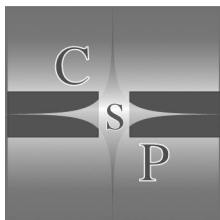


"Toubab La!" Literary Representations
of Mixed-Race Characters in the African Diaspora

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By

Ginette Curry



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For my husband Haccord Curry
and all the mixed-race people in the African diaspora

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements.....	ix
Introduction.....	1
PART I. THE UNITED STATES	
Chapter 1.....	36
James McBride's <i>The Color of Water</i> (1996): A Journey Beyond Black and White	
Chapter 2.....	57
Danzy Senna's <i>Caucasia</i> (1998): The Surviving Canary	
Chapter 3.....	70
Rebecca Walker's <i>Black White and Jewish: Autobiography of a Shifting Self</i> (2001): The Chameleon Experience	
PART II. THE FRENCH CARIBBEAN ISLANDS	
Chapter 4.....	116
Mayotte Capécia's <i>I am a Martinican Woman</i> (1948): "My father is Black, My Mother is Brown, and I, Am I White?" (Martinican Riddle)	
Chapter 5.....	147
Michèle Lacrosil's <i>Cajou</i> (1961): The Anti-Narcissus	
Chapter 6.....	174
Raphaël Confiant's <i>Ravines du Devant-Jour</i> (1993): Ethnostereotypes in Martinique	
PART III. THE BRITISH CARIBBEAN ISLANDS	
Chapter 7.....	200
The Racial Paradox of Derek Walcott in <i>What the Twilight Says</i> (1970), <i>Derek Walcott: Another life</i> (1973) and <i>Dream on Monkey Mountain</i> (1967)	

Chapter 8.....	226
Michelle Cliff's <i>Abeng</i> (1995): A Near-White Jamaican Woman's Quest for Identity	
PART IV. EUROPE	
Chapter 9.....	248
Marie N'Diaye's <i>Among Family</i> (1997): A Desperate Search for Caucasian Identity	
Chapter 10.....	277
Zadie Smith's <i>White Teeth</i> (2000): The Concept of Englishness in the 21 st Century	
Chapter 11.....	299
Bernardine Evaristo's <i>Lara</i> (1997): Transculturality in England: Oyinbo, Whitey, Morena, Nig Nog, Nigra!	
PART V. AFRICA	
Chapter 12.....	324
Monique Ilboudo's <i>Le Mal de peau</i> (2001): Colonization and Forced Hybridity	
Chapter 13.....	348
Bessie Head's <i>A Woman Alone: Autobiographical Writings</i> (1990): White-on-Black and Black-on-Black Racial Oppression in Southern Africa	
Chapter 14.....	367
Abdoulaye Sadjji's <i>Nini, Mulâtresse du Sénégal</i> (1947): "Toubab La!"	
Conclusion.....	397
Works Cited.....	432
Primary Sources.....	432
Critical Sources.....	437
Index.....	453

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INTRODUCTION

I heard “Toubab La!” many times during my stays in Senegal, West Africa. As I was trying to find an appropriate and symbolic title for my study of mixed-race characters in the literature of the African diaspora, I realized that it is one of the many terminologies applied to mixed-race people not only in the context of Senegal, West Africa, but also in other areas of the African diaspora.

Actually, in her second novel *Scarlet Song* (1986), Mariama Bâ defines the word “toubab” as the reflection of the way people from Senegal tend to perceive black Africans acting “white” in an African setting. She also uses the term for characters of mixed descent because of their Caucasian ancestry. In the following passage, her male protagonist Ousmane warns his cousin about the consequences of marrying a white woman, a “toubab:”

You don't realize that you are betraying your true self. You live like a *Toubab*, you think like a *Toubab*. If it weren't for your skin you wouldn't be an African any more. You know you're deserting our ranks, just when we need trained men.¹

Therefore, I have chosen the term “toubab,” the expression used in the title of this book, as the symbol of the many stereotypes and stigmatization black people of mixed heritage experience.

As a matter of fact, in *Media and Migration: Constructions of Mobility and Difference* (2001), the word “toubab” is defined as losing one's Senegalese identity and converting to western values as the following passage suggests:

The word *toubab* means ‘European’ and was the term used in Senegal originally to denote white French people; however, it has acquired a broader typological meaning, becoming a synonym for thinking and acting like a Westerner. This ‘Western’ behavior—putting money first, forsaking God, solidarity, tolerance, moderation, hospitality and dignity (the main Senegalese values)—becomes the whole negative symbol which summarizes all the faults condemned in Senegalese popular culture's view of the West.²

Etymologically, “toubab” is derived from “tabib” meaning “doctor” in Arabic. During the colonial period, many white people who settled in Francophone West Africa were doctors. Therefore, the term “toubab” was used to describe them. Also, “toubab” has other suggested derivations. In the Wolof language of Senegal, the verb “toub” means “to convert,” or “to change.” As a

matter of fact, when the French colonizers and missionaries converted African people, they changed their beliefs and customs.

The purpose of this study is to examine the different ways mixed-race characters are portrayed by contemporary male and female writers from the United States, the French and British Caribbean islands, Europe and Africa. Therefore, this interdisciplinary study is characterized by its intercontinental component in order to show not only how black people of the African diaspora are connected culturally and historically because of their common past of slavery and colonization but also how voluntary migrations due to social, economic and other unrelated factors, contributed to the development of a mixed-race African diasporic experience, especially in recent years.

I selected several authors from these five areas of the African diaspora to convey the diversity and complexity of mixed-race characters. Therefore, the book is divided in five sections covering the United States, the French and British Caribbean islands, Europe and Africa. Each chapter inside the sections includes a presentation of the historical and cultural settings of the various literary works that have been selected. Thus, it enables the readers to position the analysis of mixed-race characters within not only its specific cultural context but also within the broader discourse about mixed-races in the African diaspora.

Section one is an analysis of contemporary literary works from mixed-race American writers: James McBride's *The Color of Water* (1996), Danzy Senna's *Caucasia* (1998) and Rebecca Walker's *Black White and Jewish* (2001). It sheds a light on how people of mixed ancestry experience their hybridity in contemporary American society.

The second section of the book is about the portrayal of mixed-race characters by French Caribbean writers. Mayotte Capécia's *I Am A Martinican Woman* (1948), Michèle Lacrosil's *Cajou* (1961), and Raphaël Confiant's *Ravines du devant-jour* (1993) illustrate the condition of mixed-race characters in different areas of the French Caribbean, specifically, Martinique and Guadeloupe.

