The Role of Food and the Politics of Belonging in Alain Mabanckou's*Blue White Red*

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Abstract

Writers and critics of Francophone diasporic literature have many ways of approaching the questions of immigration and post-migration attitudes. The most consistent is their approach to African diaspora through the gender lens, race, culture, identity, and marginal opportunities. *Blue White Red* the debut work of Congolese writer; Alain Mabanckou has been analyzed through the *La Sape* fashion movement inFrancophone migration by critics as a flipside work for presenting characters in flipside societies. It has also been read as the proverbial multifarious deterrent story about African youth's transnational ambitions of accomplishment and citizenship. The functions of food in the politics of belonging for the undocumented migrant are important limitations in previous studies that require further research. The aim of this paper, therefore, is to address the ways in which Mabanckou portrays food by exploring its intense symbolism in the experiences of undocumented migrants. This study will therefore fill the gap by investigating how food, food places and rituals as forms of resistance and control. It reveals that food is an empowering agency for the individual, community, as well as government. This research shows how food heightens collective memory, displacement, and socialization and enhances identity-formation.

Keywords: Diaspora, Francophone, Immigration, Culture, Identity, Food, Food Places,

Introduction

Francophone diaspora literature has many ways of approaching the question of immigration and post-migration practices. The most consistent is immigration in relation to race, nationality, culture, and identity, with the cultural content of the two societies closely linked to colonialism. Thus, for the Francophone diaspora the experiences of African migrants in France date back to their colonial and post-colonial situation. This theme started gaining literary presence from the 1930s with the works of negritude writers like Leopold Sedar Senghor and Aime Cesaire. Their works as those of the Anglophone pan-African authors relate their racial experiences in the West to the colonial history of the African continent. Although the reasons for migration, then education, and now (political, economics, natural disaster, war, etc.) differ greatly, what remains unchanged is the treatment of the migrant in 21st century France. Instead of reduction in the marginalization of blacks, the situation is exacerbating with globalization. Consequently France as a once colonial state is faced with post- colonial immigration challenges that include former

colonies, complex issues of integration and prohibition. In this context, most of the migrant literature possess these features and ways of improvement. Subha Xavier in *The Migrant Text, Making and Marketing a Global French Literature* (2016:p.12), describes the migrant text as the literature that takes into consideration the "economic, poetic and cultural strategies" a writer appropriates to explore the migration experience. This is significant since most of the writers are resident in different diasporic locations and their experiences bear witness to the themes they explore. The other way round migration literature is significant in combating dominant narratives; and investigates identity and nationality, providing literary enlightenment since literature is the outcome of social struggle (Burge 2020:p.14). Mabanckou thus through the issues raised in the narration contributes to the discourse on African migration in contemporary fiction.

Blue White Red is a representation of Central Africa's 21st century migration to France and engages the debate on contemporary issues of migration, belonging and France's immigrations protocols. The text like Veronique Tadjo's*Lion Des mon Pere* (2010), Fatou Diome's *The Belly of the Atlantic* (2003) and Daniel Biyaoula"s *L'Impaase* (1996), also queries some perceptions and attitudes emanating from the homeland's postcolonial mentality. The different themes Mabanckou tackles expose and deconstruct both countries' prevailing national and transnational concept of belonging thereby presenting options for his characters. The text highlights the questions of colonial history of diffusion, acculturation, and perceptions in relation to cultural construction and migration. Mabanckou in this novel has to a large extent contributed in positioning Africa and the Congo in the history of world literature by engaging contemporary conversation in transnational migration and what it means to be African at the center of the debate. In addition, the theme of migration offers Mabanckou the liberty to transform his subjects and subjectivities in the ways they negotiate their dual identities. Food and fashion are central in the identity formation and self-awareness his characters exhibit and in the multiple levels of the writer's inquiry about home, migration, culture and authenticity. The functions of these two tropes in the black immigration story show that the experience for the African goes beyond accessing international borders. It is a deliberate method used by the author to depict the different levels of domination that exist in the societies. The various ways the characters and government utilize both to explore autonomy and control, and also draw attention to the failures of authorities, whether in the homeland or in the host country to their responsibilities. Kathomi Gatwiri and Leticia Anderson (2021:p. 28) emphasize that clear understanding of subjective migratory experience can only be possible when critics explore how "bordering practices" are engaged when "racialized bodies" enter international spaces and their mission to be incorporated in the host country. This observation begins with the difficult processes of entering Western countries which underscore their suspicion of African migrants. Gatwiri and Anderson insist that modern ways of humanizing political dialogue on migration give indication of power use to regulate those seen as treacherous, atypical and difficult to be absorbed in the system. They see the trend as a result of universal social disparity, control, and degradation of the black race. *Blue White Red* highlights through the trope of food and fashion this conflict between the state actors

and undocumented Congolese migrants as the latter struggle to assert their individuality in an oppressive environment.

