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Anna-Leena Toivanen

Diasporic Romances Gone Bad: Impossible Returns to Africa in Myriam Warner-Vieyra's *Juletane*, Buchi Emecheta's *Kehinde* and Véronique Tadjo's *Loin de mon père*

Abstract: This article looks into the thematic of homecoming to the African continent in the novels *Juletane* by Myriam Warner-Vieyra, *Kehinde* by Buchi Emecheta, and *Loin de mon père* by Véronique Tadjo. My reading sets out to bring together the notions of diaspora and nationhood, which are often conceived as mutually exclusive. I am arguing for the importance of an emphatic reintroduction of the African nation-state and its disturbing failures of decolonization onto the postcolonial theoretical agenda, which is currently more concerned with somewhat unidirectional manifestations of transnational mobility. The novels under scrutiny rewrite the diasporic romance of return from a gendered viewpoint, exposing the inhospitable nature of the postcolonial African nation-state towards the female revenants. While the novels' settings vary greatly from each other, they all represent the gendered diasporic return to the national home as a practical impossibility. Read together, the novels display an interesting continuum of postcolonial disillusionment by giving voice to the failed narrative of the postcolonial African projects of nation-building. While the dream of return literally dies in *Juletane* and is understood as a realistic impossibility in *Kehinde*, it seems that *Loin de mon père*, in its outright disillusionment, paradoxically articulates the most hopeful vision of the three novels.

Keywords: Africa; diaspora; home; nation; return; women

In its aspiration to transcend the boundaries of the nation, canonized postcolonial theory has been inclined to focus on questions of migrancy and dislocation. In the current paradigm, transnational circulation and its implications are primarily conceived in terms of postcolonial subjects' migrations from the Global South towards the modernity of western metropolises. Indeed,

as Deepika Bahri suggests, movement “away from and out of the Third World” seems to be constitutive of the paradigmatic postcolonial subject (175). On a general scale, the post-/transnational turn, with its “topos of migration [,] signifies the refusal to be contained and accounted for by the frameworks of home and nation”, as Ayo A. Coly (xi) claims in her study, which is critical of the current paradigm. Coly criticizes postnational theoretical discourses for focusing on deterritorialization and thus neglecting the postcolonial nation despite the fact that in postcolonial literatures, it remains an “important locus of identification” (125). In its criticism of nationhood and nationalist discourses, the postnational paradigm is more interested in western metropolitan diasporic spaces than in the realities of the Global South. This relative lack of critical interest in the Third World and the postcolonial nation on the postcolonial theoretical map is probably most flagrant when it comes to Africa. As Simon Gikandi has observed, the failures of the African postcolonial nation-state seem to represent an undesirable counterbalance to the celebrative accounts of globalization that acclaim cosmopolitan modes of hybridity and difference (610). Curiously enough, even discourses concerned with the Black Atlantic have excluded the continent from their conceptions of transatlantic movement, focusing instead on interactions between Britain and the US (Goyal 7; Owomoyela 244). The absence of the African continent and its disturbing failures of decolonization seems symptomatic of the current postnationalist paradigm, occupied as it is with dismantling the nation and embracing rather optimistic understandings of globalization. This generates a serious ethical dilemma, as Coly points out: “[B]y eluding the postcolonial African nation, postnationalist discourses of home [...] dodge the political [...] task of confronting the urgency of local realities and the continuing fact of empire” (127). Reintroducing nationhood on the postcolonial agenda does not, obviously, have to imply an unproblematic resurrection of nationalist discourses. On the contrary, in today’s postcolonial moment, it seems all the more evident that their story is “an exhausted one”, as David Scott puts it (57). Rather, it is a question of simply taking into account the darker reverse of globalization and cosmopolitanism – a reverse at

whose heart lies the failure of the postcolonial nation-state to produce viable prospects of living for its citizens.

In contrast to the current topos of migration with its emphasis on the movement from the Third World towards western metropolises, conceptions of mobility have not always been constructed along such unidirectional lines. After colonial narratives of conquest, different pan-Africanist and black internationalist discourses, motivated by shared histories of imperialism and slavery, adopted the African continent as their ultimate destination. In the Francophone literary context, the Négritude movement has had an important influence on the formation of the field. The movement embraced the idea of a mythical return to the African continent in order to reconnect with one's cultural roots. In addition to the Négritude movement, the notion of return has been a recurrent motive in diasporic literatures: it is a trope through which issues related to home, nostalgia and roots have been discussed, sometimes with mythologizing overtones (Nyman 37-39). During the African decolonization period, the trope of return was often closely linked to optimistic nation-building narratives and national homecomings of cosmopolitan been-to's, whereas Caribbean fictions of return cherished images of homecoming with pan-Africanist ideals (Boehmer, Colonial 192). In black diasporic literatures, as Yogita Goyal puts it, "the sign of Africa speaks as directly to dreams of redemption and return to a lost homeland, as it does to the politics of fighting racism and imperialism" (8). In this sense, Black Atlantic narratives can be seen to belong to the narrative genre of romance, "implying a non-linear, messianic temporality". Simultaneously, however, they are also marked by an impulse of teleological, modernizing nationalism. (Goyal 9) Goyal goes on to argue that contrary to the common view, nationalism and diaspora are not mutually exclusive, and that the critique of nationhood implied in diaspora "does not work as a disavowal alone [...] as it contains within it its object of critique" (16). In other words, questions of home and belonging are important for diasporic narratives even though they are often approached more critically than in nationalist discourses. Simultaneously, while the notions of home and nation are profoundly