Section three is an analysis of writers from the British Caribbean islands of St. Lucia and Jamaica. The study of Derek Walcott's *What The Twilight Says* (1970), *Another Life* (1973) and *Dream on Monkey Mountain* (1967) as well as Michelle Cliff's *Abeng* (1995) reveals the plight of biracial and multiracial characters in an environment that historically, culturally and ethnically differs from the United States and the French Caribbean islands.

Section four is a study of the developing trend of mulatto literature in Europe. Specifically, more and more authors of mixed heritage write about their experiences in a European setting. For that purpose, I selected one writer from France and two from England: Marie Ndiaye's acclaimed novel *Among Family* (1997), Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) and Bernardine Evaristo's *Lara*

(1997). All of them reflect the complexity of being biracial in contemporary European societies.

Finally, the fifth section features writers from the African continent south of the Sahara who wrote about the mixed-race condition in different points in time. As a matter of fact, the book's outline reflects the route of the slave trade in reverse. The analysis of South African acclaimed author Bessie Head's *A Woman Alone, Autobiographical Writings* (1990), Monique Ilboudo's *Le Mal de peau* (2001) from Burkina Faso and Senegalese writer Abdoulaye Sadjji's *Nini, Mulâtresse du Sénégal* (1947) concludes this literary journey that highlights the diversity of mixed-race characters' experiences in the African diaspora.

Overall, this book is an examination of the way these characters look at the world and how the world looks at them, depending on their historical, socio-economic, cultural and ethnic background. They experience historical, economic, sociological and emotional realities in various cultural settings from either white or black people. In fact, they search for their identity in a world that evolves rapidly towards the erasure of authentic ethnicity.

This is the reason why each chapter includes the historical circumstances that shaped the emergence of a growing number of mixed-race people. They possess multidimensional identities within themselves while longing for racial belonging. Moreover, each section of this book provides an in-depth analysis of specific authors' novels. It is divided according to the various geographical areas where black people live and have mixed with whites.

Specifically, as a result of the slave trade and colonization, the mixing of races between blacks and whites started several centuries ago. In the past, hybridity was mostly the result of coerced relationships between white men and black women. It was caused by the power structure and the sexual exploitation of black women during slavery and colonization.

As a matter of fact, "hybridity" is a disputed term. It originates from the Latin "hybrida" which used to describe the offspring of a sow and a wild boar. As its etymology suggests, it has a negative connotation that was reinforced by 18th and 19th century western theorists who elaborated a discourse in which white Europeans were portrayed as superior to other races.

Furthermore, the geographical sections illustrated in this book span a number of overlapping literary genres. As a matter of fact, four of the literary works examined in this study are autobiographies: James McBride's *The Color of Water* (1996), Rebecca Walker's *Black White and Jewish* (2001), Raphaël Confiant's *Ravines du devant-jour* (1993) and Bessie Head's *A Woman Alone, Autobiographical Writings* (1990). James McBride's *The Color of Water* is a memoir that tells his story as a biracial child growing up the 1960s in the United States. At the same time, it addresses the current debates on race and identity in

American society. Through his informal way of writing, McBride's memoir reveals the experiences of growing up biracial in America. The interwoven stories of the author and of his white/Jewish mother convey two different points of view and racial experiences. Such narrative strategy reveals that McBride's search for his own identity is closely related not only to his African American origins but also to his mother's past as the daughter of a very conservative Jewish family. On the other hand, Rebecca Walker is trying to uncover her racial identity through her poignant memoir *Black White and Jewish* (2001). This finely crafted work reveals Walker's experiences as a biracial child and highlights how her parents' divorce resulted in her moving constantly from the black to the white and Jewish world. The thread of the narrative reflects not only the various environments she lived in but also the shifts in identities that such a family situation produced. Furthermore, Raphaël Confiant's *Ravines du devant-jour* (1993) is the account of the author's early childhood in the Martinican countryside. At six years old, he realizes that his light skin and specific features set him apart. For example, his female neighbor repeatedly uses Creole insults towards him and makes him aware at an early age of the profound Caribbean skin hierarchies as well as the complex and divisive social structure of Martinique in the 1950s. Also, Confiant uses the literary genre called memoir to show that the plight of the French Caribbean mulatto is a synthesis of various cultural and racial influences. Finally, Bessie Head's *A Woman Alone, Autobiographical Writings* (1990) is a compilation of miscellaneous pieces the author wrote in South Africa and Botswana. As the daughter of an unknown black father and a white mother, she recorded her traumatic experiences in the oppressive regime of Apartheid. Being categorized as a "coloured" woman, she endured ostracism by white as well as non-white people. Her autobiographical writings reflect how she fell in between the black and the white world. Many times, people refused to accept her because they perceived her as belonging to neither of them. *A Woman Alone, Autobiographical Writings* (1990) includes letters, essays and fictional sketches. In addition, a number of notes written by the author belong to the epistolary and journalistic genre.

Other selected texts such as Danzy Senna's novel *Caucasia* (1998), Michelle Cliff's *Abeng* (1995), and Mayotte Capécia's *I Am A Martinican Woman* (1948) are semi-autobiographical. For instance, Senna confided that she is not really interested in writing memoirs because she prefers drafting stories about fictional biracial characters like herself and what might happen to them.³ Michelle Cliff decided to write *Abeng* as a semi-autobiography in an attempt to chronicle her own childhood experiences in Jamaica as a near-white privileged young girl. She revealed that writing this book helped her reconstruct her own racial history that had been intentionally deconstructed since much of her past had been hidden from her when she was living in Jamaica. Finally, Mayotte

Capécia's book *I Am A Martinican Woman* is a fictionalized account of her life in Martinique in the first half of the 20th century. Its analysis reveals she was a more complex person than the character she actually portrays since many events in her real life seem to have been either omitted or altered. As this book will reveal, recent scholarly publications suggests that Capécia may not have been the real author of *I Am A Martinican Woman*.

Overall, these authors' memoirs, autobiographies and novels are all the more captivating because most of them know from personal experience what it is like to be mixed (except Abdoulaye Sadjì from Senegal and Monique Ilboudo from Burkina Faso). They have experienced marginalization, discrimination, ostracism for being racially different. Therefore, such texts also unveil these writers' private racial dilemmas.

Each section of this book covers not only the examination of different cultures but also of various points in time, from the colonization period in French West Africa and the French Caribbean islands, to the years of Apartheid in South Africa, and finally several contemporary African diasporic settings. Interestingly, a new genre of literature about race emerged in the 21st century. As a matter of fact, about six of the novels analyzed in this book have been published at the beginning of the 21st century in the United States, the French and British Caribbean islands, Europe and Africa.