The narrative is centered on two migrant groups, the Parisians and the Peasants, especially the exploits of Moki who represents the Parisians. Life in Paris and Pointe Noire the homeland is the fulcrum of the narration. Within the two locations lie the distinction between a true Parisian and a Peasant. A Parisian goes to France to live in the capital city, Paris, unlike a Peasant who lives in the province. The Parisians are African Dandies, men of style and members of La Sape movement. Thus, the text magnifies the distrust these groups have against one another. While the Peasants go to France in search of higher education and work for economic growth, the Parisian is driven by the desire to acquire fashionable taste and the means to impress those in the homeland. That is how Moki, a highly respected sapeur captures the attention of his audience and inadvertently ensnares Massala-Massala, the protagonist. His web of lies is just to impress and maintain an imaginary status as "the real Parisian" and foremost sapeurin Pointe Noire and Paris. Moki's full name is Charles Moki and like most sapeur is in reality a man of low station in Paris. He has however managed to upgrade his family from being dirt poor to a middle class repute by utilizing his meager resources to build a house and live flamboyantly at Pointe Noire. Moki, on every visit delights his listeners, mostly young men with stories of his adventure. He paints this picture of opulence and ease, while in truth he is an undocumented migrant living obscurely in France. He enjoys the attention and respect of his people as a Paris returnee with suitcases filled with clothes and other French commodities. However, his life in France is full of uncertainty and covert maneuvers for his daily existence. But his awestruck audience is unaware of this truth. In order to survive the hard life of the undocumented migrant Moki and his friends devise several unlawful means to beat the system. To belong in Paris for the undocumented Congolese is to wear '"masks", live complicated lives between "shadows and light". The migrants are indeed in the magnificent city but are not part of it in the actual sense of it. To belong they must forge their own code to destabilize that of the enemy. As Massala-Massala discovers, Moki and friends develop strategies "to pinpoint faults in this society they were not part of and penetrate a world that was closed to them" (p. 96).Moki's involvement in the clothing business is his strategy for survival in France that also gives him the privilege of maintaining the identity of a man of elegance even when the society constantly degrades him.

In recent years, the crucial function of food in identity formation has increasingly dominated research interests of literary writers and critics of migrant literature. Food plays multiple roles in the circle of life. It is significant for the development of the individual, community and government. The unique role of food is expressed more effectively in migrant fiction where it assumes the place of power and control for both the individual and the government. In the discourse of home and diaspora, Amir and Barak-Bianko (2019) describes food as often generating grounds for actions and consequences thereby becoming a symbol of authority. The government appropriates this power to organize, discipline, and administer codes of conduct for the individual and groups. The migrants also utilize food to challenge the

institution that oppresses and frustrates their continued existence. The food ways in the home country form the food pattern of migrants in the host communities and is recalled from their memory. Recognizable food customs facilitate the retention of emotional attachment to the motherland. Amir and Barak-Bianko further stress that cultural identity and food have symbolic correlation to the country of origin. The migrant is not absolutely distanced from his cultural values by reason of migration; in essence food is the bridge between the old life and the new one which contributes to hybrid identity formation. The result of this new life for the migrant is the aspiration to conserve his/her traditions by inculcating the food ways of the homeland "especially when one's culture is not the dominant culture in that society" (Sutton 2001, Beoku-Betts 1995). Food in immigration fiction challenges the nominal role of food in maintaining health. It underscores the basic, communal, cultural as well as the psychosomatic meaning of food practices in a migrant text (Rozin 1980). Thus food is an integral part of a text and with underlying meaning in fiction. Through food and food rituals a writer especially in migrant narrative unfolds dominant issues in the dialogue.