intertwined, it is nevertheless obvious that not all national subjects feel equally at home in a given nation; gendered diasporic narratives treating issues of national belonging are good examples of the disjunction of home and nation. In short: diaspora and nationhood are not mutually exclusive, and nationhood does not automatically signify home.

The post-independence era has witnessed the rise of less romanticized accounts of diasporic returns in both African and Caribbean fictions, representing the return more commonly as “an emotional crisis, the end of a nostalgic dream, or a harsh encounter with a reality of continuing social and political hardship” (Boehmer, *Colonial* 192). The romantic imagery of the return to Mother Africa has also been disturbed by approaches that take into account gender differences. As Piper Kendrix Williams suggests in her analysis on Ama Ata Aidoo’s, Maryse Condé’s and Marita Golden’s representations of women’s migrations “back” to the African continent, gender further complicates the already impossible return to the extent that “the migrations [...] turn quickly into exile” (55). In other words, the diasporic African female revenant is always not only African/Black, but also *female*, and this very fact has an impact on the way in which “return” and “home” are experienced. This is why Carol Boyce Davies urges researchers to be attentive to “the totalizing nature of nationalist (Africa-diaspora) discourse” when dealing with questions of home in a gendered context or in “any other ideological stance or identity position which is not subsumed under Black/African nationalism” (49-50). In Black women’s diasporic narratives, romantic quests for mythical homelands are highly questioned, hence disrupting the intertwined narratives of home and nation (Davies 113). When it comes to the nation-building project, women’s role in the national drama is most typically that of the producer of new (male) citizens, or more symbolically, the bearer of the tradition (Boehmer, *Stories* 29). The gendered, asymmetrical power structures that characterize postcolonial national projects can be reckoned to be among their failures of decolonization. So, when Anne M. François poses the apt question whether “the return to origins

[would] be questionable if the continent was economically and politically stable” (xxxii), one should understand “stability” in terms of gender equality, as well.

As to the alleged substantive differences between the Anglo- and Francophone literary fields, I am inclined to agree with Kathleen Gyssels and Bénédicte Ledent on the artificiality of pigeonholing African cultural products along conventional language barriers (13), and believe that there are good prerequisites for a fruitful comparative dialogue across linguistic borders. In postcolonial literary studies, it has been rather common to “promote the splintering of African literature into linguistic camps reinforcing the false notion that [Anglophone and Francophone] literatures are inherently different” (Nfah-Abbenyi x), which is a tendency against which my comparative reading actively positions itself. What is more, as Charles Forsdick and David Murphy (7-8) maintain, a similar lack of dialogue can also be identified in the relation between postcolonial and Francophone studies: while the former has been focusing mainly on Anglophone texts at the expense of other languages such as French, the latter has been suspicious of the supposed Anglo-Saxon biases of postcolonial studies. Furthermore, Francophone studies have been more concerned with linguistics and geographical criteria than analyzing the corollaries of French colonialism. However, as Forsdick and Murphy go on to suggest, the two fields are not essentially different: they have taken divergent yet parallel paths, and thus a genuine dialogue would benefit their mutual development. (7) As to the thematic concerns, it can be argued that, on a general scale, Anglophone and Francophone African literatures have been preoccupied with similar questions: gender difference, collapse of the national project, AIDS/HIV, environment issues, migratory movements and globalization belong to contemporary themes that transcend linguistic classifications. The novels under scrutiny in this essay all address issues related to gender, diaspora and nationhood with different emphases. Diachronically, Myriam Warner-Vieyra’s *Juletane* (1982) is representative of the first wave of feminist African novels, addressing questions such as polygamy in a personal diary form; in this sense, it shares many resemblances with Mariama Bâ’s *Une si longue lettre*

(1979). In its treatment of subjects such as madness and violence, the novel could also be compared to works of authors such as Bessie Head and Calixthe Beyala. Buchi Emecheta's *Kehinde* (1994), one of the author's so called London novels, is not only a feminist diasporic text interested in feminine self-discovery and empowerment, but also a novel with an emphatically postcolonial approach to multiculturalism. Véronique Tadjo's *Loin de mon père* (2010), on the other hand, can be linked to the canon of Francophone African migrant novels, although it places the emphasis on the "original location" that has been left behind instead of on the actual diasporic space in a similar vein to the works of Fatou Diome. Together the three novels paint a complex picture of the intersections of gender, dislocation and nationhood in the postcolonial African context.

