Why come back?
Sense of Place and Senegalese Student Migration

Megan Coggeshall
Lewis & Clark College
Portland, OR

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Abstract

In this thesis I study sense of place in the context of migration between Senegal and France for educational purposes. In order to determine the ways in which Senegalese people attach meaning to France and Senegal, and the implications of these meanings, I analyze three Senegalese novels: *Ambiguous Adventure* by Cheikh Hamidou Kane, *The Abandoned Baobab* by Ken Bugul, and *Patera* by Aïssatou Diamanka-Besland. I compare these novels to surveys of current Senegalese students to investigate the themes in how sense of place is expressed by individuals. I explore the tensions between nomothetic and idiographic tendencies of place and the external or internal conceptions of place in order to determine the implications of these tensions for environmental discourse. I argue that the tension between embodying meaning in material and ideal elements of place in these migration narratives is intimately linked to Senegal's colonial past. Furthermore, historical, social, and political elements interestingly intersect in these real and literary accounts and affect how people indentify with their environments. Based on themes that arise in student narratives, place proves to be a useful tool not only for understanding environmental concern, but also for contextualizing the development of environmental narratives.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Being out of place is a sensation that everyone has probably experienced at some point in their life. This concept seems rather intuitive but on closer examination, the place referred to in this context is not entirely clear. *The Dictionary of Human Geography* gives a concise definition of place as a portion of geographic space that serves as a setting for social relations and the creation of identity. Place is not necessarily an officially recognized geographic entity, but instead may be a site of intersecting social relations and collective meaning (Johnston 2006, 582). Agnew identifies three major elements of place as "locale, the settings in which social relations are constituted; location, the geographical area encompassing the settings for social interaction as defined by social and economic processes operating at a wider scale; and sense of place, the local structure of feeling" (1987, 27). Thus, to claim to be in place is to say that one identifies with the social relations and unique identity that distinguish a place from the surrounding area. More simply, to be in place is to feel comfortable, welcome, or at home in a particular place. In the context of environmental studies, place and sense of place are important because many scholars suggest a close relationship between the conceptions of place and environment.

Yi-Fu Tuan, a well known humanistic geographer, states in the introduction to his book *Space and Place: the Perspective of Experience* that a concern with nature and the quality of the human environment is based on questions of place (1977, 5). This suggests that how we understand place influences our conception of the environment and our relationship to it. Tuan presents the other side of this relationship when he writes: "Consider the possibility that the environment itself may have an effect on the elaboration of a spatio-temporal world. Natural environments vary conspicuously over the earth's surface and cultural groups differ in the way

they perceive and order their environments" (119). Tuan's views indicate both that our view of

place affects our relationship to the environment and, reciprocally, that environments influence

how we understand the world and attach meaning to places. Variations in place identity logically

occur due to the environment because one of the factors influencing our creation of place is

locale which, as the setting where social relations take place, includes a consideration of the

environment.

R.J. Johnston, another well-known humanistic geographer, elaborates on Tuan's second

point by stating that:

> Environmental variations are fundamental to the creation of the complex cultural mosaic
> that comprises human occupancy of the earth, but their existence is insufficient to
> account for that mosaic […] The environment is both enabling and constraining: it
> presents humans, individually and collectively, with opportunities, and it also faces them
> with constraints. Crucial to an understanding of the human mosaic, therefore, is an
> appreciation of how the opportunities have been identified and acted upon, and how the
> barriers posed by the constraints have been tackled. (1991, 73)

The diverse human responses to environmental factors therefore influence the meanings of

places and account to a certain extent for their uniqueness. The perspectives of Tuan and

Johnston illustrate the importance of environment to the conception of places but do not discuss

in detail the role of place in changing the physical or built environment. Meanings associated

with places such as a modern urban area, a center of agricultural production, a garden, or a

national park all influence how people understand their environment and which sorts of

alterations are deemed acceptable. For example, it would not be as appropriate to build a

skyscraper in the middle of Yosemite National Park as in New York City because of the different

meanings attached to these places. Additionally, it is not only the meaning of a place that is

important, but one's attachment to it. A strong sense of place could indicate a stronger place

attachment and a higher likelihood of caring for that place.[1] A stronger positive attachment to place may then indicate a greater concern for one's environment.[2] However, the relationship between place and environmental concern is complex, as will become evident in the following study of place situated in Senegalese student accounts of migration.

The object of this thesis is to study how sense of place is expressed in Senegalese novels through student narratives about studying in Europe and subsequent choice to return to Senegal or stay in Europe. I compare the literary experiences to real instances of student migration to discuss similarities and themes that exist in student experiences of place, and to address one of the many tensions in a study of place between establishing general themes and limiting a study to narrowly applicable details. I argue that while place is expressed uniquely by each person, there are broad themes that can be extrapolated from individual experiences to suggest how students understand their place both in Senegal and abroad, such as the role of experience in creating an authentic understanding of place. Furthermore, these themes relate to current environmental discourse, suggesting that a discussion of narratives of place could lead to a better understanding of contemporary environmental ideas. I also address a tension between an emphasis on the ideal elements of place rather than on the physical or material aspects when creating place meaning. The meanings associated with ideal aspects of a place are most important because they determine sense of place and a level of place attachment which acts as an indicator of environmental

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[1] Greater place attachment means that there is a strong relationship between people and place.

[2] For more information see Megha Budruk's study of urban green space usage in India which suggests a positive correlation between strong place attachment and environmental concern. Based on surveys and interviews, meaningful experiences in a location were associated with greater place attachment and increased environmental concern in the case of urban green space usage in India (2009, 825). However, Budruk warns that this attachment varies according to the nature of the population and the environment, indicating that place attachment is not as strongly correlated with positive environmental attitudes in all contexts (826-827). While place is an interesting way to understand environmental concern, the context of the situation must be considered, which restricts the ability to create general principles.

concern and is interestingly related to the post-colonial Senegalese cultural imagination, as well as the social and political factors that currently affect the dynamics of the country.

I begin this thesis by contextualizing place in humanistic geography and then I present different definitions and critiques of place in order to situate its use in the analysis. Following a discussion of sense of place, and how it is understood in terms of the provided definitions, I analyze three Senegalese novels, *Ambiguous Adventure*, *The Abandoned Baobab*, and *Patera*. Along with data from real Senegalese students' experiences abroad, these novels act as individual case studies of how place is given meaning and how sense of place is articulated. I use Yi-Fu Tuan's concept of mythical space to compare the role of experience in real and literary migratory accounts, and Hogarth's study of Senegalese literature to situate these narratives in a historical context. I will then conclude with a discussion of the various tensions in a study of place and how they are understood in a broader context of Senegal's colonial history, and the implications of this study of place not only for environmental concern, but also when extrapolated to contemporary environmental narratives.

A brief history of place in humanistic geography

Modern conceptions of place are based on a conflict between Enlightenment ideas concerning the social sciences and critics of this way of thinking that occurred during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Enlightenment thinkers promoted a universal view of human nature, while critics argued that human nature varies in a "centered and particularistic manner emphasizing individuality of cultural communities" (Entrikin 1991, 2). This tension between nomothetic and idiographic tendencies continued through the 1970s when place and associated ideas such as placelessness and sense of place were more fully developed by humanistic geographers to distinguish their approach from that of positivist geographers who

focused on space (Johnston 2006, 582). Space responded to the dissatisfaction of certain geographers with the focus on particulars of place by appealing to the generalizing nature of science and allowing for the creation of broadly applicable laws (Cresswell 2004, 19). Place was seen as subjective and particular while space was universal, abstract, and subject to scientific law. As described in Yi-Fu Tuan's work, place is concerned with meaning and individuals' attachment, while space is detached from human experience.

In *A Question of Place: Exploring the Practice of Human Geography*, R.J. Johnston (1991) further elaborates on the history of place in geography. Throughout the first half of the twentieth century, geographic studies were largely based on the description of regions. These types of studies approached regions from a historical point of view and focused on the physical environment and human occupation of specific areas without discussing the broader implications of the research. This resulted in studies that were largely uninteresting to people outside their field and uninspiring for later geographers. Regional geography was harshly criticized in the 1960s leading to the creation of the many sub-disciplines that exist in modern geography as well as a call for the revision of regional and historical geography. The transition towards a focus on place in human geography was influenced by the French *géographie humaine* in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that focused on the ways of life particular to specific regions and the "interplay of the natural and cultural worlds" (Cresswell 2004, 17).

The concept of place was recognized to contain aspects that could be generalized and was extended to fields outside of humanistic geography starting in the 1980s. It is now used in economic, historical, and political geography due to its relevance to issues of race, class, gender, sexuality and other social relations. Although place is an important aspect of modern humanistic geography, it is now a controversial topic due to increased globalization. Global influences may

decrease the uniqueness of places and their individual identities and lead to the convergence of formerly distinct places as well as the potential for increased feelings of placelessness.

Understanding space and place: Contemporary definitions and critiques

Yi-Fu Tuan provides one of the earliest complete studies of the concepts of space and place and primarily describes their complex relationship as one of opposition; if place is secure and stable, space is freedom and threat (1977, 3). Since space is frequently associated with openness, it becomes a realm of possibility and thus provides a sensation of freedom. Place on the other hand, is secure because it has an identity. Tuan defines place as, "centers of felt value where biological needs, such as those for food, water, rest, and procreation, are satisfied" (4). This points out the importance of physical features of the world because of their influence on the creation of place in satisfying human needs and allowing for a visible distinction between unique places. Space, like place, can fulfill biological needs, but place is unique because of its meaning which extends beyond its life sustaining qualities. Tuan points out that culture may be one way to explain different meanings that are associated with places but that a sole focus on culture ignores the fact that certain shared human traits, such as the formation of intimate human relationships, may better explain how and why we organize and attach meaning to place.

Tuan further describes the difference between space and place according to time. Space is more abstract than place and as time progresses, space can be described as movement whereas place is a pause or point of rest (6). Space can therefore be viewed as a network of places, or pauses. The pause in movement occurs to satisfy biological needs, but pausing in one location for enough time allows the place to become a center of felt value as we become more familiar with it (138). Place is therefore frequently associated with the ideas of dwelling and home. This

is important because place contains an aspect of permanence that does not always exist in human relationships. While identities of places change, the physical location will remain, and changes are likely to occur over a much longer time scale than those in human relationships. People and relationships are nonetheless an important aspect of place because the right people give a place a positive meaning whereas, "in the absence of the right people, things and places are quickly drained of meaning so that their lastingness is an irritation rather than a comfort" (140).

Tuan emphasizes that the meaning and value of a place are primarily derived from experience (8). Experience is typically described in relation to the senses, and thus the external world, and is a way that people perceive reality. Experience is compounded in somewhat indistinct feeling and thought which lead to the deepening of meaning and value over time. An example given by Tuan is of odors which "lend character to objects and places, making them distinctive, easier to identify and remember" (11). Experience in this case refers to smell, and so meaning is attached to that smell as well as the place at its source. While experience is cognitively filtered by our preconceived views of the world, grounding the meanings of a place in real elements (e.g., as perceived by the senses) give them a sense of authenticity.

Some argue that factors related to globalization necessitate a critical perspective on place because "nostalgia for stable, homogeneous place-based communities," could lead to "new nationalisms, and other place-based identity politics" (Johnston 2006, 583). Furthermore, a focus on place can lead to nostalgic myths of community, and can also ignore different perspectives such as those of women who are oppressed in traditional views of the home. Doreen Massey (1997) argues that a traditional view of place inadequately incorporates the effects of globalization and accepts place as a static concept instead of as a process. According to Massey places do not have neat boundaries because individual places are always linked to the outside

world. Additionally, places do not have single, unique identities because there are many cultural and structural factors that lead to internal conflicts in a place. This indicates that the sense of place felt by one person could be entirely different than that felt by another; Massey gives the example that the sense of place felt by a woman will be different than that of a man in a small mining village because they circulate in different areas.