For the migrant characters in *Blue White Red* food serves as a connection to their cultural identity and a determining factor in their struggle for recognition in the host community. Food enables them to reassert their Congolese identity and sustain their memory of the motherland. The protagonist Massala-Massala's frustration at the true state of his brothers in Paris is relieved by the discovery of Congolese foodways. His courage is further boosted with his nomination as the Chef for all the undocumented inhabitants of *Rue Du Moulin- Vert (14 Arrondissement, Paris)*. As the latest migrant from the homeland, his memory is "fresh enough to remember that cuisine" (93). Such food items as "manioc leaves, tubers, and smoked fish" transport him back to Pointe Noire when he says, "I forgot I was in France". The migrants' attachment to their native foodways shows that migration influences the practice not as much in its structure than in its substance (Duru 2006). In fact migration strengthens the customary function of food in the way Duru observes that the kola nut still retains its value in Igbo society as well as in diaspora. Such Congolese food items as manioc leaves, foufou and smoked fish like the Igbo kola nut are potent symbol of African food culture. To remember and maintain their Congolese food practices they will need "food places" to offer them gastronomic sanctuary where the collective mealtimes produce a feeling of protection (Amir and Barak-Bianko). Moki's crumbling Paris home *Rue Du Moulin-Vert* and *Chateau Rouge*, the African market are the food places in the text that connect the Congolese to other African migrants. As Massala-Massala expresses the market offers "exotic ingredient from our country, from the African continent." The food items once seen as cheap by the locals now assume elevated importance as sources of pride. The food places are the meeting point for the migrants where they "sense home, eat home, and dream about home" (Saber & Posner). They are places of comfort and protection more especially for undocumented migrants as Moki and his fellow citizens.

In *Rue Du Moulin- Vert* their manner of partaking in common feeding pattern remakes a cultural community far away from the fatherland which emphasizes the vital position of food in

diaspora encounter (Charon:p. 40). They live in the eighth floor of an abandoned and dilapidated building without lift and marked for demolition. Overcrowded and bare the "tiny room" is "poorly lit and smelled of mildew" (91) with more than a dozen people. As undocumented migrants, their possession of the building and general presence in France is illegal as their tour visas have expired, and this controls their movement. Massala-Massala is coached on how to behave to avoid detection by law: "Don't sleep with a lit candle. Knock on the door with our secret code: one knock, then wait a few seconds, then two knocks, and then cough-just once" (92). They devise these codes and attitudes of endurance in a society out to stop their progress. In spite of living in that limited space in Paris, the migrants exercise great freedom in what they eat, how it is procured, prepared and sustain the ritual. This continuity of the human eating habit makes the food place also a hunting ground for the police who lurk behind the corners in the area. They comb the food places for vulnerable African migrants like the Congolese who are without papers. Jessica Kwik (2008:p.36) in a study indicates that cultural food accomplishes communal functions. However, she observes that the undocumented immigrants do not enjoy this privilege, and their gatherings are usually clandestine. In *Blue White Red* the characters instead of being demoralized by their situation living like "felines…masters of the art of positioning their steps on the wood staircase without making it creak"(91), consolidate their one room into a sanctuary of strength, community and pride in Congolese food practices. Massala-Massala's kitchen duty leads to his re-discovery of his *joie de vivre,* a self-discovery that causes him to "start to smile again" (p.93).

Moreover, concealed in this character's duty is the role of food as identity indicator for family, rank, gender, ancestry and other groups. Congolese society, like most African societies, is patriarchal with gender restrictive roles. Cooking is not a male task, but reserved for women. And as the only male in his family, Massala-Massala is not used to that chore. His confession "I knew a little about how to prepare dishes from our homeland" reveals typical African and Congolese cultural food practice that is gender biased. Nevertheless, in Paris he is forced into what David Sutton calls "prospective memory", the end result of several dimensions of the connection between food and memory. Sutton asserts that food possesses structure in the ordinary and practical circumstances within days, weeks and years enhancing remembering. Prospective memory is the combination of structure and its repetitive nature that suggests the notion of planning in the present to remember food events in the future. Thus, Massala-Massala's new role as the providerof Congolese "national dishes" for the other migrants requires the use of his memory of the homeland for his present and future food adventures in France. Massala-Massala's declaration "I had watched my mother and sister prepare food.I can work miracles" portrays his past inexperience and his determination to change that in order to assign meaning to himself in Paris. Mabanckou uses the food motif to explore the immigration food practices of the African diaspora in general where the kitchen ceases to be the domain of women. The significance of food in the construction of diasporic identity and re-enactment of memory is exemplified in his meticulous engagement of the processes in Congolese food ritual. He:

> Prepared a big pot of salted fish with peanut paste and fine herbs. A main dish with soporific powers. We wanted to sleep at night to gain weight… My main dish was seasoned with semolina made according to our custom. I kneaded it. I made a dense dough with corn flour. The pot, uncovered, simmered on the hot plate. Everyone served themselves, paper plate in hand. I received compliments from the greedy… all the occupants except me, kicked in money for the meal (95).