The "happy endings" inscribed into nationalist narratives of home (George 15) turn into romances gone bad in the three novels that I analyse in this article. I discuss the notions of return and national home from a gendered viewpoint in the novels by Warner-Vieyra, Emecheta and Tadjo. While Warner-Vieyra's *Juletane*, Emecheta's *Kehinde*, and Tadjo's *Loin de mon père* are all set in different temporal, geographical and socio-political contexts, the theme of return to the African continent and to the postcolonial nation-state figures in all of them. Suzan Z. Andrade maintains that in African women's writing, "representations of national politics become most sharply visible through allegorical readings of familial structures and institutions" (92). This is the case of the novels under scrutiny, where the national drama is primarily set on the familial/domestic stage. In Warner-Vieyra's and Emecheta's novels – respectively entitled after their protagonists – the return takes place in the African nation-building context and is motivated by masculinist nationalist ambitions. In these two novels, it is the protagonist's husband who wants to leave his cosmopolitan life in Paris/London in order to return to his native Senegal/Nigeria – an itinerary with which the female protagonist is expected to comply. Tadjo's more recent novel, on the contrary, is set in the civil-war ridden Ivory Coast in the 2000s, where the cosmopolitan protagonist Nina returns momentarily in order to organize her father's funeral. If the other two novels nurture homing

desires (Brah 193) towards the “original” location – however frail they may be – in Tadjó’s novel, where the protagonist remains highly disillusioned in the face of the failures of the postcolonial nation-state, this sort of search for belonging is deemed pointless from the very outset. Despite their different settings and their diverse ways of conceptualizing the problem of return, the novels also share some similarities. In all three, the protagonists have lost either both their parents or at least their mother at some point of their lives. This places them in a certain state of homelessness and orphanage which is likely to invoke in them a more or less conscious quest for belonging, an aspiration to reclaim their connection to the African mother figure as in *Juletane* and *Kehinde*, or to renegotiate the relation with the national father as in *Loin de mon père*. This quest, of course, turns out to be an impossible one, as the continent assumes less the role of a nurturing mother than that of a disappointing father (see François ix-x). The returns of the three protagonists are also all marked by a deception on the part of the male figure (husband/father) who has initiated or motivated the whole venture of return. The fact that in Tadjó’s novel the protagonist’s return is motivated by her father and not by a husband denotes a more direct engagement with the (paternal) nation than in the two other novels in which the return is depicted primarily as the husband’s personal project of homecoming. The absence of a husband in Tadjó’s novel does that the female protagonist has the possibility to renegotiate more actively her own relation to the African Fatherland than Warner-Vieyra’s and Emecheta’s heroines whose husbands function as some kinds of intermediaries. In a way, then, in these novels, the father figure seems less repressive than the husband. My reading of the novels intertwines gendered diasporic African migrations with the narrative of the postcolonial nation, tracing its narrative from its early emergence charged with promises of new beginnings, through the subsequent insufficiencies and failures to its eventual crisis, deprived of any redeeming horizon of hope. How is the return imagined in the novels and what is the place of the female revenant in the national home? I start by tracing the failed romance of diasporic returns to the

national African home with Warner-Vieyra's novel, then proceed to Emecheta's, and finally, discuss Tadjó's text.

Juletane tells the story of a young West Indian woman who has migrated to Paris and subsequently to the newly independent Senegal, the homeland of her husband. Juletane's departure from the Caribbean is marked by her being an orphan, and her voyage to the African continent can be interpreted as an aspiration to undo her sense of unbelonging through the "return to a maternal African womb" (King 102). Furthermore, the novel can be read as a critical feminist rewriting of the male-centred narratives of diasporic return and nation-building. It is written in the form of a diary, with the exception of the chapters narrated from the viewpoint of a social assistant, Héléne, a Caribbean woman living in Africa with her fiancé. Héléne is also the reader of Juletane's diary, and her character stands in striking opposition to Juletane: she, unlike Juletane, succeeds in negotiating her identity in a way that "neither denies nor accepts her rupture with Africa" (Willey 450). In its form of "un récit complètement décousu, une histoire de fou" (16) – 'a disjointed tale, incoherent ramblings' (4) – the diary is set in the private realm, outside official nation-building narratives. Further, the fragmentary form of the novel, as Ann Elizabeth Willey has argued, suggests that linear narratives could not capture the complexity of the Caribbean experience of the return to the African "motherland" (453). The retreat from national narratives is in itself significant, and the way in which the novel conveys affects of solitude, melancholia, and madness forms a disturbing counter-discourse to the utopian register of the nation-building project and the romantic aspirations of diasporic narratives of return.

