



The Trauma of Racial Discrimination in *La Préférence Nationale* De Fatou Diome

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Abstract

Racial discrimination is defined as any prejudice against any personality as a result of his ethnic origin, race or skin colour. It has been a recurrent challenge in human setting from the time immemorial. This paper discussed the trauma being endured by black immigrants in France. It adopted the psychoanalytical theory in order to bring to the fore the trauma suffered by the susceptible black settlers who thronged France in search of greener pastures. The study also adopted close reading technique as a methodology which afforded us the opportunity of detailed and relatively objective examination of the structure and other aspects of the novel. The paper concluded by observing that racial discrimination still exists in France despite the various measures put in place to regulate the anomaly.

Keywords: *Race, Discrimination, Colour, Trauma, Prejudice, Caucasian, Negro.*

Introduction

Racism is any dissimilarity, segregation, constraint or favourite based on national or ethnic origin, colour and race which has the purpose or effect of invalidating or weakening the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an identical basis, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in cultural, social, economic, political or any other fields of public life. Such prejudice may be based upon ideas or theories of superiority of one race or group of persons of one colour or ethnic origin, which may be used to rationalise or promote racial hatred and prejudice in a wide variety of forms. Such action may promote acts of violence or incitement to such acts against groups of persons of another colour or ethnic origin. Racism has been a recurrent topic of numerous pronouncements by UNESCO and other global organisations. In 1978, UNESCO defined it as including racist ideologies, prejudiced attitudes, discriminatory behaviour and institutionalised practices, resulting in racial

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inequality, as well as the deceptive concepts that discriminatory relations between groups are morally and scientifically justifiable. Racism as a policy attributes the determination of human capacities to specific inherited physical traits that are considered to differentiate a race. Prejudice and discrimination on the ground of colour, race or ethnic origin exist in a number of societies, where physical appearance and ethnic origin are accorded prime importance. Racism has increasingly been recognised as aggression or unfriendliness that one person feels for another being because of his or her colour alone. Despite the fact that these racist beliefs have been so reliably ascertained to be inaccurate, regrettably, they still continue to be an important cause of discrimination. When people define and discuss race, they create a social reality through which social categorisation is achieved. It is remarkable to note that the social categorisation put in place by the society is not only illegitimate but also irrational. Franklin (2009:385) insists that racism is not only subjective but exceedingly arbitrary given its preference for illogical classification of human beings resulting in one being grouped as rational and economically endowed as opposed to other which is irrational and miserable.

Racism in France

The recurrent surge in racist incidents in France has been specifically worrisome in the last decade given the racist and anti-Semitic opinion as well as in the rise of racist threat documented by police data. It is also demonstrated in the development and stabilisation of votes acquired in national and local elections by the *National Front*, a party that has made immigration its main campaign focus. Undoubtedly, the policy being promoted by the *National Front* is the mass eviction of all non-European settlers and about 30% of public opinion supported the policy. The party has deliberately attached utmost importance to the topic on its political agenda. The discontent feelings about the presence of immigrants manifest in daily events or social incidents in France. To an average French citizen, immigration is perceived as a threat to order and unity, indeed to the very existence of the French national community. The dissatisfaction is also noticeable in specific aspects of immigration challenges: schools and hospitals allegedly occupied and disparaged by substantial number of foreigners. Low-income housing allocated first and foremost to foreigners: social protection from which they are the first to benefit and the clandestine, ever more numerous, which destroy the social order. More often than not, various articles are published in the newspapers and magazines, political speeches and opinion polls are also made, condemning the government lethargy and indifference to racist issues. Government interference is also sought through these medium towards eradicating or minimising this menace. This demand is not necessarily pertinent, action is not always the solution to an existing problem. The government procrastination is at times justified. One could estimate as Gerard Noiriel does ‘that within the history of immigration in France, a specific and original model of integration is at work’.