Massala-Massala's new identity formation is enabled by his memory, the simmering pot and the aroma it exudes invokes memories on which his changed identity as a cook is formed. Sutton (74) indicates that ethnic food can modify identity once practiced in a new setting in the same way that migration enables a shift in identities by several altering situations. All his life in Africa he had never practiced cooking, but his memory serves him well as he unconsciously assumes the role of mother Africa in nurturing others. Gassparetti and Hannaford (2008), observe that the migrant confrontation often reinvents examples and conventions of activities previously lived in the migrant's homeland. Once Massala-Massala reveals his dish is made "according to our custom" he takes pride in the ability to prepare food in Paris according to his tradition.

This experience offers him the prospects for vibrant relationships and growth with the others. It is from the openness and trust that food enables that his future in France is decided and that goes to show that notwithstanding the place of performance the food ritual enhances community solidarity. As the crisis he suffered earlier on arrival is conquered by the task of cooking, Massala-Massala is able to understand the dilemma of his compatriots. They opened up to him on the reason why they rely on illegal means for survival. As the older migrants pool resources together to provide the food he prepares, they also take interest in his expectations and responsibility and decide on how he can also contribute his own part to the welfare of the community. For lonely migrants without family food in this way encourages empathy, self manifestation and social cohesion (Douglas, 1984).

Food, therefore, is the binding element that provides the communal fraternity and socio-economic direction for the occupiers of *Rue Du Moulin-Vert*s. In their abandoned dwelling food gives them a sense of security and freedom that elude them from the outside. Mabanckuo accomplishes the true representation of food as not just a mere source of sustenance but also establishes that the physical practice associated with food possesses deeper meaning for the migrant community. The food places as well as the practices associated to it are important part of the narration, thus categorizing the characters as marginalized and racialized bodies in Paris. Their status as undocumented immigrants confines them to the very limited space the food place like *Rue Du Moulin-Vert*s offers "like cadavers tied to some sort of mass grave" (p.91). Inside the building they struggle for space, light and air similar to the way French authorities consistently threatens to suffocate their ambition on the streets of Paris. Foodas a result is the corporeal and material approach that cultural distinctiveness is maintained by immigrants in a society with multiple cultures (D'Sylva and Beagan 2011). To succeed in Paris they must 'juggle

shadows and light…and obliterate any natural urge for self-reflection" (p.97). All the undocumented migrants discard their masks for the day as soon as they converge in a place of refuge, like *Rue Du Moulin-Vert*s after every evasive hustle of the day on the streets of Paris.

Consequently, Mabanckou draws from the food places trope to investigate and expand the marginal condition of the African Diasporas beyond the people from Central Africa. The African market not only represents the link to African cultural food but establishes a larger community for other African nationals to transact their businesses. Massala-Massala is reminded "of the markets back home" as sellers flaunt their Africanness through the display of cultural food, artifacts, national newspapers, medicines and herbs as well of the mystic powers of marabouts. Like a typical African market *Chateau Rouge*is filled with the real ambiance of African marketplace where "old women piled their wares and doze off despite the brouhaha of the area" (95). In the commotion of "mass of humanity…passersby had to slalom between the several bowls of red yam from Cote d'lvoire and crates of plantains from Bobo-Dioulasso" (95). The market is the centre of information from the homeland especially the political leadership of African and Arab Francophone countries with heads of the leaders boldly imposed on the front pages of African newspapers. The influx of African nationals in African markets places the latter as the melting pot of cultural identities for the migrants. Africans from different nations facilitate their co-existence and are united, irrespective of their difference in language, religion, traditional ethics and practices. In the African market they do not pretend to speak the language of the host but rely on their own means of communication adding to their hybrid identity construct. In *Chateau Rouge* "Africans speak in patois at the top of their lungs" as their dealings resonate in legitimacy alongside illegality.