Juletane meets her future husband Mamadou in Paris, where the couple frequents politically aware exilic circles interested in the African decolonization processes. Symptomatically, Juletane is not familiar with these issues, which are for her merely "theoretical" (26): "Jusqu'à ma rencontre avec Mamadou, j'avais donc vécu bien loin de tout écho du monde colonial. Aussi, l'indépendance ou autonomie étaient des mots tout à fait nouveaux pour moi" (30) 'So until I met

Mamadou I had lived very far indeed from any echo of the colonial world. Hence, independence or self-government were words which were quite new to me' (12). Once Mamadou has completed his studies, the couple marries and "returns" to Senegal, where the husband aspires to make a career in the service of the new nation-state. In the beginning, the departure to the African continent represents for Juletane a return to her origins and a possibility of a whole new start. Still, she cannot quite utter her feelings: "Je fut saisie de bonheur. J'ouvris la bouche mais aucun son ne sortit. Je vivais un merveilleux rêve" (32) 'I was overwhelmed with happiness. I opened my mouth, but no sound came out. I was living a wonderful dream' (13). Essentially, the return embodies masculinised hopes of nation-building, the dreams of Juletane herself remaining formless, non-verbalized and complying with those of her husband. The destination is Mamadou's not Juletane's Africa, and the latter's quest for belonging soon proves to be unrealisable: "L'arrivée sur cette terre africaine des mes pères, je l'avais de cent manières imaginée, voici qu'elle se transformait en un cauchemar" (35) 'This homecoming to Africa, the land of my forefathers, I had imagined it in a hundred different ways, and it had become a nightmare' (15). One of the reasons that Juletane's homecoming turns out impossible are her West Indian origins: she is not considered as a real African. Juletane is treated as a "toubabesse", a white colonial wife, which divests her of her African identity. She does not speak the local language, nor is she familiar with the traditions. Her unfamiliarity functions as a barrier between her and the world outside, and, eventually, this barrier establishes itself also in her relationship with Mamadou. So in a sense, notions of tradition and communality that are defined in empowering terms in romantic diasporic narratives, gain exclusionary meanings in *Juletane*. The main reason that the dream of return becomes a nightmare is the fact that Mamadou, her only point of reference, turns out to be already married and have children. Due to this revelation, Juletane is seized by a sense of melancholia which reinforces her isolation from the world so that everything that takes place outside the boundaries of the house remains beyond her reality. The grip of melancholia turns her into a feminine misfit in the national

narrative, a madwoman inclined to violence, as her murder of the children of Awa (Mamadou's first wife) and the disfiguration of Ndèye (the younger wife) illustrate. Juletane's only connection to the world outside the domestic realm is a radio that Awa listens to. The radio is set in the yard, and it is broadcasting "le discours du chef du gouvernement, depuis la ville sainte. Je retiens des mots: 'Œuvre national', 'développement', 'premier plan quadriennal', etc." (44) 'the speech made by the head of government, from the holy city. I catch words: national effort, development, first four year plan, etc.' (21) This mechanically memorised wordlist indicates that Juletane's alienation in the national project is not dissimilar to Awa's, whom she reproaches for listening to broadcasts whose discourse she can barely understand. Juletane also criticizes Awa for the fact that her universe "s'arrête à une natte sous un arbre et trois enfants autour" (17) 'stops at a mat under a tree and her three children around her' (5). This accusation, however, applies to her as well, with the exception that Juletane is childless after becoming accidentally sterile – a fact that further contributes to her status as a feminine national misfit through her failure to "confirm the virility" of her husband. The loss of the child clips the wings of her aspirations to embrace an identity other than that of a stranger or madwoman.

Juletane's isolation has both spatial and temporal dimensions: she does not belong to the space and time of the nation, and feels like "une épave à la dérive dans le temps et l'espace" (109) 'a rudderless boat adrift in time and space' (60). Her temporary scope is limited to the present, her past being "si loin et monotone" (91) 'so far away and so uneventful' (49), and the future lacking any horizon of hope, marked by endlessly repeating routines and what she calls a "vegetable" existence. Juletane's temporal vacuum is in total discord with the modernizing nationalist discourses oriented towards the future, or those in search for a glorious past. Eventually, Juletane abandons all her dreams, including that of leaving: "Moi, je ne rêve plus de Paris ou d'ailleurs. J'ai définitivement enterré tout ce qui se passe en dehors de cette maison" (54) 'As for me, I never dream of Paris or anywhere else any more. I have buried once and for all everything that goes on

outside this house' (26). The theme of burial can be read as a symptom of melancholia, a condition that embodies the loss of a loved object that the subject refuses to give up by making it part of herself. The melancholic subject is a highly self-critical one, and, given that the loved object has become one with the melancholic subject, the critical core is actually directed towards the lost loved object itself. (Freud 160-63) It is through the articulation of the melancholic affect that the narrative problematizes the possibility of romantic returns and the new beginnings they are supposed to entail. Juletane's estranged condition reflects the impossibility of the feminine belonging to the national home. The acknowledgement of the critical quality of melancholia is implied in the following:

Ici, on m'appelle "la folle", cela n'a rien d'original. Que savent-ils de la folie ? Et si les fous n'étaient pas fous ! Si un certain comportement que les gens simples et vulgaires nomment folie, n'étaient que sagesse, reflet de l'hypersensibilité lucide d'une âme pure, droite, précipitée dans un vide affectif réel ou imaginaire ? Pour moi, je suis la personne la plus clairvoyante de la maison. (13-14)

Here, they call me "the mad woman", not very original. What do they know about madness? What if mad people weren't mad? What if certain types of behaviour which simple, ordinary people call madness, were just wisdom, a reflection of the clear-sighted hypersensitivity of a pure, upright soul plunged into a real or imaginary affective void? To me, I am the most lucid person in the house." (2)

Juletane's impossible search for communal belonging ends in a mental hospital where she eventually dies, with her last written words expressing her hopeless aspiration of "me réveiller dans un autre monde où les fous ne sont pas fous, mais des sages aux regards de justice" (141) 'wak[ing] up in another world where mad people are not mad, but wise and just' (78). The melancholic tale of the mad female revenant effectively calls into question the redemptive narrative of diasporic homecoming to the postcolonial African nation.

While Emecheta's *Kehinde* shares similarities with *Juletane* in terms of the thematic of return to the African postcolonial nation, it presents to the reader a protagonist with quite a different path: once the homecoming to Africa has proven to be impossible, the return is redirected back to the diasporic location. The novel is set in the late 1970s and mid-1980s within the context of the Nigerian oil boom. Like *Juletane*, *Kehinde* shares an interest in the figure of the double. In *Juletane*, Hélène and the protagonist can be read as the "two faces of the same coin" (François 91), whereas in *Kehinde*, the double structure is generated through the figure of Taiwo, the protagonist's stillborn twin sister whose spirit inhabits and guides her. The death of her mother at childbirth leaves Kehinde orphaned just like Juletane, and, in a similar vein, her return to Africa can be interpreted as a failed attempt to reconnect with a lost maternal figure.

The novel opens with the protagonist's husband, Albert, receiving a letter from his sisters in Nigeria who want him "to return home" (1). The idea of return is constructed mainly as a masculine one, accommodating deviating meanings and aspirations: "They want you to return home? What of us?" (1). Albert's longing for return is motivated by dreams of prosperity and masculine pride of "being someone", and these personal dreams are intertwined with a national sense of duty: "Nigeria needs us" (3). There is a discrepancy between the clearly articulated, middle class aspirations of the husband and those of Kehinde, whose "dreams about home are confused" (22) and who does not share the enthusiasm about the return with the rest of the family. Indeed, the return to Nigeria is first and foremost Albert's project of establishing a "new-found confidence" (41) as he suffers from an inferiority complex because of Kehinde's more successful professional career. The return, in this sense, can be conceived as a restoration of patriarchal order, teaching Kehinde "how she was supposed to behave" (35). Kehinde, on the other hand, enjoys her diasporic middle class life, whose comfort is symbolized by the Jaguar her husband washes and polishes every weekend: "[s]itting in the passenger seat beside Albert [...], [she] did not worry much about what else was happening in the world" (41). Eventually, Kehinde overcomes her persistent doubts concerning the return,

reasoning that “Nigeria was her country too” (47), and decides to follow her family to Nigeria without selling the London home, contrary to earlier plans.

On her arrival in Nigeria, Kehinde observes Albert being “thoroughly at home” (66), and finds the husband’s “new confidence”, his patriarchal power that is, somewhat attractive. Her own diasporic middle class comfort, however, is disintegrating like her beloved Jaguar that has started to make “strange sounds that had not been there before, as old bones creak under the still taut skin that holds them together” (67). At first, Kehinde’s gaze is that of a been-to madam: she finds that due to the oil boom, Nigeria has become “almost like a developed country” (67). Despite this patronizing sense of superiority, Kehinde is not received as a respected been-to, but is instead frequently reminded of the fact that “[t]his is Nigeria, you know” (70) or that “This is Africa” (86), implying that diaspora has distanced her from the logic of the local life and made her a stranger in her homeland. In this sense, Kehinde’s humorous statement suggesting that Nigeria might not be “part of this world” (70) rings ironically true for her. She realizes that her Africa was imagined as “one of parties and endless celebrations” (97). The novel displays a similar pattern of unpleasant revelation as *Juletane*: it turns out that during Kehinde’s absence, Albert has taken a second wife who is pregnant with his child. This stands in interesting contrast to the fact that before leaving London, Albert made Kehinde abort the baby she was expecting because of potentially detrimental financial and professional consequences. The abortion can also be read as a refusal to have other than “respectful Nigerian children” (91) brought up in the homeland according to local traditions. At the same time, Kehinde’s decision not to have children after the abortion reflects her retreat from the conventional nationalist “masculine family drama” (Boehmer, *Stories* 28) in which women’s role is defined by motherhood.