It has been established by the French Representative Council of black association that virtually all black people in France opine that they have endured discrimination based on their skin colour. Nine out of ten respondents, 91%, said that they individually endure racial discrimination in their daily lives. Patrick Lozes, the president of the *Cran*, the black

advocacy group that conducted the survey, while making known the results to lawmakers at the National Assembly, few weeks after the government introduced its multi-year anti-racism action plan. The *Cran* published the first version of this survey in 2007, where it discovered that 56% of black people reported experiencing racial discrimination. The 2023 survey, carried out by the *IPSOS polling agency* as reported by the *Parisien Newspaper* seems to establish that the situation has become poorer. 25% of respondents declared they suffered racial discrimination frequently, 44% once in a while and 22% seldomly, only 9% reported never experiencing racism. What the *Cran* call daily racism is most frequently experienced on the street or in public transit. The survey also revealed that black are more often harassed by police than the rest of the population. Half of respondents, 49% said they have been stopped and asked for identification by police although official statistics put the number at 23% of the entire population.

La biographie de Fatou Diome

A native of Niodor, an island located in the southern Senegal, Fatou Diome is a mixed-race writer. She dislikes active participation in household chores and she is always found among men in contrary to the traditions of her environment. She develops interest in education despite being raised in the village by her grandmother. The young learner engages in unorthodox jobs in order to complement her grandmother's efforts towards her education. She attends a secondary school in M'bour and later works briefly as a maid in Gambia. Her passion in education makes her to return to Dakar for her university education with a determination to become a French teacher. Fatou Diome meets a French man who lives in Senegal at age 22. They fell in love with one another and the relationship metamorphosed into marriage. The young couple relocated to Strasbourg in 1994 but the union did not last as a result of recurrent hostilities from her European in laws who detest her colour. She endured severe difficulty after divorcing her French hubby as a result of her status as an African immigrant in French territory. She is compelled to engage in household chores for six years in order to make ends meet and also support her studies. She remained resolute to complete her academic pursuits (DEA) diploma of advanced studies before starting her Thesis on *Travel exchanges and training in the literary and cinematographic work of Sembene Ousmane*. She taught for some years at the Marc-Bloch University of Strasbourg and at the Higher Institute of pedagogy Karlsruhe Germany after completing her studies in literature and philosophy at the University of Strasbourg. She devotes herself to writing even before receiving the insignia of Doctorate Honoris Causa at the University of Liege in 2017. She published *La Préférence Nationale*, a collection of short stories, published by Presence Africaine in 2001. Her first novel is *The Belly of The Atlantic* published in 2003. The novel was followed by *Ketala* 2006, *Inassouvies, nos view* 2008, *Celles qui attendent* 2010, *Impossible to grow* 2013, the above novels were all published by Flammarion. Her most recent literary work, *Les veilleurs de Sangomar*, won the French-language Rotary clubs literary Prize in 2019.

Psychoanalytical Theory of Personality

Sigmund Freud is generally presumed to have propagated the psychoanalytical theory of personality. It is basically the investigation of personality and the related difficulties in