As a critical base for the African migrant community the food places are ultimately interrupted by "the excursion of state power" which introduces elements of control and stricture. It is a veritable ground for law enforcement agencies who prowl and profile immigrants in order to regularly check their status and business interests in the market. Paradoxically, the African market also is a place of jeopardy for the African migrant irrespective of his/her status, because a documented migrant can be imprisoned or deported if unfortunately found on the wrong side of the law with the backing of the same law that legalized his permit. The host governments initiate control by applying two methods of "regulation" and "inspection" of food safety and to impose employment laws and status. These are employed to demonstrate state influence and they intensify the deprivation of the migrant group. In *Chateau-Rouge*as the Africans hawk their goods they keep "their eyes open and necks craned like cautious storks to guard against a possible round-up by the cops" (p.95). Operators of the "parallel market… the black market" that intermingle with *Chateau-Rouge* are generally on edge; their clandestine manner of transaction includes burying their wares inside clothes, by this means becoming "walking market stalls" (p.125). Other migrants that deal in electronics plot means of undermining the police and their restlessness is as a result of their inability to prove ownership by providing receipts. On confiscation by the police these migrants are required to pay huge sums to get back their goods.

To sabotage the police intelligence, the sellers resort to showing prospective buyers pictures of their merchandise kept in hotel rooms nearby, before the bargain is completed in "total peace of mind".

The relationship between the police and the migrants in the African market therefore is that of "cat and mouse", with each engaging strategies to outwit the other. Constant search of the African market challenges the security it is supposed to provide since the controlling presence of the law "sows fear, interferes with their daily life and prevent the community from enjoying the multilevel roles these places have" (Amir and Bara-Bianko 73). The psychology behind the haunt of food places by agents of government is basically driven by the need for identity formation by both new and old migrants. It is the primary and only place where they can claim ownership as a community, reminisce on the homes they left behind and form new socio-economic relationships. And it is through these food relations that Massala-Massala learns about the undocumented migrants "infinite ability to split oneself into two" and gets to meet the most important personalities in their world, Moki's "most trusted collaborators." During his jaunts in the African market and as the other migrants partake in his food, he is able to demystify Moki's image of a real Parisian and the true meaning of "*Paris is a big".* Their insignificance in Paris rubbishes the slogan he uses back home to entrap his listeners. Massala-Massala realizes that Paris is indeed the opposite of Moki's picture back home in Pointe Noire. He is quick to grasp the truth that in Paris Moki is a nonentity. He and the other migrants live on the margin and have to take up different names in order to function as there are no other alternatives. Thus, for the protagonist to manoeuvre through the food places he has to navigate two identities at different times, from Marcel Bonaventure to Eric Jocelyn-George. The dual persona is a defense tactic, a representation of what the migrant will be and the way others expect him to live in the position he finds himself. The protagonist despairingly embraces the first new name Marcel Bonaventure, a name without a history but one that possesses the ability to "open borders…a permanent pass" (84).

Accordingly, Massala-Massala who has gained the acceptance of others as greenhorn must shade off his identity again as Marcel Bonaventure to enter their murky world as Eric Jocelyn-George. Prefet who is the brain behind the fake ID has got it done "in a studio, with his own hands" avoiding the police or the city hall knowing it would be impossible through that avenue. He must do this to be able to move around and make a living as illegal Congolese migrant in Paris. His ability to sell off "one hundred and twenty-five transit passes" with "authentic checkbooks" will determine the success of his "blue-white-red dream" (112).

1. In addition, Mabanckou uses this to instigate the cultural meaning of names in Africa, how migration disrupts the continuity and dislocates identity. In Africa every name is important to the family and carries a little history. For the protagonist the name Massala-Massalais his ancestral heritage and has its own history of continuity. Surviving four generations and "repeated twice" in his vernacular Massala-Massala means "those who remain, remain, those who stay will stay". The name suggests permanence of the family

bloodline by the children who live to carry on the lineage. The protagonist believes the name to be "eternal, immutable…not something to change like clothing to dress appropriately at any given party". Migration as a result sullies the sacredness of African names, alters their history thereby making them worthless by the abandonment. However, the different identity formations are strategies migrants exploit to "legalise" their stay on their own dictate. In "Food, Identity, and Cultural Reproduction in Immigrant Communities", Fabio Paresecoli (2014) affirms that within the food concept migrants are capable of establishing their own environment as well as determine their relationships with others. Consequently, the experiences make them to undergo heightened understanding of their own powers and preferences. Mabanckou utilizes the delay in Prefet's "*white pipeline*"; the channel he uses to authorize Massal-Massala's "sojourn", to reveal the dynamics of French immigration laws. The inconsistency in immigration laws and debates by successive government legislatures continue to make it difficult for law enforcement agencies like the police and immigration officers to apply the correct procedure. In the vagueness of the law migrants are left with the consequences of loosing legal status at any time as Mabanckou asserts:

> …in the morning they determine your status was legal, and in the afternoon, with their fists on the table, laws, presidential decrees, and official newspapers in hand, they solemnly denied it and gave you an appointment in forty-five days and a list of documents to provide, some of which were in the possession of your great-grandmother (107).

The above experience is the author's critical condemnation of the policy of exclusion by Western authorities to displace the African diaspora. Western nations in so doing end up creating disenchanted communities of immigrants. The risk inherent in the governments' politicking with African immigration is that it unsettles even those migrants who are documented. Their residency status is precarious since they stand to lose it through the lapses of the administration. In *Blue White Red*, *sans-papiers* are those migrants with residency permit but who become undocumented as a result of difficult "draconian laws." These laws are made for the political aspiration of politicians and also aimed at appeasing the citizens who often times are frustrated by the influx of foreigners. The African migrant is caught in this dilemma of belonging and unbelonging, butgoing home offers littlereassurance. The identity racket expert Prefet who has not reunited with his family back home for the past twenty-five years is a good example. His strategy of beating the law includes not having a permanent address in Paris "to shake the police who hounded him" (107). Yuval-Davis expounding on the notion of politics of belonging claims that the failure of government policies also affects citizens' expectations. And it is in their inclination to please the citizens' anticipated result from government that migrants' rights are undermined. She goes on to state that the fundamental concern in the dispute should be ascertaining the limitations of belonging and the scope of the creation of "us" versus "them". Therefore, the binary social construct in France is represented in *Blue White Red* with the

Congolesemigrants and other African diaspora in the minority. They are excluded from government policies and projects that the majority "them" have exclusive right to.

Mabanckou appropriates hunger strike which is a political type of protest as far back as the late nineteenth and mid twentieth Century, to engage the condition of African diaspora in the global discourse. In incarceration centers food is added to the many indignities suffered by detainees who are daily observed by the authorities. Food therefore deepens their sense of discrimination and strain as its value and appropriateness turn out to be "another factor that intensifies the emotional difficulty" (Amir and Barak-Bianko, p.73). In this context of starvation as a weapon, food is the ideal "prism" for investigating the system, given that governments regularly employ food as calculated means of exerting power (Rene Provost, p.577). As we confront the protagonist at the detention camp, food once again is the lens for probing migrants' rights as well as state apparatus of control over detainees. The hunger strike for the recognition of the inmates' basic rights is "called by the rowdy convicts" (p.138) to agitate for better conditions "in the establishment's penal policies." Subjecting self to such extreme measure greatly empowers the hunger strikers who choose to control their own bodies through the rejection of food by this means power-shaming the authorities. The result of hunger strike is not absolute as it may go the way of the strikers or might be thwarted by circumstances. For instance the hunger strikers in the novel did not have the support of the protagonist who boasts "me, I ate…emptied my bowl with a healthy appetite and finished my bread down to the last crumb" (p.138). Massala-Massala who learned early that "the road to redemption passed through good behavior" (p.137) refuses to join the other inmates in the hunger strike. The plan will jeopardize "the path of redemption" that the camp offers him and his plan to start the process of re-entering Paris as soon as his repatriation is effective. After exhibiting good behavior with the prison officials, staying out of all forms of trouble, and acquiring a skill in carpentry his deportation is executed. His stand is common with minority migrant communities who in spite of the difficulties suffered in the host country and the prospect of deportation, still nurse the desire for another attempt at re-migration. It is not surprising then that Mabanckou highlights Massala-Massal's becoming using the trope of food and food places. His arrest at the *Chateau-Rouge* by the police clarifies to the reader the relevance of the trope to his narration.