Like in *Juletane*, tradition and communality build a gap between the married couple: Kehinde’s been-to madam’s position does not help to keep the husband’s female relatives “in their places” (73), and, consequently, it is not until three days after her arrival that Kehinde has the

opportunity to be alone with her husband as he comes to claim his “marital rights”. Communality in *Kehinde* is defined mainly in repressive terms, and the protagonist fails to adopt the position that is being imposed on her. Similarities with Juletane end here: Kehinde’s way out of the situation is not that of self-annihilation, that is, the “rejection of the myth of origins” through death (François 92), but leaving Africa and her husband. As Kehinde fails to secure herself a job despite the oil boom, and is unwilling to remain financially dependent on her husband, she decides to leave “for [her] own sanity” (102). The idea of return to London awakes in Kehinde sudden bursts of nostalgia somewhat dissimilar to the feelings of uncertainty she felt when returning to Nigeria. At this point, the notion of homecoming radically changes: the destination of dreams is no longer Nigeria, but England, and this time the return is imagined realistically, acknowledging even “the wet stinking body-smell of the underground” (96). The impossible homecoming to the African continent turns even the unwelcoming England into a suitable object of homing desire. This time, Kehinde’s decision to leave is entirely her own, and the rest of the family stays in Nigeria. She borrows the money for the air ticket from her friend in England. Kehinde’s arrival at Heathrow airport signifies an escape from a world on the verge of collapse, and to her surprise “even the immigration officers [are] welcoming” (107). Significantly, the spirit of Taiwo, who remained silent during Kehinde’s stay in Nigeria, welcomes her back to her London home. Eventually, Kehinde suppresses her own feeble protests telling her that her *real* home is in Nigeria by tearing down the “For Sale” sign in the front of the house. This, as John C. Hawley has suggested, is a liberating act on Kehinde’s part both as a Nigerian and as a woman “who chooses to redefine the possibility of nationality for [herself]” (344). Despite this act of empowerment, the return to London also entails a downgrade in Kehinde’s career development: she is obliged to accept a job as a chambermaid, which is yet again another blow to her *been-to* madame’s identity. While Nigeria is admittedly “a man’s world” (94), the country’s instabilities finally have their effects on Kehinde’s husband, who suddenly loses his well-paid job. The news about the deteriorating situation in Nigeria generates a critical discussion

between Kehinde and her colleague about the country's problems, and it is unique in its explicitness in the whole novel: "I'm beginning to give up hope for our country. If the place is well run, will we be here working as hotel room cleaners?" (123) By suggesting that the postcolonial nation-state has only unviable living conditions to offer to its citizens – especially for women – the novel disengages itself from romantic narratives of return. *Kehinde* draws a picture of a national romance gone bad and exposes the interconnection between transnational mobility and the failures of the postcolonial nation-state. From the very outset, the protagonist's feelings about the return were marked by uneasiness, standing hence apart from the naive enthusiasm articulated in *Juletane*. Moreover, the failures of the diasporic and national romances do not drive the protagonist into a breakdown, although they make her realize the impossibility of these endeavours and acknowledge the threat of insanity. The comparison of *Juletane* and *Kehinde* reveals a shift from disillusionment as an unexpected shock into a dispassionate acknowledgement of the state of affairs.

Véronique Tadjo's *Loin de mon père* goes even further in representing the failure of the diasporic romance as a banal matter of fact rather than an unforeseen realization with tragic consequences. The protagonist's return to her native Ivory Coast differs from Warner-Vieyra's and Emecheta's stories in that the return, from the very outset, is conceived in anything but romanticized terms. Nina, a cosmopolitan daughter of an Ivorian father and a French mother, returns from her Parisian life to Abidjan in order to organize her father's funeral. This is the only reason for her temporary return, and unlike Juletane and Kehinde, she has no intentions to stay permanently. The novel opens with Nina's night flight to Abidjan, and the predominant impression is deep anxiety because of the uncertainties waiting for her "at home". There is a pronounced awareness about the delusive nature of one's nostalgic memories of home: "Le pays n'était plus le même. La guerre l'avait balaféré, défiguré, blessé. Pour y vivre aujourd'hui, il fallait renier sa mémoire désuète et ses idées périmées" (13) 'The country was not the same. The war had scarred, disfigured and hurt it. To live there today, one had to renounce one's obsolete memories and

