, in Clark and Daheny 1989, 117)

[14] Kwame Nkrumah himself would become an exile in Guinea till the end of his life in 1972. Sékou Touré honoured him with the title of co-president of Guinea.

This, however, is not the example that Fanon, her new intellectual guide, sets for her. He condemns Negritude but remains a militant Pan-Africanist, ever committed, until his death, to the cause of his adopted country, Algeria. Fanon's and Condé's different experiences in Africa might well explain their different responses to Pan-Africanism and Othering.

5 And still more Othering

1970 was the year of Maryse Condé's decisive repudiation of Africa. Between the year in which she renounces Africa and 2012, when the French original, *La vie sans fards*, was published, she has written many works which feature Africa. However, consequent upon her disavowal, Africa has morphed into appropriated material, useful only for her literary creations: "Africa, finally subdued, would transform itself and slip, domesticated, into the folds of my imagination and be nothing more than the subject of numerous narratives" (290). The stress on the animalization and colonization, and therefore on the Othering of Africa, is stronger in the French original (Condé 2012, 334): the first meaning of "L'Afrique … domptée … soumise" is "Africa tamed and subjugated."

The trope of reification, animalization, and neocolonial possession of Africa by Maryse Condé is all the more striking as it is strategically, consciously, and conclusively placed by the author in the coda of this life story, at the very end of this confessional narrative. The import of the original French title and that of the translated English title seem to converge at this point: the writer's desire to lay bare the brutal truths of her life is coextensive with the revelation of the stark truth of how she has artistically and commercially exploited Africa for her own good. It is this tamed, domesticated, subdued, and subjugated Africa that she has appropriated, in a colonial project, to serve as the objectified reservoir for her literary works, from *Mort d'Oluwémi d'Ajumako*[15] (1973) to *La vie sans fards* (2012*)* / *What is Africa to Me*? (2017) through *Histoire de la femme cannibale* (2003) / *The Story of the Cannibal Woman* (2007). Seen in this context, it could be argued that the nature and direction of her writing and career, by her own admission, are premised upon Othering, one of the recurrent pivotal motifs of this autobiography. One observes that the novel starts on a note of Othering, of which Mamadou is a victim at the hands of Maryse Condé, and ends on another note of Othering, of which Africa is the pliable victim at the hands of the same Maryse Condé. This cyclical Othering thus constitutes the two poles within which Negritude and disillusionment are situated.

6 Conclusion

An attempt has been made in this article to examine the web of Othering embedded in colonialism, post-independence governments, intra-Black animosity, and patriarchy in Maryse Condé's autobiography, *What is Africa to Me?* Multifaceted, Othering in the form of racial profiling, reification, and marginalization in France and the French Overseas Departments compels her to see, in Aimé Césaire's sustained idealization of Africa, an escape route for collective and personal redemption, hence her decision to relocate to West Africa.

From an initial position of unalloyed trust in Negritude and Pan-Africanism as tools for the overall development of both the Black race and herself, Condé gradually evolves into a frustrated woman, on account of the homelessness and Othering that she experiences for some ten years in the Ivory Coast, Guinea, Senegal, and Ghana. Her disappointment in Africa's political elite, especially in Sékou Touré's Guinea, her objectification by proud androcentric members of the *Internationale* and the Pan-Africanist caste, as well as her brutal political and romantic repudia-

[15] "The Death of Oluwemi of Ajumako"

tion by pro-West oligarchs after Nkrumah's overthrow, drive her to question and reject her trust in the Pan-Africanist/Negritude ideal of a common destiny for all people of Black descent. Equally responsible for this disavowal is the Othering discernible in the mutual mistrust between Africans and Diasporans, including herself. While Othering is often presented from the perspective of the subaltern, in a postcolonial/feminist vein, to contest hallowed/official historical accounts by colonialists, nationalists, and males, it does not always exculpate the victim in this counter-discourse. As a result, Maryse Condé can be accused of Othering her husband, Mamadou, whose gentleness she admits abusing over a long period of time (20, 49, 55–60, 84, 135, 136, 202, 203, 205, 276) and also Africa, which she colonially appropriates in order to write some of her works. Ultimately, the opposing depictions of Othering in this autobiography show, as Terdiman (1985, 185) and Ashcroft (2001, 19) would argue, the impossibility of totally insulating the anti-hegemonic discourse/practice from the hegemonic discourse/practice being challenged.

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