However, this does not completely discount the concept of place in humanistic geography. In fact, Massey believes that, "a focus on place variation is an excellent basis for understanding diversity and difference" (317). Massey urges us to recognize the interplay of global and local social relations and meanings that are present in any given place. This view of place holds that boundaries of places are porous and that individual places are interlinked and interdependent. Tim Cresswell points out however, that this view of place can lead to a set of global-places that are hard to distinguish and can lead to a sense of placelessness (i.e. belonging to no specific place). Rather, place can occur on a variety of scales from "a favorite armchair to the globe" (2004, 99). This view allows for the unique identification of places but leaves room for fluctuating boundaries in a way that responds to the concerns of Massey.

Mythical space

One specific type of space that will be called upon later in the analysis is mythical space which is not commonly used in current discussions of humanistic geography but addresses elements that are relevant to any understanding of place such as the fact that while the meanings of a place are primarily derived from experience, these meanings can also be produced by others and subsequently incorporated into an individual's understanding of the world. Myth is defined in this context as "hazy knowledge" (Tuan 1977, 88). Mythical space is a type of construed

space, which according to Tuan, "depends on the power of the mind to extrapolate far beyond the sense data" (16-17). This space is similar to place in that it holds meaning even though these meanings are formed by someone that is physically outside of the space described in mythical terms. However, construed place is far more conceptual than place which gains meaning and authenticity through experience. There are three principal types of construed space: the mythical, the pragmatic, and the abstract or theoretical (e.g., systems of geometry). According to Tuan, "mythical space is a conceptual schema, but it is also pragmatic space in the sense that within the schema a large number of practical activities, such as the planting and harvesting of crops, are ordered. A difference between mythical and pragmatic space is that the latter is defined by a more limited set of economic activities" (16-17).

Tuan distinguishes two types of mythical space, "In the one, mythical space is a fuzzy area of defective knowledge surrounding the empirically known; it frames pragmatic space. In the other it is the spatial component of a world view, a conception of localized values within which people carry on their practical activities" (86). The first kind of mythical space is the conceptual extension of familiar spaces and direct experience. When wondering about what exists beyond an ocean or on the other side of a desert we construct mythical space. This indicates that mythical space might have little relation to reality. The second type of mythical space is a component of world view; it is how people orient and understand their surroundings (88). According to Tuan mythical space,

> Ignores the logic of exclusion and contradiction. Logically a cosmos can have only one center; in mythical thought it can have many centers, although one center may dominate all the others. Logically the whole is made up of parts, each with its characteristic location, structure, and function. The part may be essential to the functioning of the whole, but the part is not the whole in miniature and in essence. In mythical thought the part can symbolize the whole and have its full potency. (99)

Mythical space is thus largely imagined by someone who is physically outside of a place, and can be unrealistic because it is based more on ideals than material objects, but it plays an important role in helping us conceptualize the world and our place in it. Furthermore, while mythical space may be less authentic than place due to the lack of a foundation in experience, it still plays an important role in real and literary migration narratives, especially in how Europe is conceptualized in Senegal. As discussed later, the positive mythical construction of Europe seems to withstand contradicting experience in place.

Sense of place and its exclusionary implications

Place is not a stand-alone concept in the following analysis of Senegalese literature since I also focus on how characters express feelings of being in place in opposition to being out of place. David Seamon presents the concept of place in terms of preconscious actions over time that he refers to as a place-ballet. This view suggests that places are "performed on a daily basis through people living their everyday life." People are considered to be inside a place by "participating in these daily performances" in order to "get to know a place and feel part of it." Consequently, "those who do not know the routine will appear clumsy and 'out-of-place' simply though the non-conformity of their bodily practice" (1980, 34). The consideration of an individual's belonging is arguably based on more than just physical actions since language, and more subtle factors such as sense of humor or colloquialisms, play an important role from the perspective of the dominant social group. However, Seamon's view emphasizes the important fact that the distinction between being in place and out of place is not entirely conscious.

Tim Cresswell (1996) dedicated an entire book, *In Place/Out of Place: Geography, Ideology, and Transgression* to the discussion of sense of place and the implications of being out

of place. Cresswell brings a unique perspective to this topic because of his focus on ideology and transgression. By ideology Cresswell means action-oriented beliefs that promote some actions and discourage others. The ideologies of those in power designate the appropriate practices and proper usage of a place. Ideologies also frequently promote the naturalness of certain practices over others by making appeals to commonsense. One example given by Cresswell was from the mayor of New York City who described train stations as places to travel, not to sleep, in order to discourage homelessness in visible places. Thus ideologies determine what or who is out of place. Cresswell defines transgression as events that question or challenge the expectations of a place. The margins of what is considered a transgression establish the boundaries of normality. These boundaries are determined by the reactions to transgressions and they also underline the values associated with a place.

To support his claim of the importance of ideology and transgression to the development of a sense of place, Cresswell describes four main points. The first is that place creates the structure by which to judge and classify people or an action. The second is that place provides a clear means of differentiation and creates others (for example: *us versus them* or *in versus out*). The third is that ideological beliefs which are produced by the material context of our lives connect abstracts (i.e. theory) to concretes (i.e. practice). Last, ideology associates beliefs and actions with nature. This affects views of what is "good, just, and appropriate" by defining norms or what is natural (1996, 5).

The creation of a sense of place in ways that are separate from bodily practice or physical transgression is developed by the role of place in identity formation. R.J. Johnston writes:

> In creating their […] selves, individuals are not operating in a social vacuum; rather they are operating in a well-defined social context. Most are socialized in the local milieux, places with clearly-defined cultural characteristics with which they are encouraged to identify (usually implicitly): people create themselves by their own decisions, but not in

conditions of their own choosing. Most of these conditions are inherently local in scale, but they may also be influenced at a larger scale by a state ideology which promotes not only particular interpretation of 'us' – the members of our state – but also of 'them' – the residents of others. (1991, 215)

People develop their identities in contexts that define them in relation to the *other* that did not grow up in the same place. Our identification of others as out of place is therefore a subconscious action that is rooted in the past of each individual. J. Nicholas Entrikin points out the complexity of this situation by describing it as a "theoretical balancing act between the role of consciousness in creating meaning and the role of structural forces in shaping consciousness" (1991, 50). Groups of people create the meanings associated with a place, but factors that define the place shape the consciousness of these groups. Identity and place are linked in such a way that both must be considered in a discussion of being in or out of place.

While Johnston points out the important role of the individual in creating place, he does not address the internal construction of feeling out of place. Seamon also presents only the idea that an individual who is out of place is determined to be so by those in place. While the meanings associated with place are certainly determined by the dominant social group, an individual could conceivably feel out of place without others noticing. A passage from Sennett, discussed by Johnston, elaborates on the role of identity formation:

> Individuals have to discover their own identity during adolescence in order to recognize, create and sustain their own self-images. This is partly achieved by creating opposing 'other images', stereotyped representations of groups to which they do not belong, or to which they do not wish to belong. This is one element of a process of purification, of defining oneself by segmenting the world. (1991, 214)

This view more fully acknowledges the internal construction of a feeling of being out of place. If individuals move to live among a group previously established as the other, they will feel out of place regardless of the steps they take to feel like they belong. Entrikin describes this phenomenon: "One's connection to a group is first and foremost a matter of individual identity"

(1991, 54). A place-based individual identity therefore does more to establish a newcomer's belonging in a society than the opinions of the dominant social group.

Sense of place and place are valuable ways to study how people understand the world because, "place does not have meanings that are natural and obvious but ones that are created by some people with more power than others to define what is and is not appropriate" (Cresswell 2004, 27). As Johnston and Sennett point out, identity formation in relation to place creates an *us/them* dichotomy that constructs an outsider or an *other* that can be viewed as a threat to group or place identity. The idea of place can lead to xenophobia and racism if the dominant group feels that 'their place' is being threatened, and therefore that another group, such as immigrants, should be excluded (Cresswell 2004, 11). Place can maintain existing hierarchies through the creation of the other that relegates newcomers to a lower rank in the power structure. Additionally, the idea that everything has its place can lead to negative responses to social disorder caused by outside forces or structural changes to a place (Johnston 2006, 584). The opposition between in place and out of place makes social norms easier to understand but this also means that the concept of place is exclusive.

These negative aspects of place make it a particularly valuable tool to utilize in the narrative analysis below. As a former colony, Senegal holds a special relationship with France that at one time privileged immigration between the two countries. Changing laws have made immigration more difficult in recent years and have led to the creation of an *us versus them* dichotomy between France and Senegal. After a brief discussion of Senegal's colonial past, I will discuss the construction of sense of place as well as certain elements of exclusion in the context of Senegalese novels and student interviews.

Situating a study of place in Senegal through its colonial history

The most recent French colonization of West Africa began in the 1850s. Senegal was almost completely independent before colonization except for certain areas along the coast that were involved in the slave trade. In 1894 France organized a Ministry of Colonies around existing Senegalese trading posts but it was not until the later establishment of a colonial school that easily interchangeable colonial administrators were trained to manage France's interests in Senegal under the direction of one governor general (Middleton 2008, 450). From the beginning of World War I until Senegal's independence in 1960, an expanding network of civil servants covered the country in order to create unified regions that symbolized the "French policy of centralization and assimilation" (450). The initial goal of colonial administrators was to collect federal taxes to fund public works projects so that Senegal would become self-sufficient, but this led to the abuse of Senegalese people who refused to pay taxes. The poor treatment of the Senegalese people was not universal, but it nonetheless sparked revolts and localized support for Islam (450). In an attempt to reduce resentment of the colonial presence in Senegal, the French used local chiefs and high-ranking families to collect taxes and motivate villages to work for the colonial authorities; however, treating these groups as low-paid civil servants did not improve relations. The Four Communes (Saint-Louis, Gorée, Dakar, and Rufisque) were exceptions to this treatment of Senegalese people because these towns were part of France's former colonial empire. When French power over these colonies ended, the residents of these four cities gained the right to vote in France and were later granted French citizenship in 1914 when the first black deputy, Blaise Diagne, entered the French parliament (451).

After a conference held in Brazzaville in 1944, economic progress slowed in the colonies and a new African cultural movement formed in opposition to colonialism. Noticeable social

change had previously started in the 1930s when the Great Depression caused a mass population movement from country to city that led to the growth of a new and strong Senegalese culture separate from the colonizers (Middleton 2008, 454). In 1936 trade unions were legalized and frequent strikes affected almost every industry, but these strikes became most influential in 1952 with the popularization of the slogan "Equal Work for Equal Pay" (453). This slogan arose in part due to Senegalese dissatisfaction with the forced labor that resulted from the needs of World War II. Trade unionization was an important factor leading to decolonization because it applied social laws to Senegalese workers and effectively ended the profitability of colonial rule.

The social change that resulted from unionization led to improvements to the school system. Primary school attendance increased by ten times between 1938 and 1958 and the first university was built in Dakar in the mid- 1950s (Middleton 2008, 454). Additionally, the French government granted citizenship and the right to vote to its colonies, but African political representation was still indirect because of the existing system (455). The 1950s led to a rise in political violence and electoral fraud which created power monopolies among elected officials. The transfer of power during Independence in 1960 was orderly, but, "the continuous reworking of political and cultural identity among the various sections of the population meant that explosive potential still remained everywhere" (456).

This cultural and political situation from the early 1950s through current day sets the backdrop for the following literary analyses. The French colonial presence certainly influenced the way the main characters grew up, especially with regards to education. Furthermore, the conflicting influences of French and Senegalese cultures sometimes leads to ambiguous identities and meanings associated with the places mentioned in these novels. This conflict

significantly impacts the ability of the characters to establish a sense of place due to their place-based identities and frequent negative interactions with the dominant European social groups.

Analysis and comparison of literary and real-life experiences

The main interest in the following analysis is how sense of place is expressed by Senegalese authors in novels that address migration for educational purposes. The novels analyzed below are *Ambiguous Adventure* by Cheikh Hamidou Kane (1961), *The Abandoned Baobab* by Ken Bugul (1984), and *Patera* by Aïssatou Diamanka-Besland (2009). These three stories were chosen among others based on specific criteria. All of the novels were written by Senegalese authors, which act as a control in my research because of the country's colonial history. The works are split into three main sections though there is slight variation between the authors: the first section is childhood or early life in Senegal, the second is university education in French-speaking Europe (France or Belgium), and the last is life after education, generally in Senegal. The three novels are also auto-fictions, meaning that they are based on the real life of the author, but fictionalized in certain non-specified areas according to the authors' preferences. Variance based on gender and historical period during which the novels were written is important to ensure some level of representativeness of the diverse opinions on this topic.