In *Blue White Red* food acculturation, appropriation and hybridization do not only happen within the migration setting but also in the homeland in the way the returnee migrants behave and evidently among indigenous members of the homeland. More importantly, food is used to underscore the ironical display of affluence and Parisian taste by a migrant whose life is filled with lack and denial in Paris. Moki's delusional display is the reason for young people like the protagonist: France represents their ultimate aspiration to wealth. Alongside the eating habit of the Parisians is also the manner in which food is used to describe the Congolese migrants that live at the provincial areas in France called the Peasants. In the sight of the people they do not represent the real Parisians. Made up of educated professionals they always caution others about the lofty tales of Paris as told by Moki and other Sapeurs. Food and foodways in Pointe Noire,

therefore, connote two classes of people, the poor made up of the local people and the Peasants, and the rich who constitute the Parisians and their family members. For the poor people food is a simple necessity of life without too much refinement. The second class is the affluent, those Parisians as Mokiand his father that have attained Parisian taste and can afford their food. Moki's father takes pride in his son's achievement and in the manner he takes his meals. He boasts to his admirers that his son's eating pattern consists of three course meals: "an aperitif, an appetizer, a main dish and *red wine from France*, cheese, a dessert, and coffee…just like in France" (p.31). He prepares Moki's eating place outdoors, a nice table under a mango tree in the courtyard where he is openly seen. This is unlike the lowly village peasants who he claims "swallowed big pieces of manioc with a little bit of salted fish" and ordinary water. While Moki eats outdoors the Peasant eats on the ground with his relations. Moki's meals consist of European meals as bread for breakfast; the Peasant eats manioc and foufou, a meal Moki said lacks "dietary value" (p.39).

Food builds up the satirical situation in the novel by exposing the returnee migrants' bogus claim of life of material success when in reality the opposite is the case. In Paris Moki and other Pointe Noire migrants who cannot afford three course meals make do with their African food. They eat manioc, foufou and other African edibles on the bare floor of a room without anyfurniture. The Peasants' efforts to disabuse the minds of the young people that listen to Moki's story of benevolent Paris are rebuffed; making many of them fall into their trap like Massala-Massala. Massala-Massala is able to understand the tales as part of Moki's ploy in recruiting new migrants to be used to make money through the different schemes he introduces with Prefet. Another aspect the author engages is the role of food as a symbol of hospitality and family bonding. The gathering of family and friends on Moki's arrival from Paris and his father's willingness in providing food and drinks illuminates the cultural importance of food to the African. Family visits aretreated with utmost kindness and respect because in African culture "hospitality is the highest principle" (p.35). Whether in the celebration of life or death, entertaining visitors especially relations require tolerance even in the face of bad behaviour. Moki's father is forced to close his eyes to the "nuisance" of his numerous relations that come to felicitate with him on Moki's arrival from Paris. He is a believer of the African tradition that sees success as belonging to the entire clan. A rejection of one's own in times of celebration can bring the downfall of the entire family. Moreover, in future celebration they may call for a boycott and as Moki's father reasons the shame can be monumental. Being mindful of the adage "money has never mourned the dead" he refrains from the question "have you already eaten" for its implied insult and endured his guests' offending mannerisms. The underlying weight of these African protocols surrounding food is that it promotes oneness and strengthens relationships among members. Moki's father's interest is in maintaining the family ties which allows him room to host his visitors in future.

In conclusion, Mabanckou in using European, Congolese foodways and eating places tells the story of African diaspora in a way that is new. The plight of undocumented black migrants in the novel echoes the notion of "the citizen and "the subject" in the politics of

belonging. This categorization is fundamental in the analysis of the condition of the undocumented Congolese migrants in France. As former colonial subjects their spatial rights to enter another country, in this instance France, the country of their colonizer is ideal but restricted. Yuval-Davis (2006) in discussing citizenship and belonging asserts that the idea of "the citizen" is often associated with a type of privilege. This comes with "a certain sense of entitlement", a significant public empathy evident in various political schemes of belonging. Citizens enjoy projects that validate their citizenship rights such as civil, political, social, and cultural and spatial security rights. She identifies spatial security right as the chief means of expression for citizens and non citizens controlled by the state authority. Spatial defense consists of the right to go into another country for work, or education whether for long or short term purposes. Yuval-Davis also extends spatial security right to those influenced by unaccommodating administrative rules "in the form of failed expectations" like documented and undocumented people on transit. As she correctly observes spatial rights for the migrant has continued to be a source of danger, a situation that is blamed for the many alliances migrants form as "defensive identity movement." The futile expectations of migration are the reasons for their indulgence in alternative illegal means of survival. Therefore, for Moki, Prefet, Sote, Massala-Massala and others the push for crime is their inability to exercise these rights.

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