By the very nature of its topic, this study intends to cross not only racial but also geographical and cultural boundaries. Thus, it provides a comparative platform for the analysis of works that are sometimes confined to national, ethnic or linguistic frames of references. For instance, though there is still no English translation of Raphaël Confiant's *Ravines du devant-jour* or of Monique Ilboudo's *Le Mal de peau*, the author of this book's translations of the French texts allow for a cross-cultural understanding of the characters portrayed. Also, as the title of this study implies, the continent of Africa is a central point of reference in the analysis of the various literary works.

According to Paul E. Lovejoy, the African diaspora is broadly defined as a group of individuals who can trace their origins as well as part of their identity to black Africa: "'Diaspora' has meaning only so long as the 'idea of an ancestral home' is kept alive."⁴ However, despite its dispersion, the African diaspora has an African component as well. Historically, the return of some former slaves and their descendants to their homeland ultimately redefined and reshaped the concept of African diaspora. For example, in 1822, the country of Liberia was founded by freed slaves from the United States as a result of widespread discrimination against black people in 19th century America. Ironically, according to Kurt Lee Kocher, in his article "A Duty to America and Africa: A History of the Independent African Colonization Movement in

Pennsylvania,”⁵ some white people supported black people’s removal to Africa because they feared racial mixing.

Even though the Transatlantic slave trade and the domestic slave trade may have been the most influential factors in the construction of the African diaspora, additional movements have to be taken into consideration in its formation and development.

For example, the analysis of British-born contemporary author, Bernardine Evaristo’s *Lara* reveals that during the early nineteenth century, Brazilian traders took African people from the Yoruba ethnic group in Nigeria to Bahia, Brazil in order to work in sugar plantations as slaves. They carried out a series of revolts and became emancipated in 1888. In her novel, she relates that her grandfather’s father was a slave in Brazil in the early part of the 19th century and that his son decided to return to Nigeria and settled in an African-Portuguese diasporic community in Lagos, the capital of Nigeria. Their return to Africa is another historical aspect of the African diaspora that appears to have been overlooked in the study of hybridity and black diasporic literatures.

Later, in the 20th and 21st centuries, many waves of voluntary black immigrants from different parts of the African diaspora also changed the fabric of the western world by bringing in their dynamic cultures and their diverse experiences. Indeed, the African diaspora’s history of migrations is more than ever evolving into a broadening of its initial conceptualization. It now includes varied heritages resulting from black people mixing with other races. The face of the African diaspora is changing as its migratory experiences produce new cultural and ethnic landscapes, the results of hybridization.

As a matter of fact, starting in the 20th century, more black people from the African diaspora have been claiming hyphenated identities. They created a new African diasporic terminology such as “African Americans,” “Afro-Caribbeans,” and “Afropeans,” a word used to describe mixed-race people living in Europe. Furthermore, in post-colonial Africa, the children of black people who mixed with whites or other races as a result of colonization, migration or circumstantial reasons are called “métis,” “colored,” “oyinbo,” depending on the culture they are from. Over the centuries, their children became also part of the African diaspora.

As suggested previously, the literary works studied in this book show that many of the selected authors are mixed-race themselves. James McBride, Danzy Senna and Rebecca Walker write about their experiences growing up as biracial in the United States. Derek Walcott and Michelle Cliff also recall how they lived their racial hybridity in the islands of St. Lucia and Jamaica. Mayotte Capécia, Michèle Lacrosil and Raphaël Confiant reveal how they experienced their multiracial heritages in the French Caribbean islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe. Black writers from Europe such as Marie Ndiaye and Bernardine

Evaristo have African fathers and European mothers and Zadie Smith is of Jamaican and British descent. Finally, South African writer Bessie Head was born from an unknown South African father and a white mother.

Furthermore, due to the role of Africa in the ongoing history of mixed-race people in the diaspora, the present book includes novels written by African writers. Historically, the arrival of the Europeans on the continent of Africa triggered a series of changes at the cultural, social, economic and racial levels. From the 8th century until around 1911, the Islamic slave traders from North Africa started the unfolding of the black diaspora experience. During their raids in sub-Saharan Africa, they took about fourteen million African slaves back to their Arab native countries.⁶

According to Ronald Segal, major differences exist between the Atlantic and Islamic slave trades: "In Islam, slavery was never the moral, political and economic issue that it was in the West, so there are fewer sources about its history."⁷ In the Islamic slave trade, blacks tended to be used in the households instead of as manual labor in the fields. In addition, African women were outnumbering African men. Therefore, they were sex objects and had mixed-race children by Arab men. In the meantime, a lot of male slaves were turned into eunuchs, so the latter had no offsprings.

On the other hand, according to a 2001 *BBC News* article, during the Atlantic slave trade, starting in the 17th through the 19th century, between ten and twenty eight million Africans were involuntarily removed from sub-Saharan Africa into the New World as slaves.⁸ As a result, the African population was dispersed all over the world. Millions of African people were enslaved by Europeans and worked in the mines and plantations of the New World.

Such historical event prompted the increase of forced sexual relationships between white men and slave women even though merchants and explorers had sexual relationships with African women before the slave trade existed. In the 19th and 20th century, this trend increased with the colonization of Africa and the Caribbean islands. As this study will show, the condition of mixed-race people in the different geographical areas of the African diaspora varies a great deal, due to historical, cultural, economic and social factors.

Interestingly, though Monique Ilboudo from Burkina Faso and Abdoulaye Sadjí from Senegal are not mixed authors, their portrayal of the condition of their mixed-race characters is quite insightful. Through them, they have been able to convey some of the rich African cultural traditions that have been sometimes transformed and enriched by other cultures through the process of hybridization. Black diasporic mixed-race people reshaped their inherited African cultures into new geographical landscapes, therefore forging a new brand of individuals.

In the United States, early novels about mixed-race characters appeared in the literary scene before the 20th century. For example, mulatto characters are featured in African American slave narratives. This tradition spanned about twenty years, from 1840 to 1860 while the romantic literary movement had a major impact on American literature. In 1842, Caucasian writer Lydia Maria Child introduced the “Tragic Mulatto” literary character with the publication of two short stories entitled “The Quadroons” (1842) and “Slavery’s Pleasant Homes” (1843) in which she developed the theme of the black female slave being sexually abused by white slaveowners.