I use literary analysis to determine how sense of place is expressed in these three novels. Specific examples and themes from each text are important to establish commonalities and divergences in fictionalized accounts of studying in Europe, the felt sense of place in each location, and reasons for returning to Senegal or for staying in Europe. I then compare the experiences in these novels to survey data gathered from real Senegalese students who either

traveled to Europe to complete their higher education or who wish to do so. Last, I determine if the stories told by each author accurately represent real migration experiences.

Ambiguous Adventure

Iheanacho A. Akakuru argues that in *Ambiguous Adventure* by Cheikh Hamidou Kane, "geographical pegs and sign-posts are carefully blurred, and the treatment accorded to space in the novel is minimal. This is because the overriding emphasis is not on locations in themselves" (1990, 117). Physical descriptors of places are rarely provided in Kane's novel except for very brief instances that are more symbolic than literal. Instead, places in *Ambiguous Adventure* are ideological representations of Europe and Africa built on a religious framework that reinforces the fundamental opposition between the two locations that is created by Kane. According to Akakuru, ideological places "refer to a group of characters who share the same or similar dominant values, ideas or beliefs, and are therefore galvanized into action under similar circumstances" (106). Sense of place in this novel is thus most heavily based on religious beliefs which are embodied in people or influence the descriptors of the material elements of the places that locate these beliefs in space.

Ambiguous Adventure begins with Samba Diallo as a child when he attends a Koranic school taught by Thierno, the Maître des *Diallobé* (the spiritual guide of the *Diallobé* people). After Samba Diallo spends several years at the Koranic school, his aunt la Grande Royale, who is very powerful in Diallobé society, demands that he attend the French school in the nearby town of L., and then a university in France in order to learn the ways of the French colonists. The ambiguity of Samba Diallo's adventure begins at the French school in L. well before his departure for France because he is separated from the source of his religious beliefs at the

Koranic school. However, the main religious ambiguity and subsequent questioning of his

identity which is at the center of this novel result from Samba Diallo's time spent in France.

The religious framework of *Ambiguous Adventure* plays a major role in the formation of

Samba Diallo's identity as a child. After reciting a section of the Koran, Samba Diallo thinks to

himself, "This word…was the architecture of the world – it was the world itself" (15).[3] Samba

forms his identity based on a conception of the world which he believes to be constructed by the

word of God. This conception of the world is not, however, limited to the perspective of Samba

Diallo. Since this is his story, it follows that the entire novel will be based on this understanding

of the world. Akakuru further explains this in the context of the novel:

> *Ambiguous Adventure* is, in a clear way, a sublimation of a fundamental Islamic (Sufi) principle which posits the ethereal unity of the cosmos and places God as the transcendental term; that this unity is, at once, the motivating force, the organizing principle and, consequently, the dominant of Cheikh Hamidou Kane's *écriture*; that this single thematic element accounts for the tone and texture of the novel, and is the *clé de voûte* that supports the entire narrative structure. (1990, 107)

Since the entire novel is developed around religious principles, it is logical that places would act

as meaningful locations that influence Samba Diallo's story. Places are not explicitly defined

geographically but are rather based on the religious beliefs that are associated with the

geographic poles of Africa and Europe.

Africa, or more specifically the country of the Diallobé which is located somewhere in

Senegal, represents Sufi Islamic beliefs and this place strengthens Samba Diallo's relationship

with God as a child. In France over dinner one night with some African expatriates whom he met

while walking in Paris, Samba clarifies the categorization of the country of the Diallobé as an

ideological representation of his faith in addition to the importance of ideological places in his

life. Samba Diallo says: "I don't think it is the material environment of my country that I miss"

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[3] All translations come from Kane (1972).

(161). He explains this by saying, "It seems to me that in the country of the Diallobé man is closer to death," but despite this closeness to death,[4] "everything took me into the very essence of itself, as if nothing could exist except through me. The world was not silent and neutral. It was alive. It was aggressive" (162-163). Because of this Samba concludes that, "It might be said that I live less fully here than in the country of the Diallobé. I no longer feel anything directly... It may be, after all, that what I regret is not my country so much as my childhood" (162). Samba associates his childhood not with a concrete and specific physical environment, but rather with an intimacy with God. Despite the constant presence of death, he felt that his surroundings were more alive and as a consequence, he was too. Samba's friend Pierre-Louis surmises that, "It is not the material absence of your native soil that keeps you in suspense, it is its spiritual absence" (163). The importance of places in the life of Samba Diallo comes not from their physical characteristics, but from their meaning in relation to Samba's spiritual beliefs. The way in which places are described demonstrates their meaning. Since Senegal connects Samba Diallo more intimately with life and death, which come from God, this land is portrayed as a positive ideological place in *Ambiguous Adventure*.

The West, and specifically Paris, represents the materialist, secular values that contradict the religious upbringing of Samba Diallo. The man known as the Fou (the Crazy Man) aptly describes the Diallobé perspective on the West when he says "they have no more bodies, they have no more flesh. They have been eaten up by objects. In order to move, their bodies are shod with large rapid objects. To nourish themselves, they put iron objects between their hands and their mouths" (170). Clearly, the Fou is talking about automobiles and eating utensils, but the manner in which he describes them highlights the materialism present in the West. It is as if

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[4] Death is portrayed positively by Kane because in Sufi Islam death is the moment when the body separates from the soul, which has a positive and liberating effect because the soul is then allowed to rejoin God.

people have been replaced by meaningless and vague objects, and they have willingly allowed it to happen. In France as expressed by Kane, religious ideals have been replaced by materialism and Europe consequently becomes a negative ideological place.

The religious framework of the novel that assigns meaning to place is supported by the division of characters into positive or negative categories related to their African or French identity. Akakuru says that "movement away from the Koranic school (Diallobé) represents movement away from Islam, i.e. from God. Hence, we remark that generally, the qualitative and quantitative narrative treatment accorded to a character decreases as he is intellectually removed from the 'source'" (1990, 113). Based even on a cursory reading of the novel it is clear that the characters are used, like locations, as ideological representations. Samba Diallo's father is called the Chevalier (the knight), which relates to the story of the knight of Islam (*Al Hadj Umar*) who was known for his reflections on the religion (Harrow 1991, 291). Samba's aunt is known as the Grande Royale (roughly translated by many as the Most Royal Lady) because of her physical stature as well as her power among the Diallobé people. Additionally, Samba's teacher at the Koranic school is known as the Maître (Master) and Thierno (Teacher). These names and a lack of physical description support the argument that the characters are not specific people, but rather types that represent ideological positions.

It is important to establish how these characters represent positive or negative ideological places. The Maître provides the best example of the embodiment of a positive ideology. Our first introduction to the Maître is when he is punishing Samba Diallo for making a mistake in the recitation of the Koran. The Maître pinches Samba's ear so hard that his nails connect through the cartilage (13). However, this violent treatment of a child is expressed in a neutral tone that does not extend judgment toward the Maître. Furthermore, community members frequently come

to him for answers concerning the French school, indicating that he is a highly respected member of the community. Even Samba, who endures this punishment, refers to him with love and towards the end of the novel Samba addresses his confused reflections on religion to the Maître despite the fact that he is dead. The Maître can therefore be considered as a positive figure in the novel because of his profound belief in God and his piety.

In contrast, Paul Lacroix is a colonial administrator who represents the position of France in Africa and is viewed negatively. Interestingly, his last name means 'the cross,' which reflects his ties to Christianity, but the fact that Lacroix is seemingly unaware of any religious significance in his environment shows the declining importance of religion in France. In one part of the novel Paul Lacroix and the Chevalier discuss science and religion and Lacroix thinks to himself, "Strange… this fascination of nothingness for those who have nothing. Their nothingness – they call it the absolute. They turn their backs to the light, but they look at the shadow fixedly. Is it that this man is not conscious of his poverty?" (90). This train of thought shows Lacroix's ignorance toward the Diallobé people even though he lives among them. *Nothingness*, *the absolute*, and *darkness* have strong religious significance in this novel as connections between man and God. Thus, Lacroix's failure to grasp these concepts and attribute them solely to what he presumes to be the material poverty of the Diallobé people shows his disconnect from religion in a way that patronizes the Diallobé for not understanding the world in the same way he does. This arrogance (or potential discrimination) and lack of religious beliefs leads to a negative portrayal of Paul Lacroix and the French ideological space that he represents.

Sense of place in *Ambiguous Adventure* is more an internal construct than one imposed by the dominant social group. This is not to say that Samba Diallo is not out of place from the perspective of Parisian society, but Kane does not often portray this point of view since the

novel, as an auto-fiction, gives only his account of the story. There is only one instance where Samba Diallo interacts with a typical French family at the home of his friend Lucienne and is made into the *other* in relation to French society. Lucienne's mother tries to welcome Samba into their home, but then her father, Paul Martial,[5] while directing his speech to Samba, responds by saying, "My wife imagines that your African milieu is distinguished from ours only by a lesser complexity" (122). This phrase seemingly points out the obvious that Samba Diallo did not grow up in a place exactly like France. However, this is an unwarranted response when the preceding comment only asked Samba to make himself at home. What is more important is that "the man's face sparkled with malice" while making this statement (122). It is as if Martial was acting on preconceived notions of Samba Diallo as the other, and intentionally set out to make him feel out of place.

Samba's beliefs further contradict those of the French when the dinner discussion turns to missionaries in Africa. When given the choice between "faith and bodily health" he would choose the former, and thus thinks pastors are more important to send to Africa than doctors (128). In response, his friend Lucienne exclaims, "in my opinion, that's absolutely insane!" (128). This conversation shows the incompatibility of Samba Diallo's beliefs with the common way of thinking in Europe and also serves to highlight his sense of being out of place due to the identity he formed as a child in relation to these beliefs. If French people take his religious beliefs for insanity, there is not a great chance that he will be able to comfortably establish a place for himself in society.

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[5] It is also important to note that *martial* is an adjective to distinguish the military. Paul Martial is a pastor and wanted to start a mission in Africa, but was not able to because the government determined that it was more important to send doctors before pastors to Africa. With this name, Kane calls into question the true nature of French religion. Martial evokes colonization rather than God and thus associates French religion with a desire to conquer.

It is clear that Samba Diallo formed his identity based on the teachings of the Maître and so he understands the world from within an Islamic viewpoint. Thus when he travels to France, the predominately secular society clashes with his pre-formed identity and leads to feelings of being out of place. Kane's descriptions of the material aspects of places lead to a better understanding of how Samba Diallo establishes a sense of belonging (or a lack of belonging) in Paris and Senegal. Images of place further support the role of locations as ideological representations in *Ambiguous Adventure*. Though Kane rarely describes the physical aspects of place in detail, when he describes Senegal the typical imagery is of the sky and when describing Paris, he frequently refers to the streets.

The sky imagery in *Ambiguous Adventure* frequently occurs in religious contexts not only because the five prayers of Islam are focused around the times of the sunrise and sunset, but also because the size of the sky reminds Samba Diallo (and other Muslims in the novel) of his relative insignificance in comparison to God. Furthermore, a focus on images of the natural (non-built) environment in Senegal underlines the relation between human characters and the rest of God's creation. This significance goes even further in Kane's description of sunsets in Samba Diallo's homeland, the country of the Diallobé. In this scene the young Samba Diallo is talking to a French boy, Jean, who is the son of the colonial administrator, Paul Lacroix:

> While they were talking twilight had fallen. The golden rays had thinned a little, and the purple had turned to pink. Along their lower edges the clouds had become frozen blue. The sun had disappeared, but already in the east the moon had risen, and it, too, shed a light. One could see that the ambient light was made up of a paling rose from the sun, the milky whiteness from the moon, and also the peaceful penumbra of a night which was felt to be imminent. (71)

A similar scene is described when Paul Lacroix talks to the Chevalier:

> On the horizon, it seemed as if the earth were poised on the edge of an abyss. Above the abyss the sun was suspended, dangerously. The liquid silver of its heat had been

reabsorbed, without any loss of its light's splendor. Only, the air was tinted with red, and under this illumination the little town seemed suddenly to belong to a strange planet. (86)

Then the scene switches to the perspective of Paul Lacroix and: "The man's gaze wandered over the sky, where long lines of red rays were joining the sun, dying at a zenith invaded by insidious shade." At this sight Lacroix says to himself, "I really believe that this is the moment. The world is about to come to an end" (86). These sections of the text have dual meanings because the sunset is often spoken of in terms of death which is confirmed by the use of the word shadow (penumbra) in the first and second sections.[6] The connection to death is further supported when Lacroix suggests that the world is going to end. The presence of death actually makes life more vivid for Samba Diallo because he views it as living in closer proximity to God. The intensity of color in these citations represents the intensity of life for the young Samba.