respect of the internal functioning of a person's mind. The theory underscored the acknowledgement of infantile experience that could probably inspire the intellectual performance of adults. His effort has had magnificent influence on a number of fields comprising psychology and sociology, anthropology and literature and arts. Psychoanalytic theorists are of the opinion that human behaviour is predetermined because it is regulated by irrational forces, the unconscious as well as instinctual and biological drives. It includes those motivations, needs and desires that we are aware of. Freud believes that sexual desires and aggression which are essential aspects of human behaviour also play an imperative role in our personality. He partitioned human mind into three main components. The first one is the conscious mind which includes everything that we are mindful of, this is the aspect of our intellectual processing that we can ponder and talk about rationally, it constitutes 10% of our mind. An aspect of this comprises our memory which is not often part of consciousness but can be recovered easily at any time and brought into our awareness. The second one is the pre conscious level which is the domain for memories and stored knowledge which is about 15% of the mind. The unconscious mind is the third party which is the reservoir of memories, urges, thoughts and feelings that are beyond our conscious awareness and it constitutes 75% of the mind. The larger part of the content of the unconscious is inappropriate or horrible such as feelings of conflict, pain and anxiety. Freud declares that the unconscious continually manipulates our behaviour and experience, even though we are oblivious of these. He affirms that it is the unconscious that unmask the authentic emotions, thoughts and feelings, of the individual. He proposes that our personality encompasses three elements which are *Id*, *Ego* and *Superego*. *Id* is the source of a person's intuitions and stimulus. It relates with instant gratification of basic needs, sexual desires and aggressive impulses. The *Id* prioritises the pleasure principle which presumes that people seek pleasure and try to avoid pain. He equally declares that *Id* pays less attention to moral values, society or other individuals. It should be noted that *Ego* originates from *Id* and it seeks to satisfy an individual's instinctual needs while balancing with reality. It operates by the reality principle. It directs and guides the *Id* towards the acceptable manner of behaviour. The *Ego* searches thoughtfully for pleasure adopting rationality instead of irrationality, its main quirk is rationality and it is always conscious. The *Superego* is the moral aspect of mental functioning. The *Superego* informs the *Id* and *Ego* whether gratification in a particular situation is virtuous. It is basically concerned about making moral judgement and it is viewed as one's conscience.

Manifestation of Trauma of Racial Discrimination in *La Préférence Nationale* de Fatou Diome

As a result of the legacy of slavery and colonisation, people of African descent were marginalised for centuries. There is a growing consensus that racism and racial discrimination have caused people of African origin to be held back in several aspects of public life. They have seemingly endured exclusion and poverty and are often invisible in official statistics. Regrettably, the unpleasant situation persists in many parts of the world despite the fact that there has been some progress towards ameliorating the situation. It is worthy to note that discrimination is apparent in the unequal access of these vulnerable groups to basic services and this eventually leads to poverty among the black people. Apart from the unpleasant experience of poverty, most people of colour also feel humiliated in

response to public racist incidents as a result of inherent fear to get justice. The appearance of a black man causes him a great deal of embarrassment and he is made to feel inferior because of his wrongly perceived colour in the public, especially in a white dominated area. The white tends to look down on him as if it is a crime to be a black descendant. The protagonist, in the piece, *La Préférence Nationale*, is also seemingly uncomfortable as a result of the statement made by a white woman in response to her good intonation during a telephone conversation. The white lady observes:

Ah, je ne m'étais pas trompée, a ton petit accent au téléphone, j'ai compris que tu étais africaine, mais c'est mignon. (Diome 64).

It is obvious from the lady's statement that she does not expect such a flawless French intonation from an African and the simple reason is because of the past derogatory perception of a black man. A black man as far as the white lady is concerned will never and can never be anything, other than a brutish creature given up to purely animal instincts. The whites believe that the black people are brought up in abject poverty and they are also exposed to several instances of stress and trauma that inhibit their brain development. The whites are of the opinion that increased stressors like systemic racism, ethnic wars and most importantly economic hardship can affect the cognitive development of people of African descents. For this reason therefore, the egocentric white lady is surprised listening to an African lady speaking like a native French man. On the other hand, the protagonist is not flattered by the insincere compliments of the white lady. She remarks:

Je commençais à me méfier. Ces bonnes femmes-là, quand elles disent c'est mignon avec ce ton nasillard, il faut comprendre: c'est affreux. (Diome 64).