Later, in 1845, *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* by mulatto writer Frederick Douglass was one significant African American literary publication representing that period. The readers discover the harshness with which children of mixed-race parentage were treated during slavery. For example, Douglass relates that his mother, Harriet Bailey, was a black slave and his father, Captain Anthony, was his first white master. In the 19th century, mulattoes were the progeny of white men raping their black female slaves. He adds that the mulatto children of such parentage were treated very badly in addition to being sold in some cases “out of deference” for the white master’s white wife since they were reminders of their husband’s infidelity. At that time, mulattoes were the living testimony of a brutal system of oppression and exploitation in which white men subjugated black women through their power and sex.

It is estimated that about sixty slave narratives were published before 1865. In *Passing and the Rise of the African American Novel* (2001), Giulia Fabi shows that early African American authors such as William Wells Brown, Frank J. Webb, Charles W. Chesnutt, Sutton E. Griggs, James Weldon Johnson, Frances E. W. Harper and Edward A. Johnson altered the traditional literary representations of blackness in America and used the theme of mixed-race characters’ “passing” to debunk the myths about racial purity and traditional black and white color line.

In 1867, black abolitionist William Wells Brown published *Clotelle, or The Colored Heroine, A Tale of the Southern States*. This novel is symbolic of the African American southern fiction of that time. Its tragic near-white mulatta drowns herself in the Potomac River before the White House after educating emancipated slaves. Other novels such as Frances Ellen Watkins Harper’s *Iola Leroy, or Shadows Uplifted* (1892), and Emma Dunham Kelley-Hawkins’ *Megda* (1891), also reflect the traumas that mixed-race female characters had to experience during slavery.

Later, during the Harlem Renaissance, in the 1920s and 1930s, the portrayal of mulatto characters evolved from the shackles of slavery and their repressed histories to the possibility of escaping the stigma of blackness through

racial “passing.” Nella Larsen’s *Quicksand* (1928), and *Passing* (1929), as well as Jessie Fauset’s *There is Confusion* (1924), *Plum Bun: A Novel without a Moral* (1928), *The Chinaberry Tree* (1931) and *Comedy American Style* (1933) are some of the novels that belong to this category. As Hazel V. Carby argues in *Reconstructing Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist* (1987), the figure of the mulatto in literature is “...a narrative device of mediation, representing both an exploration of the relationship between the races and an expression of the relationship between the races.”⁹ However, the phenomenon of “passing” led to the portrayal of mulatto characters deeply affected by the pathology of self-hatred. The themes of suicide and sexual perversion, mental instability are also present in such literature. On the other hand, Sterling Brown comments that white writers of that period developed the theme of the “Tragic Mulatto” in a different way. According to them, the tragedy of their life was due to their biological background. Specifically, they inherited the contrasting characteristics of the black and white races that led them to an unhappy life.¹⁰

In *The Ways of White Folks* (1934), Langston Hughes also depicts mulatto characters entangled in a web of complex and ambiguous racial situations, specifically in his story “Father and Son.” Furthermore, Hughes developed the theme of the “Tragic Mulatto” in his early publications such as *The Weary Blues* (1926), and *Fine Clothes to the Jew* (1927). In 1935, his play *Mulatto* was produced on Broadway. Later, in 1952, Hughes wrote another short story entitled “African Morning.”

In the more recent years, Albert French published a novel entitled *Holly* (1995) that deals with the theme of forbidden interracial love. Also, Toi Derricotte’s *The Black Notebooks: An Interior Journey* (1997), is a literary memoir that reveals the author’s painful experience of “passing” for white while living in an affluent area of New York with her darker-skinned husband.

In contemporary America, the understanding of how mixed-race people are portrayed in literature requires the analysis of the context explaining the history of racial mixing between blacks and whites and the lasting effects on mixed-race people. In a recent *Time Magazine* article, “Is Obama Black Enough?” Ta-Nehisi Paul Coates points out that the African American politician is biracial but unlike the average African Americans, he has a direct connection with Africa because his father is from Kenya. Coates argues that his biracial identity helped him build a sizable following across people of all races, including blacks and whites. However, he adds that it also made a lot of people question his authenticity as a black man in America.¹¹ As a matter of fact, in the United States, the notion of being black seems to be perceived differently than in Africa. According to Debra Dickerson: “Black, in our political and social

vocabulary, means those descended from West African slaves.”¹² Such assertion reflects how some American people look at biracial people.

On the other hand, Pia Thielmann’s *Hotbeds: Black-White Love in Novels from the United States, Africa, and the Caribbean* (2004) argues that in the French Caribbean islands, the status of mixed-race people is quite different. The selected literary works from Martinique and Guadeloupe reveal that mixed-race characters are confronted to a class-related problem resulting in racial stratification since “class hierarchy...can be observed as paralleling shades of skin colour.”¹³ In addition, in a recent publication entitled *Le métissage dans la littérature des Antilles françaises: le complexe d’Ariel* (2005) Chantal Maignan-Claverie reveals the centrality of the concept of “métissage” (the state of being mixed) in French Caribbean literature.¹⁴ It is the dominant motif in its authors’ quest for French Caribbean identity. Such theme evolved throughout the years from the times of slavery and the colonial period to the present.

According to her, the French Caribbean literary discourse can be divided in four phases. From 1806 until 1848 (the year of the abolition of slavery), novels about mixed-race characters were authored by white colonizers portraying the mulatto as a romantic and denigrated character. The second period, from 1848 to 1914, corresponded to the end of the plantation system and the decline of the publications of writings reflecting the colonizers’ perspectives in the literary scene. It was progressively replaced by a new wave of mulatto writers who reproduced the archetypal portrayal of mixed-race characters from the colonial period. The third phase spanned several years between 1914 and 1946. This period coincided with the emergence of the Negritude movement initiated by Léopold Sédar Senghor from Senegal, Léon Damas from Guyana and Martinican poet Aimé Césaire. This literary and political movement was developed in the 1930s and affirmed the shared African heritage of the people of the African diaspora. As a result, the mulatto ideology was debunked. One publication reflecting such affirmation of the “Negro” values is Martinican author Aimé Césaire’s *Notebook of a Return to the Native Land* (2001) in which the mulatto is portrayed as the main agent rejecting the principles of a common black identity. Finally, the last phase started in 1946 until 1996. This period heralded a change of political status in the French Caribbean islands, from colonial territories to French departments. According to Maignan-Claverie, during that time, the notion of “antillanité” appeared on the literary scene. Around 1950, Edouard Glissant created this concept. A staunch critic of Negritude, he sought to root Caribbean identity within the context of the Caribbean, instead of looking to Africa for a main source of identification like Aimé Césaire did. As a matter of fact, during the second half of the 20th century, Francophone Caribbean literature started to reflect a different post-colonial racial reality.