Immediately following the first citation, Samba begins to pray, and his father prays following the second citation because of the time of day. Thus the sunset also represents an aspect of regularity in Samba's life which refers back to David Seamon's place-ballet. Prayer is part of the daily routine in the country of the Diallobé of which Samba is keenly aware. Because he understands the preconscious actions of his society and has developed his identity around the way of life in this place, Samba Diallo is able to feel in place in the country of the Diallobé.

Kane's focus on the streets of Paris as the identifying imagery of the place refers again to the materialism that he believes dominates the West. The built environment seems to support the greatness of man in relation to God through imposing monuments that block out the non-built environment. The sky which is so dominant in the country of the Diallobé is not largely visible in Paris because it is blocked out by buildings, and is thus ignored by Samba Diallo in his reflections on the place. The most prominent description of Paris occurs during the reflections of

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[6] See note 4, above, about death.

Samba Diallo during a walk one afternoon. He thinks to himself: "These streets are bare…No,

they are not empty. One meets objects of flesh in them, as well as objects of metal. Apart from

that, they are empty. Ah! One also encounters events. Their succession congests time, as the

objects congest the street." (140). By referring to humans as objects, Kane returns to the

materialist construction of France where everything is reduced to objects void of inherent

meaning. Samba Diallo comments on the apparent emptiness of the streets of Paris despite the

presence of humans and vehicles. For him, there is something lacking in Paris that recalls a void

rather than the bustle of a large city. He then realizes that the emptiness is related to the soul of

the French people that is "silted up" (141).

This feeling is repeated twenty pages later when Samba Diallo is talking to his expatriate

friends over dinner in Paris. He says, "I don't know whether you have at times had that poignant

impression of vacuity which the streets of this city may give – streets nevertheless so noisy in

other respects. There is, as it were, a great absence, one does not know of what" (161). Samba

discusses this feeling of emptiness in almost the same terms as before since he objectively

recognizes that French daily life is taking place around him, and more specifically that it is noisy,

but he still feels like the roads are empty. This citation is different however because Samba is

further able to pinpoint the source of this emptiness as an absence of something. This feeling of

emptiness could be considered as the absence of God. Samba Diallo thus feels out of place – as if

he is moving through emptiness – because his identity which is so focused on God is not the

same as the identity of the French. In Seamon's terms, Samba does not fit into the Parisian place-

ballet and thus he feels no attachment to his surroundings.

This view of Paris is supported by a story told by the Fou from when he was about Samba

Diallo's age. The Fou went to France as part of the French army, but he was not able to adjust to

life there and returned to Senegal where people started calling him crazy after hearing his stories. The Fou says, "The asphalt… my gaze traversed the entire extent of what lay before me, and I saw no limit to the stony surface: down there, the icy feldspar, here the light grey of the stone, the dull black of the asphalt; nowhere the tender softness of the earth" (103). He then goes on to state that the buildings create "a basin of granite" when included in one's view of the street (103). This creates an "expanse that was completely dehumanized, empty of men" (104). The dominance of the built environment in Paris creates a place that has apparently lost touch with God. Therefore humans, who have created this place, risk losing touch with their own humanity. It is important to note the lack of color in this description of Paris. Shades of grey dominate this scene which presents a stark contrast to the profusion of colors (red, gold, pink, purple, blue) that are part of the sunset scenes in the country of the Diallobé of Samba Diallo's youth. Despite the fact that a sunset cannot be alive, the colors suggest life figuratively through a connection with God, and the grayscale of Paris suggests an absence of life though the absence of God. As an ideological representation of materialism and secularism, Paris is a barren and empty place because without the presence of God, objects are just objects and void of meaning for Samba. Samba Diallo cannot feel in place because the lack of the almost tangible presence of God, such as in Senegal, makes Paris a place with no connection to his identity and belief system.

Samba Diallo's experience in France is interesting because he is unable to feel in place because of his place-based identity formed in Senegal. However, while in France, Samba notes that he becomes a cultural hybrid: "The West had become involved in his life insidiously, with the thoughts on which he had nourished every day since the first morning when he had entered the foreign school in the town of L." (170). The use of *insidiously* here gives a negative connotation to Samba Diallo's adoption of Western ideas and reinforces the designation of

France as a negative ideological representation in this novel. It is interesting that the hybridization of Samba Diallo's identity began in a town in Senegal that itself is a hybrid between French and Senegalese cultures because it carries broader implications for Senegal as a place unique from France. The Western ideas at Samba's university play a significant role in changing his identity to an ambiguous (or hybrid) state that he does not recognize. Consequently he is stuck in a position where he cannot identify with the ideological state of his homeland or with that of France.

Just before Samba receives a letter from his father demanding that he return home, his inability to feel in place in France is further developed during a conversation with his African expatriate friends. Samba says: "Here, now, the world is silent, and there is no longer any resonance from myself. I am like a broken balafong, like a musical instrument that has gone dead. I have the impression that nothing touches me anymore" (163). This statement expresses Samba's sense of disconnect from French society. He cannot find belonging because like a broken instrument, he no longer has a sense of purpose. In a more general sense, though, Samba is expressing the feeling that the evolution of his identity from his time in L. to his studies in Paris have made it so he can no longer relate (resonate) with the world as he understood it as a child and which is therefore how he believes the world should be. He no longer has the same connection to his faith that gave him purpose. Samba seems to have lost his sense of knowledge and belonging in the world which he found through a close relationship with God. Samba expresses this loss, "I no longer burn at the heart of people and things" (174).

Samba Diallo's time in France puts him in the interesting position in which he never felt in place in France, and clearly was not accepted by the people there, and he also cannot find the sense of place he had as a child in his homeland. This is the cause of the ambiguity in the title of

Ambiguous Adventure that after his adventure Samba Diallo finds himself to exist in an

ambiguous place between the two poles represented by Senegal and France. Samba expresses

this ambiguity when he describes the situation of many African students in France:

> It may be that we shall be captured at the end of our itinerary, vanquished by our
> adventure itself. It suddenly occurs to us that, all along our road, we have not ceased to
> metamorphose ourselves, and we see ourselves as other than what we were. Sometimes
> the metamorphosis is not even finished. We have turned ourselves into hybrids, and there
> we are left. (124-25)

This makes it seem like it will be impossible for Samba Diallo to find once again his place in

Diallobé society. Here especially, Samba presents a static view of place, where his place-based

identity continues to evolve through his experiences in different places. Samba views the country

of the Diallobé as a place that remains the same and continues to hold the same meaning as when

he left for school. As ideological representations, it makes sense that the places in this novel

would be more static than what is typical in real life. Thus, in Kane's description of Samba

Diallo's homeland when he returns, it is as if nothing has changed. The same religious context

frames every person and action despite the death of the religious leader, Thierno. Since Samba's

identity becomes hybrid, he is caught between two places and is unable to reestablish his place at

home.

Samba Diallo's place-based identity changed enough to affect his desire to find a place

back in his homeland. When he returns he refuses to go to the mosque and tells the Fou, "I have

already told you not to call me any longer to prayer" (178). This is somewhat surprising because

his faith was the defining factor of his life as a child, but it was also the reason he could not find

a place in Paris. His refusal of this identity when he returns home may be attributed to culture

shock, but it seems to be a reflection of his more general feeling of ambiguity and potentially a

sense of freedom from Diallobé traditions. This is aptly described by Samba himself: "I am not a

distinct county of the Diallobé facing a distinct Occident, and appreciating with a cool head what I must take from it and what I must leave with it by way of counterbalance. I have become the two" (164). Samba Diallo cannot choose which aspects of his identity will help him best find a place in a given location because he contains inseparable elements of the two. The source of his identity as a child came from a deep connection to God, so his inability to reconnect with God after his time in France can also be seen as an inability to return to the source. Distance from the source increases ambiguous feelings, which explains why the novel ends with Samba Diallo still in a position of being out of place despite his return to his homeland. Despite the fact that the material elements of his homeland have stayed the same, Samba is unable to feel in place because he no longer identifies with the ideal aspects of the place.

The Abandoned Baobab

The Abandoned Baobab is the autobiography of Ken Bugul, the penname of Mariétou M'Baye which means "the person nobody wants" in her native Wolof (Hogarth 2008, 75).[7] This is the story of a woman who is born and raised in Senegal but pursues her college education in Europe, Belgium in this case. Bugul's story is similar to that of Samba Diallo's in *Ambiguous Adventure* in that she begins by feeling wholly in place in Senegal and then transitions to feeling wholly out of place in Belgium. Additionally, her sense of being out of place begins before she arrives in Belgium due to the influence of the West in her village and in the hybridized Senegalese cities where she attends the French school as a teenager that resemble L. in *Ambiguous Adventure*. Thus, like Samba Diallo, Ken Bugul begins to lose her coherent sense of identity and rootedness in Senegal due to the impacts of colonialism. Place in Bugul's story is

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[7] She adopted this penname to protect her from criticism due to the controversial nature of the book which becomes more apparent in the discussion of Bugul's time in Belgium.

primarily expressed in terms of warmth and coldness. Place is also rooted in material elements,

or symbols, like the baobab tree and the intimacy of human relationships that evolve throughout

her birth, education in Belgium, and eventual return to her homeland.

The Abandoned Baobab begins with a section entitled "The Pre-history of Ken." This

section describes the early childhood of the protagonist, and author, in her native village. The

description of this place was written many years after Bugul's childhood, so it seems to be

described in a nostalgic manner that ignores any negative aspects of her early years. When

describing her birthplace, which is only ever referred to as 'the village,' Bugul writes:

> Everyone was happy there, for everyone shared everything. Birth, life, and death. Sorrow and trouble, happiness and joy. In this village people were together as one. The old grew older and births were welcomed as if they brought immortality. The new-born was always a reincarnation. (1984, 18)[8]

The togetherness and sharing that characterized Bugul's childhood led to a sense of belonging in

a place that welcomed her birth as a reincarnation of their history and extension of tradition. The

village is also described as a place where, "beauty intermingled with the everyday and the

dream," (11) and where life was "pure" (102). Thus, the village is associated with positive ideas

through both concrete descriptions and abstract feelings of welcome and belonging.

One of the ways in which Ken Bugul gives meaning to the village, aside from general

positive associations, is through the baobab tree. She describes Senegal as "the country of the

baobab" (23). The baobab has great significance because it is in these trees that the *griot*

(storyteller and holder of the village history) would traditionally be buried. Thus, the baobab is

linked in a concrete way to the history of the country and becomes the symbol of Senegalese

traditions. In *The Abandoned Baobab* the baobab, which is symbolically at the center of the

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[8] All translations come from Bugul (1991).

village is called 'loyal,' and is described as a source of life through the production of food and

medicines (19). Bugul writes:

> It gave the best fruit of all. They made juice out of it to pour over the millet porridge; measles were treated by making the patient drink it and then putting some of its drops in the eyes; it helped against diarrhea, too. Its dried leaves served to prepare the powder that would bind the couscous, giving it a flavor of fresh milk; freshly ground and mixed together, they were the best remedy against fatigue. Its bark served to weave the famous hammocks of the land of the sun. The land of the baobab. (23)

Here, Bugul gives another definition of Senegal, the land of the sun. Light and sun imagery,

which is also linked to warmth, are important in Bugul's creation of place. Bugul's childhood

village is a positive place which gains meaning through its ties to tradition, history, and the life-

giving properties of both the baobab and the sun.