The black narrator is familiar with the white antics and this explains the reason why she is seemingly apprehensive about the Caucasian's compliments. She knows that the lady's accolade needs to be carefully decoded in order to be on one's guard. Racially oppressed people are not subjugated because of their race, they are oppressed because of false beliefs about their race. The statement made by the lady is informed by the past misinformation being peddled about the black man. Disinformation about the blacks is so pervasive and can be very dangerous. The whites, as a result of their egocentric motive, endeavour to control the manner that black people are perceived. They insist that black people are inherently violent and that they need to be vigorously monitored and tamed. They adopt this method to justify their hostility towards the black community. The black race is seen as a set of people whose intellectual endowment is defective as a result of their colour. Conversely, blacks have demonstrated that colour has nothing to do with intellectual capability given their numerous academic exploits and excellence even among white classmates. The race has excelled in several human endeavours, even to the disappointment of the arrogant whites. The whites do not believe that Africans can compete with their white counterparts in education as a result of the erroneous beliefs perpetuated during the ignoble slave trade. Slavery encourages racial

stratification that relegated the blacks to subordinate positions in relation to the whites. This unjustified subordination pervaded the social, economic and political domains and also designated most non-whites permanently on the bottom ladder of society regardless of their talents and abilities. Western education was perceived as an exclusive right of the whites who by virtue of native biological endowment and cultural experience could be educated for leadership positions in society that need well-developed intellectual capacities. Regrettably, blacks were regarded as not being worthy of education as a result of non-possession of ideal attributes necessary for academic excellence. For this reason, the whites concluded that it was better to teach them (blacks) various trades.

Looking scornfully at the narrator, Madame Dupont, the French lady deliberately ridiculed the black lady with her racist response to her claims that she has been in France for some months. She retorts disdainfully:

Toi en France, combine de temps? Pour corroborer l'image idiote,
qu'elle se faisait de moi, je me contentai d'indiquer le mois.
Janvier, madame. (Diome 65).

Madame Dupont's statement is occasioned by the past records of African youths who are mostly illegal immigrants in France. She is of the opinion that the narrator is an illegal immigrant, not knowing that she entered France legally through valid entry visa. It is remarkable to note that illegal immigrants are not well treated in France. They are not only exploited as cheap labour but inexplicably perceived as non-humans. It is on record that some 700 undocumented migrants, mostly men from Africa, ran into one of Paris most famous structures, the *Pantheon*, and sat down on its stone floor. The black protesters were shouting and demanding the realisation of their fundamental human rights as embedded in the famous French values of liberty, equality and fraternity. Several speeches about human rights were made by leading black activists who led the protest. Some inscriptions neatly written on cardboards were also displayed: *Our ancestors fought for France, We are not hiding anymore, We are not objects, We are people like you, Why not accord us legal status? Why not try to improve our welfare? Why denigrating us?* These are some of the traumatic inscriptions exhibited by the black protesters to express their frustrations and anger. The protesters are part of a new movement referred to as 'gilets noirs or black vests'. The main aim of the body is to protest against worsening prospect for the black working class. The mainly black activists who constitute gilets noirs maintained that they are 'blacks with anger' over the predicament of undocumented migrants in France. Of all the inscriptions displayed, one of them caught our attention, and this is '*We are not objects*'. Regrettably, blacks are still seen as objects or things that can be used and discarded at will. Monsieur Dupont while referring to the narrator observes:

Mais qu'est-ce que tu veux qu'on fasse avec ça? (Diome 66).

He uses 'ça' 'thing' for a human being and it shows clearly that the whites do not see the blacks as human beings that is worthy of any respect. Colonial narratives are full of lots of

misrepresentations about Africans as a people and Africa as a continent. The inherent erroneous beliefs held since the colonial era persists even up till today and this explains the reason why blacks are often disparaged. The protagonist feels bad about the statement but she cannot express her anger and frustration because she is badly in need of a job. She suffers untold trauma as a result of her self-esteem that is exceedingly denigrated. Sigmund Freud, through his psychoanalytic theory brings to the fore the significance of the unconscious mind. This is a reservoir of feelings, thoughts, urges and memories that are outside our conscious awareness. Most of the contents of the unconscious are unacceptable or unpleasant, such as feelings of pain, trauma, anxiety or conflict. According to Freud, the unconscious continues to influence our behaviour and experience, even though we are unaware of these. The protagonist feels empty and rejected by Monsieur Dupont's statement but the determination to make ends meet at all cost continues to motivate her. She remembers that the arrogant Caucasian is still being influenced by the deplorable status of the blacks during the ignoble slavery era. She realises that the white man does not see any dignified attribute in a black man given the fact that he occupies the lowest social stratification during the colonial era. She notes painfully:

C'était donc ça. C'est pour cela qu'on me regardait comme ça. Je n'étais pas moi avec mon prénom, ni madame, ni mademoiselle, mais ça. J'étais donc ça et même pas l'autre. (Diome 67).

The narrator expresses her agony about her description and identity as 'a thing'. It should be noted that Monsieur Dupont is being influenced by his past memory about the black. The invalid stigma of the black created during the slave trade as a lesser being, persists in his mind, and also informs his wrong perceptions about blacks. For this reason, the narrator does not worth anything before him a result of his colour. This is obviously the consequence of a long history and contemporary reality of systemic racism. He believes that an average black man is dirty, lazy, non-productive, unintelligent, rude and inexplicably greedy. As far as Dupont is concerned, the criminal record of the Negro people is alarming and one has to be extremely careful engaging their services. He is of the opinion that the Negro is on a lower order of civilisation and often uneducated, undisciplined and untrained. He is often ferocious because he makes a criminal of the lowest type for he is the product of ignorance. The whites believe that the people of black origin are ignorant and incapable of taking good initiatives as a result of their poor educational background and low cognitive development. The same opinion is held by Madame Dupont in her discussion with her hubby. She observes:

Pour Madame Dupont, africain est synonyme d'ignorance et de soumission. (Diome 70).

She is of the opinion that blacks are naïve, ill informed, timid and exceedingly subservient. The blacks, as far as Madame Dupont is concerned are only clever in executing tedious tasks that require physical energy. They are products of myths and superstition, which in most cases, hinder them from rational thoughts. Unfortunately, the whites succeeded instilling the

belief of self- degradation in the unsuspecting blacks. The blacks, consequent upon this erroneous belief, are compelled to look down on themselves. Freud makes us to understand that, with negative illusions and convictions, one can steer oneself right into a pit. One can damage oneself and to worsen it one's personality becomes more and more incapacitated and impaired. Freud insists that, how you think of yourself has a major steering function. It shapes how you feel, how you behave, indeed, who you are. The 'me' damages the 'I'. It is easy to see the shaping effect of yourself concept on yourself by thinking of the negative side. The consequence of this situation according to Freud, is like being abused by others, this self-abuse fuel despair and a sense of helplessness and hopelessness. This is the pathetic situation that the protagonist finds herself. The Negro problem according to Freud, is principally a problem of ignorance but not necessarily of illiteracy but a profound ignorance of the world and its ways, of the thought and experience of men, an ignorance of self. This challenge can be solved by organised training and primarily such training must take the form of social leadership which is education. To benefit from this social leadership, it is expected that Negroes will be directly responsible for the training because the whites will encourage the blacks to accept their inferior status and consider the whites as super human beings.

Monsieur and Madame Dupont ultimately decided to employ the protagonist as a maid in their household but the manner of speaking to the protagonist brings to the fore once again the unending humiliation being endured by the Negros. Madame Dupont says arrogantly:

Toi, y en a commence demain matin, trente heures par semaine, SMIC ... Toi, trente minutes avance, madame y en a montré le travail. Oui madame, dis-je en lui serrant la main avant de partir. (Diome 71).