Later, in 1970, another literary movement emerged under the name of "créolité." It materialized in the publishing of *L'Eloge de la créolité (In Praise of Creoleness)*, 1989) by Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant. The book was a response to the inadequacies of the concept of Négritude.

The word "créolité" or "creoleness" describes the heterogeneous nature of the French Caribbean islands. These authors celebrate the multiracial identities of Caribbean people resulting from the mixing of African, indigenous Caribbean, European, East Indian and Chinese cultures. They define "créolité" by stating that it is "an annihilation of false universality, of monolingualism, and of purity."¹⁵ Actually, "créolité" seeks to decrease the dominance of French as the main language of the French Caribbean and valorizes the use of Antillean Creole in the literary, cultural and academic sphere.

In the French Caribbean islands, several black and mixed-race authors have written novels in which hybrid characters are portrayed. Two of them are Martinican writers Mayotte Capécia and Raphaël Confiant whose novels are the objects of this study. Another Guadeloupean writer is Suzanne Lacascade. Her novel *Claire-Solange, âme africaine* (1924) has been useful in the analysis of mixed-race characters in the French Caribbean. It is the story of a mulatto heroine, Claire-Solange, who is the daughter of a French colonial officer and a deceased colored West Indian woman. Despite her claims that she is "African," she is not only alienated from the African continent but also not accepted by the white world. Furthermore, one particularly relevant publication of the 1970s is Simone and André Schwarz-Bart's *La Mulâtresse Solitude (A Woman Named Solitude)*, 1972) from Guadeloupe. It is a story taking place during the slave trade and featuring a mulatto woman conceived on a slave ship and struggling to keep her dignity. The novel shows the resilient nature of the mixed-race heroine who survives against the odds. Also, Jacqueline Manicom's *Mon examen de blanc* (1972) reveals how mulatto characters have internalized the myth of black racial inferiority. Specifically, Madévie, the main mulatto female character, is described as an exotic and sexual being. She perpetuates the negative stereotypes associated with mixed-race women who would give up everything to become white. Such characters think that black people from Guadeloupe are French and that Africans are savages. Finally, in her acclaimed novels, Maryse Condé portrays several mixed-race characters. In *A Season in Rihata* (1988), the mulatto character Marie-Hélène is from Guadeloupe. She meets an African man named Zek. She lives unhappy in a fictitious African state because its African community does not accept her. On the other hand, in *I, Tituba, Witch of Salem* (1992), the mulatto heroine is presented as subversive. She defies white society by fostering a slave revolt in a plantation and by practicing witchcraft. Also, in *Windward Heights* (1998), Cathy, the mulatto protagonist, falls in love with

Rayze, an African man. However, she rejects him and embraces the white world by marrying a Creole plantation owner.

On the other hand, in the British Caribbean islands, the cultural tradition of storytelling was a popular practice among the African slaves. Over the years, it evolved into a literary form. Therefore, the earliest Anglophone Caribbean literature was characterized by proverbs, riddles, and folktales. However, the history of Anglophone Caribbean literature is also reflected in slave narratives that convey the hardships Africans experienced in the hands of white people during the Atlantic slave trade. For example, Mary Prince's *The History of Mary Prince, a West Indian Slave* (1831) relates the life of a female slave from Bermuda. Also, *The Narrative of Ashton Warner* (1831) describes the trials of a female slave from St. Vincent. In addition, "The Interesting Narrative of Maria Jones" (1848) is the portrayal of a woman born in West Africa in 1777 and enslaved in St. Vincent, and later on in Trinidad. "The Narrative of Archibald Monteith, a Jamaican Slave" (1853) shows the intolerable conditions of the slaves in Jamaica. Furthermore, Maxwell Philip's *Emmanuel Appadocca or Blighted Life: A Tale of the Boucaneers* (1854) is considered as the first novel to appear in Anglophone Caribbean literature. It embodies a literary tradition of resistance against slavery and colonialism.

In the 19th century, Jean-Baptiste Philippe's *Free Mulatto* (1824) is considered as one of the earliest works in Anglophone Caribbean literature. He describes his fight for black people's civil rights when they were still enslaved in the New World, particularly in Trinidad. His book is a plea to the colonial government of that time. As a free-colored man owning slaves, he fought for their freedom and tried to define the place of the mulatto in his society.

Also, one of the earliest autobiographical accounts of mixed-race British Caribbean authors is Mary Seacole's *The Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Seacole in Many Lands* initially published in 1857. It relates her experiences as a freeborn mulatto from Jamaica. As a businesswoman and a nurse, she traveled to several countries in the Caribbean islands and Europe. In the book, she confides to her readers that she inherited her energy and vitality from her Scottish army officer father and her healing powers from her free black Jamaican mother. She succeeded against the odds during the Victorian period. However, in her autobiography, she also addresses the stigmatization of mulattoes in the 19th century Caribbean islands. Specifically, around 1852, at a dinner in Panama celebrating her move to the frontier town of Gorgona as a storekeeper, she recalls a white American man giving a speech in which he blessed her as the best "yellow woman" God ever created. He told his audience: "She's so many shades removed from being entirely black...if we could bleach her by any means we would...and thus make her acceptable in any company as

she deserves to be.”¹⁶ She responded that she was not ashamed of her black skin and let her white listeners know that she was proud of being of mixed descent.

The second half of the 19th century was also characterized by the publication of poems such as Horatio Nelson Huggins’ epic *Hiroona: A Historical Romance in Poetic Form* (c 1885) recounting the Black Carib War against the English in St. Vincent at the end of the 19th century. In the early 20th century, Jamaican poet and novelist Thomas MacDermot’s *Beeka’s Buckra Baby* (1907) (whose pseudonym was Tom Redcam) dominated the Anglophone literary scene. The book is the portrayal of peasant life in the British West Indies. Interestingly, early 20th century British Caribbean literature reflects the ingrained intolerance of colonial whites about interracial relationships. For example, Stephen Nathaniel Cobham’s *Rupert Gray: A Tale of Black and White* (1907) describes the love affair of Rupert Gray, a black accountant, and Gwendolyn Serle, the daughter of a white businessman in Trinidad. The novel portrays the tragedy that such courtship brings about in a narrow-minded, racially biased Trinidadian setting. In addition, Cobham shows the rising racial consciousness of black Caribbeans in their colonial environment.