Bugul repeatedly refers to the sun in her descriptions of her childhood. In her village,

"there was only sun," (19) "humans did not speak. Only the sun spoke," (10) and the landscape

was "of fire and gold" (12). The sun is so dominant in her memory that everything was affected

and colored by it: "The huts were yellow, the high grass yellow, the sand yellow, the animals

yellow, the humans yellow" (15). The sun offers warmth, but Bugul also describes it in terms of

protection. She says that the "sky down there [was] much more protective, more reassuring"

(58). The warmth and protection offered by the sun is intimately connected to the life sustaining

qualities of the baobab and the welcoming people of Bugul's childhood community.[9]

The "Prehistory of Ken" ends when the young Ken tries to imitate the women in her

village who wear earrings by pushing a bead into her ear. Bugul describes this moment,

"Suddenly, a scream! A piercing scream. A cry from underneath the denuded baobab tree came

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[9] It is important to note that the adjectives *protective* and *warmth* are also commonly associated with mothers who nurture and protect their children. This concept is especially significant in *The Abandoned Baobab* because Ken's mother leaves the village just after Ken starts school to go take care of her grandchildren. The departure of the mother is in many ways representative of the western influence in Bugul's life that ends her feeling of being in place in the village, and begins the period when she tries to define her identity while faced with European ideals.

to shatter the harmony of the deserted village. The child was pushing the amber bead into its ear, deeper and deeper. The cry echoed in the heat of rhythm and dance" (25). This is a turning point in the story because while Ken literally pushes a bead into her ear, the harmony that is shattered is that of her life in the village up to that moment. The scene takes place under the baobab which indicates Ken's ties to her village and its history but the baobab is now denuded. When she screams out, the period of western influence in her life begins and with it comes the end of her sense of place and belonging in Senegal.

Soon after the scene where Ken pushes the bead into her ear, we learn that a railroad reaches the village and a train station is built. Along with the train comes, most notably to Ken, western style shoes that are incompatible with the local environment (high heels are not made to be worn in sand). The scream that initially shattered the harmony of the village foreshadowed the arrival of the West which significantly affected the lives of the local inhabitants. It was at this moment, Ken notes, that the baobab "stopped growing" (23). This indicates that the arrival of the western influence infringed on the value of tradition and negatively impacts Ken's sense of belonging that was associated with the baobab.

It is also important to note that Ken Bugul's mother leaves the village by train. Ken is of school age at this point, and so she remembers even more strongly the feelings of abandonment and alienation that accompanied this event and are subsequently carried throughout the story. The train links the mother's departure to the arrival of the West, and thus provides a foundation for Ken's view of Europe.

When Ken initially departs from Senegal for Belgium she has not lived in her home village for many years because she moved to her grandmother's house in the region of

Ndoucoumane to attend the French school. Here, Ken tries to form her identity, but is

unsuccessful because she is attempting to be French. Bugul recounts this time,

> I spoke only French with the young people who went to the French school… always with
> Paris fashion magazines I bought secondhand at the market, always taking walks around
> the village to be seen, with high-heeled shoes that made me hot and kept me from
> walking gracefully. (138-139)

Bugul later wishes that, during this time, she had been more willing to resemble others than to

"deform herself" to fit a French ideal (139). By trying to fit into an ideal that does not suit her,

(since she says she could not walk gracefully, and that she deformed herself) Ken begins her

long struggle to establish an identity which she later articulates by writing: "Identification was

difficult. I was working to achieve two realities in a contradictory fashion: in my innermost self,

the yearning for a bond haunted me. Torn in two!" (143).

The process of identity formation was interrupted by the Western influence in her village

and her move to a hybrid Senegalese city. Throughout the story, Ken's identity fluctuates

between the poles of Africa and Europe in a way that prevents her from ever truly finding a sense

of place in Europe because she does not understand herself. The time spent at the French school

in Senegal already alienates Ken from the stability of her home village when she leaves for

Belgium, and her departure only serves to increase the distance between her and her childhood

capacity to find a sense of place. Bugul thus views Belgium as a promised land that might help

her find an identity.

Despite her view of Belgium as a promised land, Ken does feel some reservations about

leaving Senegal during the flight to Belgium. Bugul describes the process as, "tearing myself

away to head north," (23) "tearing yourself away," (25) and finally "I felt as if I were being torn

away from myself" (25). Since the repetition of this idea occurs over only a few pages of text, it

carries even more weight. Tearing is a somewhat violent idea, or at least one that is associated

with pain. Furthermore, when Ken says she is being torn away from herself, this violence is directed toward her own person, and seemingly relates to the idea of a lost identity through the forceful separation from herself, or literally from her home village. The physical separation from her village removes Ken from the only stable identity and sense of place that she experienced thus far in her life.

It is interesting then, that Ken describes Europe positively. She says that she is going to, "the North of dreams, the North of illusions, the North of allusions. The frame of reference North, the Promised Land North" (23). These sentences, however, foreshadow her future unhappiness since the north is a land of illusions which reflects that Bugul thinks she will find her place in Europe due to her assumption acquired at the French school of a shared cultural identity with Europe leading to disappointment. However, this positivity continues to her first day in Belgium when she writes, "Promised land. Life is mine! Farewell loneliness!" (45). After the separation from her mother, Ken views Belgium as a place where she can establish her own identity and create connections with other people. This happiness, however, is short lived.

During a shopping trip on Ken's second day in Belgium, she attempts to buy a wig. After trying a few wigs, the salesperson informs her that they do not sell wigs for people like her. Ken then reflects, "I was a foreigner, a stranger, and this was the first time I realized it" (50). This statement reflects an *us versus them* dichotomy whereby Ken is forcibly made to know that she is out of place in Belgium simply because of the way she looks. After spending years in Senegal pretending to be French, this comes as a huge shock to Ken and she then realizes that the identity she attempted to establish for herself will not hold up in Belgium.

This incident marks the end of the hope that Ken had in Belgium as a country where she could find herself and establish a place. Belgium, and the West, thus becomes a negative place

which is associated with cold and isolation in contrast to the warmth and community in her village. Walking back from shopping, Ken remarks that "the people of this country were not greeting me" like people did in Senegal (51). Instead, Belgium was a "cold and lonely world where everyone walks too quickly […] as if pursued by a monster" (47). This view of the West as a cold place was actually established in Senegal when Ken attends a university in Dakar and lives with her brother's family in their European style apartment. She says:

> The brother lived with his family on the third floor of a building in the heart of the city. It was the first time I'd ever been so high up. It was a cold place, with cold tiles everywhere. Ah, the warm sand, tepid, comfortable, the sand, the soil, the only thing capable of supporting people! Only sand offers that comfort. The whole time that I was at the brother's house, I was cold. In my heart, in my soul, in my relationships. (121)

Ken points out the opposition between European places and African places by creating a distinction between warm and cold. She refers to the sand when discussing the warmth of her village and the use of the word comfort creates a connection to the idea of home in the village where Ken felt in place.

In almost direct opposition to the village where people live together and help each other, Ken describes the treatment of people in Belgium:

> In this country, the sick were alone, the handicapped were alone, the children were alone, the elderly were alone. And those were the richest stages of human life. Down there, everyone was integrated, concerned, surrounded; everything lived together. Even the trees gave shade and freshness, had their culinary or therapeutic uses, were places for meditation. (97)

The nostalgic version of the harmonious village where Ken grew up acts as a stark contrast to the isolation and coldness of human relations and strengthens the classification of Belgium as a negative and cold place. Thus, if she felt in place during her childhood, there is little chance that she will be able to find her place in a society that coldly ignores her as an anonymous immigrant instead of welcoming her.

Ken Bugul went to Belgium to pursue her studies and mostly to find her identity which she linked to French history because of her education. At the end of her trip though she realizes that she, "hadn't found [her] ancestors the Gauls, or anything to replace them" (88). The fact that Ken did not realize that she could not find her identity from a history that is not her own underlines the inevitability of her feelings of being lost. This leads to the reflection that she, and others like her, "didn't manage to find a formula appropriate for emancipating ourselves. We were following the same procedure as Europe although we weren't living the same realities; we hadn't lived the same historical, cultural, social, or emotional process" (88). This has broader implications for Senegal as a whole, and the need to form a country separate from France, but it also has a profound impact on the formation of Ken Bugul's identity. She realizes that she cannot form her own identity in Belgium or in relation to France because her history and traditions are not the same as those of the French (or Belgians). She must therefore live independently of her colonial history in order to find a sense of place in the world.

Ken Bugul's time in Belgium is overall a negative experience which reflects the negative associations of the place. Initially when trying to assimilate into Belgian society, Ken dates a student she does not like and becomes pregnant (though she later aborts the pregnancy). Then she lives with an older man who kicks her out of his house in a fit of jealousy. Finally she becomes a prostitute and exotic dancer and abuses drugs and alcohol. Trying to find her identity in Belgium led to deeper feelings of isolation. Bugul writes, "True loneliness was the mother's departure, the French school, and then again loneliness. I knew enormous numbers of people and I knew nobody… I took refuge in drugs" (98). Her loneliness is exacerbated by the coldness of Belgium and the lack of meaningful and intimate human relationships despite being surrounded by people. Consequently Ken becomes seriously depressed and realizes that during her entire

stay in Belgium, she "was searching vainly for something, the need for roots similar to all those veins that bound child to mother, that umbilical cord that surely had to be important." (96). When Ken realizes that these roots are not to be found in the West, she decides to "go back home" (181). Home has special significance in this statement because it is one of the most fundamental concepts linked with place. Home is the basic location where people attach meaning to places. Thus, when Ken uses the word home, she confirms that she had a strong sense of place in the Senegalese village as a child, but that she lost it with the intrusion of the West in her village and the departure of her mother, and exacerbated this loss when she travelled to Belgium.

Ken Bugul writes, "as always, a human being was looking for a reference point, out of a need for bonding, for stability" (146). This reference point that brings her stability is found with the baobab tree that was important to her as a child. Thus, Ken returns to her village, but "[she] had made a date with the baobab tree, [she] hadn't shown up and couldn't let it know, [she] didn't dare. The missed date had caused it deep sorrow. It went mad and died shortly thereafter" (181). Ken returns to a dead baobab tree, but this is not a negative event because she proceeds to write,

> The morning I arrived in the village, all the other baobab trees hid behind their trunks, folding their branches in on dense foliage. The sun was guarding the dead one as it stood fully lit. The birds were in mourning. The little white and yellow butterflies were fluttering in the air on their luminous and trembling wings… [It was] the first morning of dawn without dusk. (180-81).

Despite the fact that the baobab tree is dead, it is covered in light and Bugul mentions the sun once again. This brings her back to the warmth and happiness that gave meaning to the village of her childhood. She also mentions that this dawn was the first that was not tainted by dusk, presumably since the arrival of the Western influence in her life. The dead baobab tree indicates that the identity that Ken Bugul had as a child no longer exists because of her experiences in

Belgium. However, during this time she created a new identity that will allow her to move forward in the future. A return to the light and warmth, as well as the presence of new and flourishing baobabs, gives hope to the end of the story and implies that Ken Bugul is able to find a new place in Senegal that gives her the comfort and sense of rootedness that she was looking for throughout her time in Belgium. This return indicates that place is primarily related to ideals in Ken Bugul's novel because the baobab dies. However, since the baobab is the material representation of meaning related to her home village, the death of the tree does not indicate the end of the meanings associated to this place. The village and its more mythic or imagined qualities retains its positive meaning so that Ken can return despite physical changes to the locale and the environment.