outdated ideas.’ At the core of Nina’s anxiety lies a guilty conscience for having left the “homeland”. She fears potential accusations of playing the *been-to* madam, and in her dreams she hears voices telling her “Personne ne veut de toi, ici. Va t’en!” (14) ‘Nobody wants you here. Go away!’ She is concerned about how those she has left behind “allaient-ils la regarder ?” (15) ‘were going to look at her?’ On her arrival, the old homeland with its heavy bureaucratic practices makes Nina feel an unwanted revenant. Firstly, at the customs, Nina is treated like an intruder until the official realizes that she is the daughter of a prominent national figure. This clearly implies that the country she is returning to is that of her fathers, not hers. Secondly, on the way from the airport to her father’s house, the car is stopped by a soldier for an identity control, in pursuance of which Nina’s passport is deemed an insufficient document. The menace of the civil war is present everywhere on the city streets, making Nina ask herself “Etait-ce bien là Abidjan, cette ville dans laquelle elle s’était toujours sentie en sécurité ?” (21) ‘Was this really Abidjan, the city in which she had always felt safe?’ Significantly, the house in which Nina grew up is now inhabited by a service man, and military men pass frequently by her father’s home. The crisis of the nation-state has taken over the domestic sphere, invading the notion of home as something private and safe. What is more, the postcolonial state lays claim to her father’s memory by sending state officials to the ceremony: “Kouadio, paix à son âme, nous appartient biologiquement, mais pas socialement. C’est une figure publique qui a beaucoup fait pour son pays” (27) ‘Kouadio, may he rest in peace, belongs to us biologically, but not socially. He’s a public figure who has done so much for his country’.

The overall mood of the novel is strongly marked by a sense of powerlessness and loss of hope. First of all, Nina finds out that during the latest years of his life, her father had, despite his former prominence, already lost contact with the rulers, turning into a relic of the ancient regime and deemed guilty for the chaotic state of affairs. It is suggested that this guilt, together with his displacement from the centers of power, essentially contributed to her father’s death: “Elle avait senti en lui une grande lassitude, colère éteinte par trop d’espairs déçus” (15) ‘She had sensed in

him a great weariness, anger killed by too many lost hopes'. Significantly, it seems that the affect of hopelessness takes over Nina as an unpleasant paternal heritage. She feels "terriblement triste" (30) 'awfully sad', asking herself whether it is on her shoulders that the family's future lies or whether she has better solutions to propose for overcoming the national crisis. She finds herself faced with numerous moral questions concerning her own role in the national chaos, accusing her father for having left "sans la mettre dans la bonne direction" (113) 'without guiding her in the right direction'. Closely related to Nina's personal sense of powerlessness, the novel also comments on the role of intellectuals and artists in the national turmoil. Nina claims that there is "une responsabilité morale quand on a eu accès à l'éducation" (133) 'a moral responsibility when one has had access to education', and reproaches her artist friends for passivity and submission in the face of the country's crisis. Finally, she gives up her idealism and sighs, "Je perds vraiment mon temps" (158) 'I'm really wasting my time'.

Nina is made to realize that her diasporic life has distanced her from the local realities. When she finds out about her father's financial problems and meets one of his creditors who has no proof about the total of the debt, the creditor remarks patronizingly: "Mais voyons, Nina, tu sais bien comment les choses se passent chez nous" (58) 'But come on, Nina, you well know how things happen around here'. For Nina, traditional beliefs and customs seem to have no sense at all. At one point, her father's funeral has to be postponed because of concurrent traditional festivities, which in turn lengthens her stay in the country. While for her aunts, "[c]e sont des choses qui arrivent" (104) 'these are things that just happen', for Nina "[c]e n'est pas normal" (105) 'it is not normal'. Nina is forced to submit to the demands of the family and their traditions, finding herself "[i]ncapable de prononcer un mot de plus" (105) 'unable to mouth another word'. Another element that essentially contributes to the protagonist becoming a stranger in her homeland is the growing cultural distance between her and the father for whom she has returned in the first place. While in *Juletane* and *Kehinde* it was the husband who led a double life, a similar pattern repeats

itself in Tadjó's novel as the father's deceptions start to unfold. Once again, it is an issue of having secret families and descendants, and the actions of the treacherous head of the family are common knowledge to all his relatives except his daughter. In a way, then, it is the tradition and the relatives that install themselves as obstacles between Nina and her father, and, consequently, the "fatherland". Once she finds out that her father had resorted to sorcery in his professional and personal problems, Nina questions "[d]ans quel monde son père avait-il vécu ?" (69) 'in what world had her father lived?' The father and daughter are worlds apart.

There is a chapter that describes a telephone conversation in which Nina announces the delay in the funeral organizations to her Parisian boyfriend, Frédéric. The short dialogue is dense in meaning by exposing unsaid tensions between here and there, and the fear of the one who is left behind that the revenant might find herself more at home in her "original" location. Frédéric asks Nina how much longer the funeral organizations are going to take, fearing that she is not coming back to Paris again. Nina's answer – "Ne dis pas de bêtises, tu sais très bien pourquoi je suis ici" (106) 'Don't be foolish, you know exactly why I am here' – shows that there is no possibility that she could feel herself at home in Ivory Coast. Nina acknowledges the impossibility of return: "[E]lle se sentait aussi étrangère qu'une Africaine débarquant dans les rues de Paris. [...] L'impression de ne plus être utile la dissuadait. Demain ne lui appartenait plus dans cette ville. La vie s'organisait sans elle" (112) 'She felt as alien as an African woman landing in the streets of Paris. [...] The feeling of not being useful any longer discouraged her. Tomorrow in this city did not belong to her anymore. Life went on without her'. Compared to Kehinde's rather happy detour from Nigeria back to her home in London, in Nina's case the question of belonging is more problematically resolved: "C'était en elle que se trouvait la cassure, l'impossibilité de vivre où que ce soit" (112) 'The fracture was part of herself; the impossibility of living anywhere at all'. In this sense, Nina comes closer to Juletane, whose complex origins as a "not entirely" African contribute to the state of homelessness and unbelonging that she experiences.