After 1929, the British Caribbean islands witnessed a rise in the social and political awareness of their population. This transformation reflected in the literary works of that period. Trinidadian writer Alfred Mendes was a prominent West Indian literary figure during the 1930s. His novel *Black Fauns* (1935) is an exploration of identities clashing with the heterosexual norm. His prose is representative of the anti-establishment fiction of the 1920s and 1930s in the Caribbean. On the other hand, C. L. R. James’ *Minty Alley* (1936) is a critical examination of class issues in West Indian society. In addition, the birth of modern Anglophone Caribbean poetry started around 1940 and ended in 1960.

In the 1950s, the theme of the divided self in mulatto characters has been developed by Guyanan authors such as Edgar Mittelholzer in *The Life and Death of Sylvia* (1953), and Jan Carew in his novel *The Wild Coast* (1958). During the colonial and post-colonial periods, several authors emerged on the literary scene. Their main focus was to examine the impact of colonialism on black Caribbean people in its relation to identity. V. S. Naipaul, Vic Reid, Roger Mais Selvon, George Lamming and Wilson Harris wrote about the black Caribbeans’ cultural and racial identities. In the 1970s, Derek Walcott and Kamau Brathwaite became two prominent poetic voices. Walcott’s mixed-race heritage enabled him to articulate in his literary works the complexity and ambiguity of the British Caribbean mulatto experience. Also, in her novels, contemporary Jamaican-born Michelle Cliff portrays Caribbean mixed-race characters who resist racial labeling and claim their belonging to “blackness.”

In addition, contemporary female mixed-race poets such as Lorna Goodison, Grace Nichols and Maxine Omowale Maxwell express the position

of mixed-race people as one of privilege and ambiguity. In “Guinea Woman” from *I Am Becoming My Mother* (1986), Jamaican poet Goodison seeks her ethnic roots and draws on her African and European ancestries. Guyanan poet Grace Nichols’ “Nanny” (1990) as well as Trinidadian Marine Omowale Maxwell’s “Caribbean Women Birth Song” (1990) shows that they both find an answer to their identity quest by first situating themselves in blackness.

In sub-Saharan Africa, mixed-race people are sometimes seen as having inherited the negative stereotypes related to white people during the colonial and post-colonial period. Since this book analyzes also the way mixed-race characters are portrayed in selected African novels, some key concepts in African literary history need to be revisited. Specifically, in West Africa, Léopold Sédar Senghor is not only one of the founding fathers of Negritude, he also became an advocate of racial mixing and predicted that the future of mankind is in “métissage.” Furthermore, he broadened the concept by claiming that it is not only a matter of ethnicity but also a cultural phenomenon.

Indeed, nowadays, the face of Africa is changing. In their literary works, a lot of African authors reexamine the notions of race. They redefine the concept of hybridity and give it new literary forms.

As a matter of fact, the theme of interracial marriages has been developed in a number of African novels dating back to the late 1950s. For example, Cameroonian Ferdinand Oyono’s *Houseboy* (1966) explores interracial sexual relationships between colonial men and African women and implies that such unions were another form of colonial domination of Africans by white people. Also, in Cameroon, Rémy Médou Mvomo’s *Mon amour en noir et blanc* (1971), Mongo Beti’s *Les deux mères de Guillaume Ismaël Dzawatama, futur camionneur* (1983), *La revanche de Guillaume Ismaël Dzawatama* (1984), as well as Thérèse Kuoh-Moukouri’s *Rencontres essentielles* (1968) feature interracial sexual relationships between white and black characters.

On the other hand, in *Critical Perspectives on Mongo Beti* (1998), Odile Cazenave’s “The White Woman in Interracial Couples in Mongo Beti’s Dzawatama Novels” shows that in Senegalese author Ousmane Sembène’s *O Pays, mon beau peuple* (1957), the white woman Isabelle has a mulatto child who becomes the living symbol of her experience of interraciality. When her husband Faye dies, she stays in Senegal so that her mother-in-law Ramatoulaye can enjoy her grandson.¹⁷

In that respect, Odile Cazenave’s *Rebellious Women: The New Generation of Female African Novelists* (2000) has been instrumental to this study because it examines the theme of mixed-race marriages in African literature and how the white woman, “the toubabesse,” is portrayed in her relationship with her African husband and the African community. She

concludes that the children of these white women become new marginal characters. They are stigmatized because they represent a race and culture that are no longer authentically African.¹⁸ Furthermore, mulatto characters play an important part in several 20th century African novels. For example, in Camara Laye's *L'enfant noir* (1953), Marie is portrayed as a beautiful mulatto woman. In the Central African Republic, Andrée Blouin, who was born in 1921 from a Banziri mother and a French father, wrote her autobiography: *My Country, Africa: Autobiography of the Black Passionaria* (1983) in which she chronicles the major events of her life as a mulatto woman during the colonial period. Placed in an orphanage, she only met her parents when she became an adult. Also, Henri Lopes, a mixed-race writer from Belgium Congo distinguished himself with the publication of *Le Lys et le Flamboyant* (1997) in which the word "métis" is celebrated. He gives a positive image of mixed-race characters in an African setting. Likewise, Williams Sassine from Guinea is another mulatto writer whose publications *Wirriyamu* (1976) and *Mémoire d'une peau* (1998) have been helpful in understanding the phenomenon of racial "otherness" in Francophone Africa. The son of a Lebanese father and Guinean mother, he depicts the problematization of racial categories in West Africa. Specifically, he analyzes how the color of one's skin, such as the albino's, can create ambiguous situations in a postcolonial African society where racial difference is not really tolerated.