Patera

In *Patera* Aïssatou Diamanka-Besland presents a different perspective on migration between Senegal and France from that in *Ambiguous Adventure* and *The Abandoned Baobab*. Instead of focusing solely on her own story as a law student in Belgium and then as a Ph.D. candidate in literature in France, Besland interweaves the stories of other immigrants who make the dangerous journey from Senegal to Europe in the small fishing boats which give the novel its name. This story is therefore less an autobiography, though it is based on the author's life, and more a manifesto of sorts against immigration. Since this novel was written in 2009, it presents current trends in immigration and also the recent factors that give meaning to the places in these three stories. Besland's story differs from Kane's and Bugul's because the meanings associated with Europe are so strongly positive that young Senegalese people (mostly men) are willing to risk their lives to get there. However, Besland similarly relies more on ideal rather than physical aspects of place.

In this novel, Besland creates a parallel between the personal story of a young woman's struggle for independence after the end of her engagement, and a generalized story of all immigrants who try to reach Europe. Besland tries to give a voice to those who are *sans-voix* (without a voice) by telling the story of the many young Senegalese who have died trying to reach Europe by sea. Besland presents these immigrants as "the third-world people who search for an exit, a second way, a place, somewhere in the cosmos. A place somewhere in this enchanted marsh. A place in this enigma of life that remains always and forever a farce!" (2009, 173).[10] According to Besland, all these men want, and in parallel all the main character, Soukeyna, wants, is a place in the world.

Besland constructs Senegal as a place of little hope and few job opportunities for young people because of its weak economy. France in particular is constructed as a mythical place of unending prosperity. One of the main images of France is that of the supermarket where "entire aisles are allotted to pet food" and where, as part of this myth, "animals eat bread and butter and fruit for dessert while in Senegal, or even in Africa, these staples are luxury products" (151). The myth that animals live better in France than humans in Senegal does nothing to prevent migration. For Soukeyna, however, Senegal is a place that is deeply tied to tradition and, as a woman it is a place where she cannot pursue success on her own. Europe on the other hand is presented as a promised land, a place where success, economic or otherwise, is guaranteed. It is important to note from the beginning that Besland rejects the Senegalese traditions, such as religion or the meaning of the baobab, that are somewhat valorized by the other authors. I'll start by discussing the meaning of Senegal in *Patera*, and then develop how France, and Europe in general, is presented by Besland.

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[10] All translations are my own from Besland (2009).

Again, Besland describes Senegal as a "place without hope" (63) and "without jobs for young people" (85). Many young people who leave for Europe based their livelihood on fishing in Dakar. But with overfishing, making money to survive becomes more difficult, so these young men take the fishing boats and attempt to reach Europe by traveling around Africa. For Soukeyna the hope left Senegal after her fiancé left her for a French woman. However, this is a turning point for her because she then decides that she will never get married and decides that she must get away from her life that is dominated by family and the gossip of others (8-9).

Besland frequently repeats similar ideas when talking about Europe. For a majority of the young people in Senegal, "Europe is paradise, the good life, happiness!" (83). These positive associations with Europe encourage young people to leave Senegal, and their parents frequently pressure them to get to Europe using whatever means necessary. For most, "leaving for Europe was a sign of social ascension and coming back [to Senegal] validated this ascension" (141) and the view of those still in Senegal is that someone in Europe is successful because "being there is necessarily to be rich" (189). However, the young people who go to Europe and live a hard life there do nothing to correct this misinformation. Once the young men have worked in Europe for a few years and earned enough money, they come back to Senegal on vacation to flaunt their success, and to "make people believe that they had become important" (41). Soukeyna finds it necessary to point out to those still in Senegal that, "life in France is very hard as well, immigrants slave away. They aren't happier than you" (178). This seems to have no effect on people who want to leave for Europe, which continues the view of Europe as the "promised land," (62) or as Soukeyna sees it, the "pretend Eldorado" (112, 150).

Besland writes, "it is important that the Senegalese know [about the hardship in Europe] so they don't continue to dream of an idea that only exists in their head" (146). In Europe most

immigrants are treated as "less than nothing" (146) and must work harder than Europeans to prove their worth (155). Once the men reach Europe, underemployment due to racism is common, and it is difficult to be accepted due to exclusion based on the *us versus them* dichotomy. The perceived difference of the Senegalese migrants leads to their rejection by the dominant European society. In the general story of migration, Besland ignores for the most part the internal construction of being in place in favor of the seemingly more decisive sense of being out of place determined by Europeans. This immediate external designation of being out of place prevents, in a way, the ability of immigrants to establish a place for themselves, or to feel in place from an internal perspective.

In *Patera*, as in *The Abandoned Baobab*, Europe is described by its coldness. Soukeyna's sister lives alone with her child in Paris after her husband goes into a coma, and Soukeyna describes her sister's life by talking about, "the daily solitude, the cold, the coldness of people" (79). The reality is that for immigrants, the voyage to Europe is often a deadly process, and once there, Europe seems to be a land characterized by hardship and the indifference of others. Even for Soukeyna's sister who immigrated legally, Europe is a cold and unwelcoming place. Despite the reality, the dream of a Europe full of opportunity remains in the collective Senegalese imagination. By ignoring how life really is, Europe stays a place with positive meanings despite Soukeyna's attempts to prove otherwise.

It is therefore interesting that Soukeyna leaves for Belgium to pursue her own dreams. She describes this process by saying, "I was going to leave this world behind me for another life. My steps fell on the path of rebirth. My dreams were redesigned" (89). In contrast to most, she goes through the difficult process of obtaining a visa so that she can enter Europe safely.[11]

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[11] The process of obtaining a French visa from Senegal has become increasingly difficult due to immigration reforms. In the past it was relatively easy for Senegalese people to obtain temporary work

However, her plans of "liberty and independence" are founded on a life in Europe not in her homeland, which links her to other immigrants (47). Her decision to go to Belgium is based on the fact that, "all the important men in power" studied in Europe (84). This reinforces the stereotype that Europe is the only way to achieve success. However, while the immigration of most Senegalese is defined as the pursuit of a mirage, Soukeyna differentiates her own choice because she is aware of the hardship that awaits her.

Besland returns to the use of the heat and cold opposition first presented in *The Abandoned Baobab*. After Soukeyna lives in Belgium for a while, "she misses the African heat" and the "idea of leaving brought [her] to life" because "life is too difficult without family" (96-97). The warmth associated with Africa once again comes from family and community ties that contrast the indifference of Europeans. This is interesting because it seems to question the presentation of Europe as a positive place despite the hardship, and Senegal as a negative place defined by tradition and a lack of opportunity. However, these categorizations of France and Senegal are maintained because Soukeyna is successful in Europe. She is highly educated and lives well, and she also ends the story with a successful book tour where she is invited to speak at well known Paris locations. Soukeyna remains in France because of her career, and this reflects the real life path of Besland who is currently finishing an additional degree in political science in Paris.

In this story Besland constructs an interesting boundary between the immigration to Belgium and then to France of Soukeyna and the immigration of other Senegalese people. The

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visas and live in France for several years. However, due to the recent rise in Nationalism, immigration laws have become much stricter and it is nearly impossible for the average Senegalese person to receive a work visa. This explains the high rate of dangerous migration using small fishing boats, or by walking across the Sahara to reach Europe. Now it is more difficult to obtain a visa to pursue higher education in France, though it is still possible. Migration to France for studies represents, however, elite migration that is not available to a large portion of the Senegalese people.

novel is written from the perspective of Soukeyna, and she frequently writes "the immigrants" or "they" when discussing immigration, and she adopts as her mission the goal to give a voice to those without a voice. She attempts to do this by revealing how hard life is in France for most immigrants who live ten to a room and work long hours for very little money. It is clear that the life of Soukeyna is very different from this; however, as an immigrant herself, the distance between her and others from Senegal seems to be exaggerated since they are all pursuing similar goals in Europe. It is not until the very end of the novel that Soukeyna acknowledges the similarity between her and other immigrants. She says, "I'm searching for a way for those without a voice. I am a person without a voice! I am the soul of those without a voice – without a way!" (207).

Sense of place and meanings of places are different in this story compared to *Ambiguous Adventure* and *The Abandoned Baobab* because in the opinion of Soukeyna, and other immigrants, Europe has positive associations and represents opportunity and success. For Soukeyna this meaning remains consistent throughout the story as she establishes her place as a student and writer in France. However, for many others, the quality of life in Europe is worse than in Senegal, while racism and other forms of discrimination continue to limit their upward mobility in society. However, when these immigrants return to Senegal temporarily, they continue to talk of Europe as the Promised Land that makes everyone abundantly wealthy.

In *Patera* the realities in Senegal and in Europe do not seem to fully match the meanings associated with them as places. Experience, which as Tuan suggests, is at the base of meaning formation due to interaction with a specific location, does not accord with how places are understood in this story. This is likely due to the general approach of the novel that describes place from the view of many, rather than from one perspective. Thus the myths established in the

Senegalese imagination are confirmed by the refusal of migrants to tell the truth about life in Europe upon their return to Senegal, as well as Soukeyna's personal success. This suggests that the Senegalese cultural imagination is more powerful in developing the 'true' meaning of a place than individual experiences.

Interviews of current Senegalese students

Based on the limited amount of information available on student immigration to France, it is difficult to generalize students' views. However, enough survey data were available to establish that current Senegalese students have a nuanced view of place that is much the same as the general immigrant population in Besland's novel. Before discussing how students conceptualize and relate to place through opinions on studying in Europe and returning to Senegal, I will begin with a brief discussion of the history of immigration to Europe from Senegal and the statistics on student migration to France.

During the period of French colonialism in Senegal there were very few immigration laws between the two countries. Emigration was mostly made possible through the army because many former soldiers worked in the Marseilles harbor. More Senegalese people went to France after Independence in 1960, however the weakening of Senegal's economy in the 1970s led to an influx of immigrants to France that the country could not accommodate. Thus France tightened its immigration policy and allowed Senegalese immigrants to enter the country usually only in order to rejoin their family (MAFE 2011).

France's immigration policies (called the Pasqua laws) were still very restrictive in 1993 and deterred foreign students and young professionals from settling in France. From 1994 to 1996 only 9 percent of foreign students obtained a five or ten year residence permit after the

completion of their studies, though the conservation rate for those of West-African origin was slightly higher at 11 percent (Tremblay 2005, 214). In 1998 France revised its immigration laws to include provisions for highly skilled immigrants. These provisions eased the conditions of entry for scientists, scholars, and certain highly skilled professionals but language barriers, a struggling French labor market, a lack of recruitment flexibility, and relatively low salaries paid to researchers in French public institutions led to lower than expected numbers of immigrants (214).

Due to the decreasing population in Europe (mostly because of a lower birthrate) many European countries decided to further ease immigration laws to attract highly skilled workers to certain sectors experiencing a decline in worker availability. Thus in 2002, "immigration officers were told to look favorably at requests for long-term residence permits made by previous students in France" (Tremblay 2005, 214). Foreign students are still required to obtain student residence permits that must be renewed annually, but the process of obtaining a visa to remain in France is now easier (214). This decision was made because students who have previously studied in France have a better knowledge of the language and culture so a transition to long-term residence is not as difficult and foreign students with French university degrees can more easily and uniformly transfer their experience to French professions.

According to a report compiled by Campus France using data from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), about 8,948 Senegalese students studied in France in 2009 (Binder 2011, 1).[12] Despite the 45 percent increase of Senegalese students in France between 2002 (7,836 students) and 2009 (11,364 students), the overall number of university students in Senegal increased as well (from 50,375 in 2003 to 94,371 in 2009)

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[12] Campus France is an organization with which foreign students must register in order to obtain a visa to study in France. All foreign students must obtain a visa to enroll in a French university.

(Binder 2011, 1). This means that there is a decreasing trend in the percentage of Senegalese students pursuing their education in France (from 20.2 percent in 2003 to 12 percent in 2009), though according to the 2009 Senegalese Migration Profile compiled by the International Organization for Migrants, the number of Senegalese students pursuing their education abroad is generally increasing, likely due to an increase in Senegalese students pursuing higher education in the United States (Binder 2011, 1 and Some 2009, 55).[13] Of all international students who study in France, only 26 percent stayed in France to work (Rivière 2011, 33). This is confirmed by data from Senegal which show that about 25 percent of university-educated Senegalese people emigrated in 2000 (Hjalmarsson and Högberg 2008, 7). This is a relatively high percentage loss of highly educated workers which indicates that certain factors in Senegal make it difficult to retain recent graduates.