She returns home fulfilled and happy. She can now plan her expenses on the little francs she will be earning from the Dupont family. The following day, she arrives the house before 7:30am in compliance to their previous discussion. Apart from doing the normal domestic chores, she is also obliged to attend to madam's naughty daughter. She tries her best to satisfy the little girl but the mischievous Caucasian is inexplicably hostile and disgusted by the presence of the black maid. She deliberately refuses to respond to the maid's questions, jokes aimed at making her happy. She is seemingly disturbed by her boss's instruction, mademoiselle, ma fille pas contente, toi, jouer avec elle.(P.72). Lady, my girl is not happy, you, play with her. The girl remains indifferent and reticent to every steps taken to make her satisfied and happy. The immensely frustrating maid remarks disappointingly:

En effet, la petit était un peu réticente à mon égard, malgré mes sourires et mes tentatives diplomatiques. À midi, elle s'enfermait dans sa chambre où je lui portais son déjeuner. Il n'y a rien de plus insupportable qu'un gosse de bourgeois, surtout quand on lui a mis dans la tête que tous les autres peuples de la planète ne sont des primitifs. Mais j'avais besoin de garder mon emploi. (Diome 72).

The protagonist is convinced that the reason for the unruly and uncooperative behaviour of the little Caucasian is due to the negative misinformation instilled by her parents about black people. She believes that the little girl will behave differently if she were a white lady. She endures humiliation, insult and ridicule because she cannot afford to lose the job. Like her parents, the little Caucasian is not only rude but strangely hostile. She believes that the black maid is at the mercy of her parents who can sack her without any notice. As much as she tries to satisfy the little girl, she continues to frustrate the Negroe's effort simply because of her colour. It is remarkable to note that discriminations against blacks have been permitted to thrive unchallenged for several years in France. France and America are two different countries but they all have poor records of racism. It is expected that the two countries will make deliberate and visible efforts towards eradicating racism, otherwise, nothing will ever change. France maintains that the country is blind to colour and impermeable to racism, but this is merely a mystification. The country continues to consider racism from a moral and individual perspectives but failed to formulate policies that can effectively confront racism challenges. It is obvious that an average French man is dissatisfied with black man and they do not conceal their feelings about the race. Madame Dupont in one of her conversations with the protagonist, she asks ridiculously: Et un jour, à table, elle me demanda:

Pourquoi tu es noire? C'est parce que je mange trop de chocolat.
Elle me regardait et fit un grand sourire. Je voyais qu'elle n'étais pas convaincue.(Diome 73).

What a taunting remark! Madame Dupont deliberately wants to provoke the narrator but surprisingly, she remains unperturbed by the hostile and racist remarks. She needs the job badly and she is prepared to keep the job even when being irritated because it is extremely difficult for a black man to get a good employment in France. Rodrigue Ossebi, in his project, *Crisis of Survival: African immigrants in France*. He notes that the discrimination that recent immigrants encounter in France includes lack of acceptance and their struggle to become educated and full members of French society. He observes: Presently, several of the central and west Africans who live in France have little access to financial aids, housing or decent education and more than 40% of them do not have jobs. They face untold challenges incorporating into society and they live in precarious conditions. The above statement explains the reason why the narrator endures the humiliation and the insult from the Dupont family. A lot of helpless immigrants are exposed to worst conditions but the poor economic opportunities in African countries motivate them to endure the psychological pain. Freud, through his theory brings to the fore again the significance of Superego. This is the component of personality composed of the internalised ideals that we have acquired from our parents and society. The Superego works to suppress the urges of the *Id* and tries to make the *Ego* behave morally, rather than realistically. The narrator is a product of a long history of colonial hostilities against the blacks. She has heard a lot about the Negroes' resilience during the colonial era. She is therefore prepared to face the challenges of the menial tasks and also continue with the job despite the hostile atmosphere in Dupont household. The *Superego* continues to influence her each time she feels like quitting the job, She normally remembers what she went through before getting the job and also several unemployed young Africans

who are roaming the French metropolis looking for non-existing jobs. The *Superego* also suppresses the *Id* which believes in pleasure at all cost. She tries to cope with her meagre resources, having imbibed the African values of living within one's means.