Also, in Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure* (1962), Samba Diallo, the main protagonist, describes the charming quadroon woman he meets when he visits the Pierre-Louis family. However, in Senegalese literature, many mixed-race characters are represented as outcasts. Black men marrying white women appear to be stigmatized by their traditional community. For example, though there has been an increase in mixed-race couples since the colonial period, Mariama Bâ explains in *Scarlet Song* (1981) that such unions have been mainly caused by self-interest. She portrays her male character Ousmane as a weak, egocentric and opportunistic protagonist.¹⁹ However, she acknowledges that the habit of marrying white women did not stop with the independence of Senegal. As a matter of fact, Ousmane is aware of his country folks' negative stereotypes related to mixed-race couples and to his marriage with Mireille. Bâ stresses that according to popular belief, white women are not meant to marry black men because they change their husband's mentality, customs and habits. According to her character Yaye Khady (Ousmane's mother), they westernize their spouse and cut them off from their cultural roots. They are intruders in the African world and portrayed as "she-devils."²⁰ In addition, their offsprings are most of the time brought up like white children and may end up being more racist towards black people.²¹ Ousmane concludes the mixing of races is detrimental to the future of Africa because it leads to the deculturalization and

exploitation of African people. Such alienation is translated into the following traditional Wolof proverb stating that a man has only one intestine and he who marries a white woman will have it burst because he will be under her control.²² By extension, their mulatto children are also seen by Senegalese society as people who betray their true self. They represent cultural and racial alienation in the eyes of those who think that being “toubab” is not only a way of life. It is also the result of the colonization of the mind. Though Mariama Bâ acknowledges that some mixed-race people are totally integrated into their African environment, she also concludes that mixed-race marriages lead to the loss of the African soul. Therefore, it is not surprising that at the end of *Scarlet Song*, Gorgui, the son of Ousmane and his French wife Mireille, is rejected by both the white world of Mireille’s family and the black world of Ousmane’s community. He is called “toubab” or “Gnouloule Khessoule” and ends up being murdered by his own mother who cannot bear Ousmane’s lack of affection towards him as well as black people constantly sneering at his hair and complexion. Gorgui’s death seems to reflect a strong indictment of the future of mixed-race people in an African traditional context. They cannot be integrated to the white or black world. Therefore, they must disappear. In the novel, Mireille explains the significance of “Gnouloule Khessoule:” “One of her pupils had told her the words meant, ‘Not black! Not white!’... ‘There is no place in this world for the *Gnouloule Khessoule!* A world of filthy bastards! A world of liars! You, my child, you’re going to leave this world! *Gnouloule Khessoule!*’”²³

Ironically, Caribbean writer Myriam Warner-Vieyra’s novel *Juletane* (1987) presents a mixed-raced woman from Guadeloupe who marries a Senegalese man. Though she is a black woman, she is also called “Toubabesse” because she comes from Guadeloupe, an island where the culture is considered by Senegalese people to be more French than African. She is stigmatized by Senegalese society because in their eyes, she is deprived of ethnic and cultural authenticity. The clash between the canon of racial identity in Senegalese culture and the ethnic realities that mixed-race people experience in their daily lives creates a sense of loss. They are portrayed as anomalies trapped in their racial and cultural dualism. Therefore, mixed-race characters are cast as sociocultural and racial exiles in this particular African context.

Also, in South Africa, several black as well as white authors tackled the issues of interracial relationships such as Andre Brink and Alan Paton. However, the selection of Bessie Head’s autobiographical writings stems from the decision to analyze writings that are representative of how mixed-race authors experienced the policy of Apartheid as opposed to non-mixed authors such as Nadine Gordimer, Doris Lessing and Daphne Rooke who also wrote about interracial relationships in segregated South Africa. In order to understand Bessie Head’s works, it was important to review the literature written by

contemporary “coloured” or mixed-race writers from South Africa to see the similarities and differences in the treatment of specific racial themes.

Arthur Nortje distinguished himself among the many South African writers of the 20th century. His mother was “coloured” and his father Jewish. In *Dead Roots* (1973), he reveals the plight of mixed-race people during the Apartheid regime. On the other hand, Richard Rive, another “coloured” author, wrote short stories. In *Advance, Retreat: Selected Short Stories* (1990), he describes how mixed-race people progressively acquired racial and political consciousness in South Africa. On the other hand, “Resurrection” is the story about the funeral of a dark-skinned mixed-race woman having a child who turns out to be white. Though Richard Rive was known for rejecting the racial divisions of Apartheid, he was able to articulate the trials and tribulations “coloured” people used to experience in his segregated society.

Other literary publications have been inspirational for the writing of the chapter about Bessie Head, such as Andries Walter Oliphant’s *Essential Things: An Anthology of New South African Poetry* (1992). Furthermore, James Matthews’ 1997 novel *The Party is Over* is set in the coloured area of Cape Town during the 1960s. Donato Mattera is also a South African mixed-race writer whose grandfather was Italian and whose grandmother was a Xhosa woman from the Cape. In his poetry, he shows how black people have been removed from certain areas of South Africa during Apartheid. The reading of *Memory is the Weapon* (1987), *Gone with the Twilight: A Story of Sophiatown* (1987) and *Azanian Love Songs* (1994) helped understand the author’s perspective on black and mixed-race South African people’s oppression. Also, Zoe Wicomb’s literary works, especially her third book *Playing in the Light* (2006) addresses racial issues experienced by Marion, a white-looking woman, who discovers that she is the daughter of a couple classified as “coloured” in South Africa. Finally, in *Poetry and Protest: A Dennis Brutus Reader* (2006), Dennis Brutus’ poems such as “The Sounds Begin Again,” “Sharpeville” and “Sequence for South Africa” were major sources of inspiration for the analysis of Bessie Head’s autobiographical writings.

In the European context, the present analysis focuses on mixed-race characters portrayed by mulatto authors from France and England. Specifically, since the mid-1980s, multiple discourses on French identity have emerged with the significant development of a mixed-race population from the African diaspora. For example, Dina Sherzer’s “French Colonial and Post-Colonial Hybridity: Condition Métisse” (1996) features interviews from prominent mixed-race people in contemporary French society.²⁴ They are referred to as “métis” which comes from the Latin “mixus.” As a matter of fact, the first discourse about “métissage” follows Senegalese poet and former president Léopold Sédar Senghor’s approach. He defined it as a cultural phenomenon.

According to ethnologist François Laplantine and to linguist Alexis Nouss, “métissage” is not only a biological factor, it is a state in which one is transformed by the other and it is the contrary of “completeness.”²⁵ Therefore, it implies the fluidity of the “métis condition” constantly moving from one pole to the other, due to the ambivalent nature of “métis” people who are neither black nor white.²⁶ Another approach about “métissage” was articulated in R. Toumson’s *Mythologie du métissage* (1998). In this book, the concept is deconstructed. “Métissage” is an ideology that leads to the negation of alterity because it reflects too many etymological ambiguities. Toumson concludes that it is a myth.²⁷

Another discourse about “métissage” is historical and anthropological. Gruzinski’s *La pensée métisse* (1999) is an attempt to trace the phenomenon of “métissage” historically by clarifying the problematic of cultural contacts and inviting a reevaluation of the history of humanity.²⁸ On the other hand, Jean-Loup Amselle’s *Logiques métisses, anthropologie de l’identité en Afrique et ailleurs* (1990) is a treaty in which “métissage” is analyzed from an anthropological perspective that emphasizes the original syncretism of the concept and its “indistinct” nature.²⁹ However, in his 2001 publication *Branchement, anthropologie de l’universalité des cultures*, Amselle is led to question the limits of the original syncretism of “métissage.” He therefore develops a metaphorical thematic approach of “branchement” stressing the constant interdependence of cultures that result from historical globalizations.³⁰ In addition, Pierre Bouvier reaffirms the complexity and ambiguity of mixed-race people in his latest study *La socio-anthropologie* (2002).³¹ Finally, *The Color of Liberty: Histories of Race in France* (2003) is a collection of essays including an extensive study of the history of race in France and how the “other” is represented in French literature.