According to Tremblay, the immigration reforms during the early 2000s have made study abroad "part of a deliberate immigration strategy from the perspective of [some] students" because, "study abroad allows students to absorb cultural and social customs of the host country and act as an ambassador for their host country and their own" (2005, 196-197). If students return they can bring their acquired knowledge and skills (especially technological) back to their origin country and improve the local economy with business development. While most students return to Senegal, the degree of nonreturn, "depends on the family status of the migrating student, the existence of institutional safeguards, and the comparative employment opportunities of the origin and destination countries" (225). Institutional safeguards could include scholarships that are contingent upon the return of students to their origin country.

In a study entitled "Circular Migration between Senegal and the EU?" Linnea Hjalmarsson and Magdelena Högberg (2008) surveyed and interviewed Senegalese students

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[13] This organization is independent of, but supported by the United Nations.

about their attitudes toward migration.[14] The following student opinions come from surveys and interviews conducted by Hjalmarsson and Högberg during a field study in Senegal in May and June of 2008. They received responses to 200 surveys from students in their final years at the Université Gaston Berger in Saint-Louis studying arts and science, economics, law, and technology. Of the eight interviews conducted, two students were at the school of medicine at the Université Cheikh Anta Diop in Dakar, two were highly skilled return emigrants, and the rest attended the Université Gaston Berger. The interviews were semi-structured to make them more like a conversation and to encourage students to speak freely. Students were kept anonymous to ensure the conversations would be truthful and uncensored. The surveys act as general context for the interviews as they were mostly yes or no questions; however, there were two open-ended questions that allowed students to explain their motives for wanting to emigrate (or not) and to return to Senegal (or not).

According to the survey, Senegalese university students generally view migration positively, but with the reservation that it should not be permanent (29). 70 percent of Senegalese students want to immigrate to Europe during or after their studies, and 30 percent of these students think it is likely (28). Of the students surveyed, 90 percent want to come back to Senegal (28). According to one student, emigrants should "return and bring back their acquired knowledge, experience, and gained money to invest in their country of origin" (29). This favors circular migration (non-permanent migration between two or more countries) which would allow knowledge to move between Africa and Europe. A participant at the Global Forum on Migration & Development praised circular migration for being,

> At the cutting edge of the migration and development debate, because it combines the interest of highly industrialized countries in meeting labor needs in a flexible and orderly

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[14] The following seven paragraphs in this section cite exclusively this article (Hjalmarsson and Högberg 2008).

way with the interests of developing countries in accessing richer labor markets, fostering skills transfer and mitigating the risks of brain drain.[15] (6)

Senegalese students mostly stated an interest in circular migration due to a desire to return and help their country of origin.

Many of the students who expressed a desire to emigrate believed that there are better working conditions and a better chance to earn money in Europe. Students expressed frustration with the working conditions in Senegal and especially the high rates of unemployment or underemployment. However, many students wanted only to gain experience and knowledge through their studies in Europe before returning to Senegal (55). Interestingly, family was frequently described as a motivating factor to immigrate to Europe. According to one student, a common belief in Senegal is that a "family member in Europe is an assurance of wealth, which influences especially the men with a responsibility for the family's economic situation" (31). Family reputation is also very important, and can be improved by sending a child to Europe.

While most students do not express a desire to immigrate permanently to Europe, family can also pressure a student to stay there. One student described family as the defining aspect of many students' decisions to stay,

> The limit is above all on the family level. They will not be able to understand [a return]. It is not always evident that the member of the family who has immigrated to Europe all of a sudden returns to stay in Senegal when there are people around him who kill themselves in order to get where he was. You were lucky to be able to go there and you return. There are people who cannot understand that. (56)

Additionally, one student who studied in Europe and then decided to return described his own negative experience upon return and the disapproval of his family: "The people said that I don't have any ambitions, they believe I'm a fool. A return is badly looked upon. My country has not welcomed me back, there are no political measures for receiving the intellectuals that return"

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[15] Brain drain is the phenomenon of large-scale emigration of highly-education workers.

(57). This student describes the negative aspects of a return as not only being limited to social pressure, but also in terms of the inability of the Senegalese government to handle the return of highly qualified individuals.

> According to [the diaspora] [students] cannot find the professional environment in Senegal which incites them to return and work in the country (conditions and means of work, salary, access to what they call qualified education for their children), compared to the means and conditions which are offered them in the countries of North. (24)

This partly explains the 25 percent emigration rate of highly educated individuals, and returns to the idea that the economic situation in Senegal does not encourage the reintegration into society of students who have studied in Europe. However, despite the disparity between the opportunities in Senegal and in France, nine out of ten students expressed a desire to return.

According to Hjalmarsson and Högberg, of the 90 percent of students who would like to return to Senegal after their time abroad, the most common motivation to return (65 percent) is to serve their country of origin and participate in development using the skills and money they earned in Europe (28). Thus, even after leaving, Senegal remains the main priority of most emigrants. It is interesting that the 30 percent of students who did not want to leave Senegal provided almost the same reasons as those students who did want to emigrate (even temporarily), citing patriotism and family as the most important influences to stay (28). These students fear harder living conditions and racism in Europe and say things like: "I prefer to remain close to my family and participate in the development of my country" and "I feel better at home regardless of the circumstances" (28). These statements express ties to Senegal as a meaningful place in addition to a desire to aid in Senegal's development.

The use of *home* by the previous student suggests that a strong bond to homeland due to its meaning and context for identity development is also important to students. Hjalmarsson and Högberg suggest curiosity for other parts of the world as one reason that certain students would

want to travel to Europe because about 75 percent of the students who had not been to Europe were willing to emigrate while only 45 percent of those who had already been there wanted to emigrate (28). This seems to fit with the more common view of study abroad as an adventure and a way to learn about another country and culture for a temporary period of time rather than Tremblay's view of study abroad as a deliberate immigration strategy.

Despite the stated goals to travel to France in order to help their country, the data suggest that, while the return perspective is typical, a decision to return is actually very personal. Hjalmarsson and Högberg write:

> In the survey many wrote 'to serve my country' as the motive for return, but the interviews showed that being close to their family and the love of Senegalese culture are necessary factors for the student to be able to say that 'taking part in the development process of their home country' would motivate them to return. (55)

Thus dedication to the country is strongly influenced by personal factors that suggest place attachment to homeland due to the formation of a place-based identity.

Hjalmarsson and Högberg state that students' description of Senegal is typically positive and patriotic because "Senegal is country of students' family and culture which will always be a part of their identity and the place where they can be the most satisfied" (32) and "where they feel the most comfortable" (34). Despite the fact that many families of emigrants do not understand why they would return, family continues to be an important factor in student return (sometimes even the "biggest reason"), because family represents safety and security and is a significant part of the students' identities (56, 34). This suggests that sense of place is a factor that influences student returns. One student described his experience in France by saying, "life is hard for immigrants, people live their lives differently from Senegal […] they work a lot and are individualistic" (31). This hard life is contrasted to a sense of comfort and security in Senegal. An inability to find a sense of place in Europe either because of the way of life or the racism

mentioned earlier, helps explain why so many students expressed a preference for circular rather than permanent migration. It is good to go to Europe and learn, but staying there is not desired because students are not comfortable there. Thus place, while not explicitly articulated by students, is suggested by their patriotic construction of Senegal as a positive place that is home to their family and culture. However, despite the statement that people work too much and are individualistic in Europe, many students still want to go there to pursue education and work opportunities. This suggests that Europe cannot immediately be categorized as a negative place because the meanings associated with it are mixed. Though, sense of place seems to play an important role in student migration, and especially in their decisions to return to Senegal.

A uniform sense of place?

Ambiguous Adventure, *The Abandoned Baobab*, and *Patera* are all contextualized in a broad migration theme in Senegalese literature. This theme began in the early twentieth century with novels that were more similar to a travel genre. These stories, particularly from the 1920s and 1930s, focus on men traveling to France to pursue their dreams. However, the 1937 publication of *Mirages de Paris* by Ousmane Socé Diop marked a transition in the portrayal of Europe due to the character's inability to find a home in France and unwillingness to return to Senegal. This led to the "articulation of the regional or national 'home' in Senegal" and a general literary movement to warn against the lack of African cohesion abroad (Hogarth 2008, 72). Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure* belongs in this period because of the emphasis on individual possibility, and Samba Diallo's refusal of the "return to roots" ideal shown in his inability to find a place in Senegal at the end of the novel (73). Ken Bugul's novel is harder to classify because while she discusses the ideas of exile portrayed in other works, she is more focused on her

personal journey. During the period when Kane and Bugul wrote, nostalgia was a frequently

used literary motif to describe Senegal. This favorable view of the author's past developed into a

"stay at home movement" in Senegal that became most evident in the twenty-first century (76).

This movement is dominated by female authors warning Senegalese immigrants (of whom the

vast majority is male) to stay in Senegal, while the female protagonist travels to France and finds

success. This theme is portrayed in *Patera* which is an extension of Besland's previous novel *Le*

Pagne Léger (2007), and also in Fatou Diome's (2003) novel *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* (*The*

Belly of the Atlantic). Despite the changing views of migration, the preoccupation with France in

Senegalese works of fiction continues.

In the context of the three works analyzed and the interviews of Senegalese university

students, it seems that France remains an element in fiction because it holds a mythical status in

the imagination of the Senegalese people as a whole. Authors and students express their views

differently which reflects the role of individual life experiences and identity among other factors

relevant to the construction of place. However, they all use mythical space to develop their views

of Europe.

The physical aspects of each place described by the authors are certainly important, but

they are not the main element of how meaning is constructed; they especially act as physical

embodiments of meaning. This relates to the idea of mythical space as being more conceptual

than experiential. Mythical space embodies the meanings attributed by someone while outside of

that place or society. Once this person physically enters a specific place and experiences how it

actually is, the preconceived meaning attributed to the mythical space is either confirmed or

rejected (though this does not indicate that an individual is in place). As a reminder, according

to Tuan mythical space is both "a fuzzy area of defective knowledge surrounding the empirically

known," and "the spatial component of a world view, a conception of localized values within which people carry on their practical activities" (1977, 86). Mythical space is used by each author in their novels and in student interviews, especially when describing Europe.

In *Ambiguous Adventure* Kane characterizes place into positive and negative categories according to worldview. Samba Diallo, however, also had pre-conceived notions of Paris as a place of rampant materialism and secularism. It is interesting however, that Kane maintains these characterizations of place throughout the novel which indicates either that Samba's knowledge when constructing a mythical place of Paris was not defective, or that he is inflexible when experiencing a new place. This unchanging view is likely due to the fact that we understand the story and Paris only through the perspective of Samba Diallo which is completely influenced by his Islam-centered worldview. Samba's daily interactions in Paris are not solely dominated by secularism and materialism, but as his experience in place is not emphasized by Kane, place remains an ideological and mythical construction which is distanced from daily life and therefore remains in the conceptual realm. However, this depiction also makes it clear that place in Kane's novel is static. This explains Samba Diallo's inability to accustom again to his homeland, because he has changed and his country has not. The view of place as a static concept in a way necessitates the creation of mythical place that is more of an ideological representation than an evolving place as we experience it in our daily lives.

Ken Bugul's childhood village is based on a nostalgic view of her past that condenses the values of her village into a sense of warmth and togetherness. Bugul's use of nostalgia emphasizes the fact that the Western influence in her life is seen more as an intrusion than as a choice. This vague positive construction of her homeland (home village), as represented by the baobab, is what allows her to return many years later, despite her personal journey, and feel like

she has found her place. Bugul clearly constructs a mythical space of Europe based on hazy facts and stereotypes she has gathered from fashion magazines and the school she attends. This leads her to view Europe as a place of dreams and as the Promised Land. It is not until she is living a European life that she realizes that the Europe created in her head is not the Europe that exists, or rather the Europe she experiences does not confirm her positive and hopeful conceptions. Instead she is faced with a cold and unwelcoming place that further inhibits her ability to find herself.