Madame Dupont appears impressed by the performance of the protagonist in her menial activities and she decides to give one of her dresses that has become too tight for her. The Negroe accepts the gown with gratitude and she feels motivated by her sense of appreciation. She feels happy momentarily working for the Dupont family despite the humiliation, insults and exploitation being tolerated. Expectedly, Madame Dupont does not know the intellectual endowment of her black maid. She does not know that the black maid is a highly lettered lady until she was politely corrected when she misquoted Descartes quotation. Madame says:

Cogitum sum, je suis pensee, comme dirait Descartes. (Diome 75).

The black maid takes full advantage of the situation to convince the arrogant white woman that knowledge has no respect for colour. She says politely while correcting her boss:

Non madame, Descartes dit , Cogito ergo sum, c'est a dire 'Je pense donc je suis' Comme on peut le lire dans son *Discours de la Methode*.(Diome 75).

Madame is exceedingly surprised and she feels humiliated being corrected by a black lady. She does not know that the maid is a university graduate who is in need of a menial job to finance her Masters Programme since the French society does not recognise the rights of foreigners, especially blacks to a decent employment. She is surprised and she regrets the manner of treating the black maid. Following this discovery, madam began to relate courteously with her maid and she realises the need to pay her for all the hours spent in her household. In time past, she has not been paying her for half an hour out of her working hours and the black maid adjusts her arrival time. Surprisingly, she is now prepared to pay after the maid stops arriving thirty minutes earlier. She notes:

Bonjour, me dit, je vous attendais, la petite doit aller à l'école, si je l'emmene, je serai en retard à mon travail. Voulez-vous maintenir la demi-heure d'avance, je vous paierai. D'accord, repondit-Je. (Diome 77).

The narrator, as a result of her educational background, is now accorded some respect. She enjoys some dignity of labour for the service rendered. At a point in time, she teaches madam, who is preparing for an examination, some aspects of French literature. What an irony! She is surprised by the quality of knowledge being transmitted by a black maid. The narrator takes advantage of the situation and they start relating as colleagues and no longer master/servant relationship. She notes satisfactorily:

Elle ne me parlait plus en petit-nègre, nous nous tutoyions et nous appelions par nos prénoms. Parfois, nous mangeons ensemble. Et quand ils parlent des Noirs, ils ne disent plus, ‘Ces gen-là, mais plutôt, ‘les Africains’. (Diome 77).

Fatou Diome, the author of this text, uses education as a form of freedom and a means of occupational mobility. The narrator’s authentic status is revealed as a result of the conversation between the duo. She becomes aware that her maid is a victim of a highly racialized society. Education is presented by the author as a means of ascending the upper class of the society. She demonstrates that there is no barrier that can hinder an educated person once she is enlightened.

In the second part of the text, the author discusses the significance of *La Préférence Nationale*. This is a phrase that shows that there are certain benefits that are strictly restricted to French nationals. These rights include the following: right to education, right to employment and right to social security. The novel describes the frustration of a Senegalese woman with a degree and who is in need of a job. The title is an illusion to National Front discourse which supports natural French indigenes in all aspects of public life. The Senegalese protagonist becomes a second-class citizen with quite restricted rights following the rupture of her marriage to her French hubby. She is refused a job at a bakery in Strasbourg because her French is too sophisticated and she cannot speak Alsatian. She is also denied a job of a teacher by a French woman who desired a tutor for her daughter. The author, from the tone of her novel, is a frank and unequivocal writer. She desires a more egalitarian cooperation between Europe and Africa because the current relationship is more of unequal cooperation and that the continent appears not to be in full control of her vast resources. She is therefore of an opinion that everyone, irrespective of his origin, should feel like a human being in front of another human being. The author presents a young Negro who goes out in search of a job and she reads in a free Strasbourg online newspaper where the service of a bread seller is advertised. She notes the address with the intention of visiting the bakery on Monday morning. She calls her university friend who is a French national to inform her about the decision to work in a bakery as a bread seller. The French national is surprised that a university graduate could nurse such an ambition. She observes:

Mais, tu délires ou quoi, commence-t-elle. Tu peux faire autre chose. J’ai le même diplôme que toi, et là je termine une formation pour être professeur. Qu’est-ce que tu vas t’emmerder à vendre des petits pains! (Diome 85).