Undoubtedly, France’s colonial past has shaped its racial ideology. To date, the first prominent 19th century mixed-race writer in France was Alexandre Dumas. His biographers traced his origins to a white grandfather of noble descent and a grandmother who was a black slave. Alexandre Dumas’ father was therefore a mulatto who served during Napoleon’s campaigns. He is well known for his historical novels. However, living in a French society that did not acknowledge his position as mixed, he faced racism during his life as demonstrated by a comment he made, answering to a white man who mentioned he had negro blood in him: “Oui... mon père était un mulâtre, mon grand-père un nègre et mon arrière-grand-père un singe... Ma famille commence où la vôtre finit!”³² [Yes...my father was a mulatto, his father a Negro, and his father a monkey... My ancestry began where yours ends!]. This statement not only reflects the pervasive racist ideology of that time but also how it affected him. His short novel *Georges* (1843) is the story of a half-French mulatto who is the

victim of colonialism and racism in 19th century France. Also, in *The Count of Monte-Cristo* (2003), he becomes an advocate of emancipation by portraying Edmond Dantès being falsely imprisoned. Although he suffered racial discrimination during his life, he is now recognized as one of the prominent French writers of his time.

However, in the 21st century, innovative literary reflections about the meaning of “Frenchness” have emerged with a new generation of mulatto writers such as Sylvie Kandé, Vera Atchou and Marie Ndiaye. Sylvie Kandé’s *Lagon, Lagunes* (2000) is a book written in poetic prose about the mixed-race experience in Africa, Europe and America based on memory, anecdotes and multiple portraits. Kandé is also the editor of the proceedings of a colloquium held at New York University on “métissage” (mixed-race identity) in a Francophone context and entitled *Discours sur le métissage, identités métisses: En quête d’Ariel* (1999). This compilation of articles focuses on the centrality of mixed-race people in the African diaspora as a result of globalization. Also, Vera Atchou, like Sylvie Kandé has an African father and French mother. In her newly published collection of personalities’ interviews and portraits, *Métis et mélanges* (2000), she provides the readers with an original approach of the way mixed-race people live their plural identities in Europe. In her article “French Colonial and Post-Colonial Hybridity,” (1996) Dina Sherzer argues that in France, a number of recent novels and autobiographies have been focusing on mixed-race identity.³³ These literary productions show a new construction of hybridity.

Specifically, in her novels, French-born Marie Ndiaye has been able to convey the experience of being “métis,” in contemporary France, giving more psychological depth to her stories. She also explains that in the ironic title *En Famille (Among Family)*, (1997), she describes the racist attitudes of French society symbolized by the rejection and exclusion of non-white French citizens from mainstream French culture. Also, in her play *Papa doit manger (Daddy Has to Eat)*, (2003), Marie Ndiaye addresses the problems of contemporary interracial unions between African men and French women in France and how it can affect the development of their mixed-race children. It is an insightful portrayal of the social, political and moral dimensions of “métissage” in French society.

Additionally, this book also examines English-born and mixed-race writers from contemporary England. It reveals that the concept of “Englishness” is articulated differently. In *Mixed-Race Studies: A Reader* (2004), two dominant discourses about race in England are mentioned.³⁴ The first one is that of English nationalism based on a mythical purity of white English people. It stems from the Victorian anthropological discourses advocating white superiority over Africans as illustrated by Goldberg (1993)³⁵

and Hannaford (1996).³⁶ Such ideology reflected a biracialist view consisting in negative portrayals of “authentic blacks” and positive representations of “whiteness.” Furthermore, in 1859, the publication of Charles Darwin’s *The Origin of the Species: The Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* confirmed the prevalence of the pervading racialist ideology of 19th century England and its empire. Non-white people from the Americas, Asia, the Caribbean islands and Africa were excluded from the “superior races” in England’s racio-cultural hierarchy. In addition, this discourse did not consider the grey areas where mixed-race people belong. The proof of such a reality is that at that time, very few words could describe people of mixed descent. As a result, despite its evolution towards a multicultural society, England has to some extent internalized the Victorian discourse.

In the contemporary novels of Zadie Smith and Bernadine Evaristo examined in this book, the vocabulary describing mixed-race characters is scanty, stereotypical and very racialized, suggesting that they are still labeled according to the phenotypic criteria of the 19th century Victorian era. Terms such as “Nig Nog,” “Whitey,” “Morena,” and “Nigra” reflect racially polarized and biracialized stereotypes that are still part of everyday discourse in contemporary transcultural London.

On the other hand, the simultaneous development of the English-African diaspora in England has led to the deterritorialization of “Englishness” since some people of African origin have kept their ties with the country they come from. Such phenomenon has also been intensified by the one-drop rule consisting in designating as black any person with known African ancestry.³⁷

As a matter of fact, emerging mixed-race writers from England are able to transgress the Manichean discourse between blacks and whites. They propose a new way to look at the concept of racial belonging. They also question the theories of biological and cultural hybridities that have been the backdrop of the English discourse on racial identities in 19th and 20th century England.

As a result, mixed-race contemporary English authors portray another idea of “home.” For example, in Bernadine Evaristo’s novel-in-verse *Lara*, the main character has an ambivalent sense of place since her mother is English of Irish origins, her father is Yoruba from Nigeria and her father’s ancestors lived in Brazil as a result of the slave trade. Therefore, she can claim three territories, two of which (Africa and Brazil) appear as misplaced longings.

Contemporary mixed-race authors’ redefinition of “Englishness” is the result of the past politics of imperial and colonial domination of the United Kingdom. As a matter of fact, sociologist Paul Gilroy’s *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1992) argues that black identity in Europe is the result of an ongoing historical process of migrations across the Atlantic. It is a new racial, political and cultural formation in modern Europe.