In *Patera*, Aïssatou Diamanka-Besland creates a Senegal that is steeped in traditional values and gender roles that seem to be related to the lack of possibility for economic and personal growth domestically. Europe is constructed around the idea that wherever is not Senegal must be better. Besland's Europe is also the Promised Land, and despite the fact that most Senegalese people who immigrate there do not find success, the defective knowledge is never corrected. However, the mythical space created by Besland is partially true in the case of Soukeyna because while she realizes that life is not significantly easier in Europe, she also has a positive experience there. In this story, the mythical view of place is stronger than the influence of experience, suggesting the power of collective imagination to influence the creation of meaning and the actions (migration) that result from this meaning.

During Hjalmarsson and Högberg's interviews, one student said:

[My family considers emigration] as a very good thing […]. In the Senegalese society in general […], the friends and neighbors [of a family with an emigrant in Europe] really respect the emigrant and his family. They say that: surely, he is good, he has really succeeded in his life over there. It is truly a good image if somebody is abroad. (2008, 55)

This relates to the previously mentioned student who claimed that having a family member in Europe is an assurance of economic success. These students demonstrate the Senegalese view of Europe as a mythical space that is full of wealth and opportunity. Europe is presented as a place with positive meanings for most Senegalese people, which results in a positive view of the

person who is abroad and increased respect for them and their families from other Senegalese people. This also presents an element of social pressure to emigrate. The student may come to believe that going to Europe is the only way to achieve success and so the positive conception of Europe in Senegal may pressure some students to leave who otherwise would not be interested.

Senegalese students' positive view of Europe as a place of opportunity mirrors the view of Europe as a Promised Land or El Dorado in *Patera*. The mythical construction of Europe is presented by students in almost exactly the same way as described in Aïssatou Diamanka-Besland's novel. This could be due to the fact that the survey was conducted in 2008 and the novel was published in 2009. Since *Patera* is a novel that addresses real immigration issues, Besland likely made a point to incorporate the real views and constructions of Europe that are held by Senegalese people. In Ken Bugul's autobiographical novel, Europe is also initially constructed as a mythical space which was described as the Promised Land until Bugul actually travels there and discovers through experience that she does not feel a sense of belonging.

The opinions of real Senegalese students confirm the theme of return in *Ambiguous Adventure* and *The Abandoned Baobab*, and in the words of Hjalmarsson and Högberg, "Senegalese abroad are to the most extent interested in returning voluntarily to their country of origin" (2008, 26). As we learned, this desire to return is a largely personal decision. The idea of circular migration is viewed positively by most, and one student said that circular migration is "positive. It's better than exile" (29). Not only does this comment support the popularity of returning to Senegal, but it interestingly portrays staying in Europe as very negative. The use of the word *exile* suggests that staying in Europe would be against his choice, and would be viewed in harsh terms as a type of punishment. This relates to *Ambiguous Adventure* where Samba Diallo calls his time in France "exile," and his friend of African origin who was born is France is

referred to as "one who is exiled" (Kane 1961, 170). While most students did not discuss living in France in such strong terms, this connection suggests that an idea of exile in literature is also a theme that exists in real students' stays abroad and that there is interplay between real and literary experiences.

The necessity of literary movements to dissuade Senegalese people from migrating to Europe alludes to the fact that the positive view of Europe is a constant thread that runs throughout history. Hogarth states that Europe, "continued and continues to play a large role in the Senegalese cultural imagination," which explains why, "in spite of these negative literary portrayals of migration to France, the phenomenon has never stopped" (2008, 74). From *Mirages de Paris* where the protagonist, Fara, travels to Europe and finds that his positive constructions of Paris are a mirage that do not hold up to experience, to *The Abandoned Baobab* where Ken travels to Brussels, the Promised Land, to find herself, to *Patera* where thousands of men are willing to risk their lives every year to pursue a dream of economic success, the positive mythical construction of Europe remains a constant. This suggests that Kane's *Ambiguous Adventure* acts to a certain extent as a reaction to this view.

The view of Europe expressed in novels is influenced by cultural views of Senegalese people, which explains why the view of Europe as a mythical space of opportunity remains alive in the Senegalese imagination both in literature and in real life. However, this positive mythical construction of Europe is almost always presented as false after an experience there. In both *Ambiguous Adventure* and *The Abandoned Baobab*, the protagonists feel out of place in Europe. In *Patera*, however, the majority of immigrants realize that Europe is not better than Senegal after they travel there and are often exposed to a harder life than what they experienced in Senegal, though these facts are ignored to maintain the positive view of Europe. Soukeyna,

however, finds her place in Europe as an author. The majority of current student opinions do not

accord with the individual experience of Soukeyna, which first confirms that her success is a

minority experience, and also shows support for the general "stay at home" movement in

Senegalese literature of which Besland's novel is part.

As Tuan discusses, experience in a place typically confirms or denies our preconceived

notions of what a place will be like, or how it should be. This gives the meanings of places an

element of authenticity because they are grounded in real or physical evidence rather than

imagined. However, in these novels, and particularly in *Patera*, the conception of Europe is more

powerful than the role of experience. In this case, the Senegalese cultural imagination more

strongly influences how people view Europe than the real accounts of living there. This suggests

that defective knowledge is not always corrected when an ideal is more desirable for a person or

a group than what actually exists. It is especially interesting that the positive mythical conception

of Europe is repeated in real student accounts of place, because it suggests that for some reason

an unsupported positive view of Europe that deemphasizes experience and real elements of place

is actually very important in the Senegalese cultural imagination.

Conclusion

The recurring reference to France or French-speaking countries in Senegalese literature is

likely linked to the French colonial presence. Christopher Hogarth refers to this pattern as

Senegalese people, "migrating to France in search of the illustrious dreams instilled into [them]

by the colonizer" (2008, 70). Cultural and linguistic factors influenced the protagonists of the

novels to travel to Europe to pursue their studies, and the idea of illustrious dreams offers an

explanation for the general theme of mythical space presented in both literary and real

experiences. The construction of Europe and particularly of France as a place of prosperity and

opportunity in the Senegalese cultural imagination is based on the view given by colonizers in the past and so despite independence, Europe retains its allure. Additionally, the tendency of authors and students to express place based more on ideal than material factors is likely related to the spread of dreams of France during the colonial period.

The important role of place presented by the protagonists in the novels is confirmed by the interview data which suggest that place continues to be a primary factor affecting decisions to stay in Europe or return home to Senegal. The meanings associated with place are expressed in personalized ways based on religion, warmth, tradition, family, economic success or other factors. However, the ability to identify with a place and establish a sense of place seems to carry more weight in a decision to stay or leave Europe than even economic success or the pursuit of personal growth, which are often given as reasons to leave Senegal in the first place.

The importance of sense of place as a factor influencing migration or return migration, as well as the common reliance on mythical space, responds in part to the tension between the ability to generalize experiences of place and the caution of stretching a discussion of place too far. It is clear that experience of place is highly individualized because the base of meaning for each person is different. However, the existence of common themes that appear throughout literary and real expressions of place suggest that feelings of being either in place or out of place can appeal to a certain extent to a desire to generalize. I would not suggest that general principles about place in the context of student migration between Senegal and Europe could be established based on only the novels and surveys analyzed here, but there are certainly themes that unite expressions of place in important ways. A use of mythical space which defines place meaning from the outside rather than from authentic experience, and a focus on ideal and imagined rather than concrete physical factors are two such themes. Another theme is the description of place

from an internal rather than an external perspective. While external identifiers of being out of place are suggested in the novels and interviews, such as discrimination based on race or national origin, place meanings are attributed from the internal perspective of the emigrant. This is primarily attributed to the fact that opinions were usually given in the first person, but this is also likely related to the importance of ideal factors such as religion or intimacy of relationships that give meaning to a place and that are highly individualized concepts. Furthermore, these narratives emphasize that internal perceptions of a place are frequently more important, especially for establishing a sense of place, than how a place is defined by the dominant social group.

As I have argued, the material or physical aspects of places primarily act as receptacles of meaning based on ideal elements in these student accounts. This meaning determines an individual's sense of being in or out of place and the felt level of attachment to a place which is often positively correlated with environmental concern. The level of attachment or identification with a place leads people to care about problems confronting it, or ignore them in relation to their level of concern. It therefore seems that the history of a place, such as colonization, and the history of the individual, such as migration, must be taken into account when considering environmental implications.

The colonial influence in Senegal, and particularly the contemporary implications of this influence, leads to interesting understandings of place and place attachment by students. The protagonists of the novels as well as the interviewed Senegalese students similarly expressed their views of place in more conceptual terms. This might be explained in part through Senegal's colonial history since the generally negative view of colonialism could lead to the Senegalese opinion that aspects of their country were tainted or contaminated by the French presence. The

ideal elements that give meaning to place such as religion, community, or family, could be viewed as protected or separate from the colonial influence whereas the physical aspects of the country were largely exploited by French colonialists for their own gain. This could explain why place is discussed rather nostalgically in many accounts, and why Senegalese opinions show less attachment to the concrete or physical elements of a place.

The possibility of a view of Senegal as contaminated by the colonial influence has significant implications for Senegalese environmental concern. This contamination could be accompanied by a sense of victimization leading to a complex view of responsibility for social, political, or environmental problems, whereby the Senegalese government is faced with resolving conflicts primarily caused by French colonizers. This could promote the view that since the Senegalese people did not directly cause a given problem, they should not be responsible for its resolution. Furthermore, the view of France in the Senegalese cultural imagination suggests that it is a place of unending economic prosperity, whereas the Senegalese economy is still weak more than fifty years post independence. Thus, while projects toward sustainable development, for example, may not even be economically feasible for Senegal, this situation might be further complicated by questions of ownership over the country and of responsibility for solutions to environmental problems.

Place, and the diverse elements that contribute to its meaning such as colonial influence, therefore presents an interesting way to conceptualize environmental concern that is not often addressed in environmental discourse. This study of place in Senegalese novels and interviews about student migration discusses tensions in how place is presented that are also broadly applicable to environmental discourse. For example, the concept of nature is frequently described in romanticized terms in contemporary American environmental narratives. In contrast to many

historical narratives where nature was viewed as a dangerous and lonely place, modernization and urbanization influenced the construction of nature as a pure or uncorrupted place free of human influence. This conception of nature first reflects ideas of mythical space whereby our view of nature seemingly rejects the role of experience in favor of our preferred conceptions. Second, the ideas associated with nature strongly relate to the nostalgia used especially in *The Abandoned Baobab* to describe a place free of negative influences. The concept of nature (and of Bugul's village) frequently refers to a time which was more pure and which may be entirely imagined or only loosely based in reality. The tension between tradition and modernity addressed in Senegalese accounts of place therefore has broader implications for contemporary environmental discourse that extends beyond nature alone.

Additionally, place in this study is generally more conceptual than experiential, and tends to emphasize imagined rather than real aspects of places. It is interesting that the role of experience in these accounts is largely discounted even when the external reality directly contradicts one's conception of a place. The experience of place in these novels and interviews are filtered through personal and cultural preconceived notions of how a place should be. This explains how, for example in *Patera*, the difficult experiences of most immigrants are ignored in favor of the imagined view of Europe in Senegalese culture. Thus, incongruities are seemingly immediately eliminated from experience. Environmental discourse reflects this phenomenon since incongruities are frequently ignored to maintain the preferred cultural view of a concept or an environmental problem. This is the case of nature or wildness where human influence has either directly (e.g., through endangered species protection) or indirectly (e.g., through climate change) altered almost every portion of the earth in a way that limits our ability to talk about nature in a traditional sense. However, the nostalgic views of pure nature remain in much

(popular) environmental discourse despite the fact that these views are largely grounded in imagination rather than what physically exists.

      This analysis of Senegalese literature and student interviews has shown that place matters concerning migratory decisions and more broadly that intersecting social, historical, and political factors significantly affect how people identify with their homeland. Place and sense of place are therefore a useful means to understand how groups or individuals relate to and understand their environments and the world. As I have demonstrated, place narratives can be extrapolated to contemporary environmental discourse to better determine how environmental narratives are communicated and how they affect the larger cultural understandings of our surroundings.

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