Besides the feeling of being rejected by the homeland, Nina also herself actively rejects the idea of returning for good. She sees the situation in the country as hopeless, and does not believe in more favorable future prospects. In a discussion with her former lover, Nina overtly expresses her uneasiness about the idea of staying, and exposes her cosmopolitan privilege of having the chance to choose her place to live: “Mais pourquoi prendrais-je une telle décision ? [...] Cela n’a pas de sens, c’est le chaos ici. [...] Il existe beaucoup d’autres pays plus accueillants. Pourquoi gâcher ma vie ici ?” (101) ‘But why would I make such a decision? [...] There’d be no sense, it’s chaos here. [...] There are many other more welcoming countries. Why waste my life here?’ This is where Nina differs especially from Juletane but also to a certain extent from Kehinde: she is at no point at the mercy of her old homeland’s hospitality, since she can return to her normal life when it suits her. Migrants of her generation are deemed too impatient and pessimistic by Nina’s relatives, as they seek to leave the crisis-ridden country as soon as possible. In the middle of crisis, as Nina’s former lover stresses, there are still people who stay and who “refusent pas la vie quotidienne” (101) ‘do not refuse the ordinary life’ and who keep the country functioning despite the chaos. In a chapter towards the end of the novel, there are hints that suggest that the possibility of a permanent return is not entirely excluded, after all. Yet the narrator makes it clear that in the case of Nina’s potential return, it would be necessary to change her attitudes and acknowledge her powerlessness when it comes to certain matters of fact. At the end of the novel, Nina surprisingly makes some concessions to tradition by placing clothes and money in the father’s coffin for his next life. The closing chapter depicting the obsequies can be read as a kind of reconciliation between the protagonist, her father, and the land: Nina takes some soil in her hand to throw on the coffin, but some of it remains attached to her skin, and she is reluctant to leave the grave when the time comes. While it might be daring to interpret the novel’s ending words – “Elle pensa qu’elle l’aimerait toujours” (189) ‘she thought that she would love him forever’ – as a declaration of daughterly love to the African fatherland, it nevertheless indicates a reconciliatory gesture unimaginable in the

failed romances of return of *Juletane* or *Kehinde*. Ironically, Nina's disillusionment and lack of romanticized expectations about the homecoming open up a terrain for a whole new possibility of return.

"Homes", maintains Rosemary Marangoly George, "are not about inclusions and wide open arms as much as they are about places carved out of closed doors, closed borders and screening apparatuses" (18). This is certainly true for the protagonists of the three novels under scrutiny: their returns to the African continent are anything but redemptive diasporic narratives of national homecomings. My interpretation of these homecoming romances gone bad conveys the idea that diasporic narratives do not exclude questions of nationhood, and that indeed, one of the very reasons that these returns are unsuccessful is the fact that the postcolonial nation-state has betrayed its promises of decolonization and that these failures are gendered. I think that these failures need to be restored to the agenda of postcolonial studies. I have been tracing the failed narrative of the postcolonial African nation-state through three somewhat different diasporic novels. Together the novels form an interesting continuum in their perception of postcolonial disillusionment with the postcolonial nation-state's capacity to provide its female citizens with viable living conditions, a home that is. In *Juletane*, romanticized ideals of national homecoming turn into an unexpected shock with extremely tragic consequences, whereas *Kehinde* gives voice to a more down-to-earth understanding of the impossibility of return. *Loin de mon père*, on the other hand, acknowledges outright the futility of the very endeavour to return and regards the eventual failure to achieve a sense of belonging as a matter of fact rather than as an unforeseen disaster. To turn back to David Scott's illuminating study on the tragedy of colonial enlightenment, this shift could be read in terms of narrative modes as a transition from a redemptive romance to a more complex tragedy, with several obstacles on the protagonist's way – obstacles that may obstruct one's sense of direction and even the goal. Scott argues that tragedy has some important virtues that are helpful in dealing with the complexities of the postcolonial era and its numerous, unresolved crises (168). Scott notes:

If one of the great lessons of Romance is that we are masters and mistresses of our destiny, that our pasts can be left behind and new futures leaped into, tragedy has a less sanguine teaching to offer. Tragedy has a more respectful attitude to the past: it honors, however reluctantly, the obligations the past imposes. (135)

I think that this acknowledgement about the limits that contexts impose on subjects finds its articulation in Tadjó's *Loin de mon père*. Ironically, in its outright hopelessness, it is also the only novel of the three in which the protagonist actually gives the return a second thought once she is fully aware of all the complexity and the obstacles that the situation entails.

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