The young Senegalese protagonist knows quite well that the job is not a dignified profession but she does not have any viable option because her colour forbids her from getting a befitting job in a racialized French society. She replies the lady saying:

J’aimerais bien faire autre chose, repliquais je, ma cocotte, mes diplômes sont certes français mais mon cerveau n’est pas reconnu

comme tel et pour cela, on lui interdit de fonctionner. En attendant, il faut bouffer. Au moins, avec les petits pains, je ne mourrai pas de faim. (Diome 85).

The protagonist's response to her friend's opinion brings to the fore the interminable trauma being endured by African immigrants in France who are daily ridiculed, humiliated and exploited. The African lady makes up her mind to visit the bakery despite the uncomplimentary remarks made about the job. She arrives the bakery and she meets the French boss who chooses to make jest of the young lady's French intonation. She informs the boss about her mission after greeting him warmly. Amazingly, the man asks a ridiculous question, trying to highlight the language interference challenge of the young applicant. He says sarcastically:

Mais pourquoi fous n'allez donc pas trafailler chez fous? (Diome 87).

The protagonist understands the message being transmitted by the arrogant boss and she is prepared to give him more than he bargains for with her frank and objective statement. She looks straight to the boss's face and informs him that she is a proud graduate and an ex-wife of a French national. She informs him that she is a victim of an obnoxious policy (*La Préférence Nationale*) which forbids her from enjoying basic rights as a result of her colour and despite the fact that she is carrying a French national's pregnancy. He tells the white boss that Europe has been quite unfair to the Africans despite the fact that Europe's wealth is built through the stolen African resources. She observes frankly:

Au revoir monsieur. Vous avez appauvri nos terres africaine à force de nous faire cultiver l'arachide et la canne à sucre pour votre people, vous avez pillé nos mines de phosphate, d'alumine et d'or pour enrichir votre pays à nos dépens, et pour couronner le tout, vous avez fait des miens des tirailleurs sénégalais utilisés comme chair à canon dans une guerre qui n'était pas la leur. Une guerre où vous les avez fait tuer au nom de la liberté que vous leur refuse sur leur propre terre d'Afrique. (Diome 88).

The young African is justifiably angry and frustrated by the policy of *La Préférence Nationale*. She does not understand the rationale for the wide gap in white and black job opportunities. It is remarkable to point out that more than half of blacks living in France claim that they experience racial discrimination in job opportunities. According to the first ever survey on the country's black population, 61% of black living in France insist that they have suffered at least one racist event within the past year, as stated by *TNS- Sofres Polling Agency*. More than one in 10 of the 13,000 respondents opine that they are often the target of racism that range from verbal attacks, jobs and housing scarcity. Patrick Lozen describes the statistics as being scary and troubling. On the other hand, Mouloud Aoumit, the head of Movement Against Racism and for Friendship Between People remarks that he is not

surprised by the Survey's findings. He claims that racism exists in French job opportunities, and many ethnic Africans and Arabs remain locked in old houses and other run-down dwellings. He says further that they rarely enjoy the same educational and employment opportunities as their white counterparts. Blacks remain under represented in the private and especially public sector. They are less likely to find jobs and experts say that they are less likely to be promoted even when they manage to get one. The French nationals believe that black immigrants occupy their country with the sole aim of stealing the jobs that are meant for their citizens. This erroneous opinion is responsible for the question asked from the protagonist.

Mais pourquoi fous n'allez donc pas trafrailer chez fous? (Diome 87).

Quite pathetic that blacks are often alleged of stealing people's jobs as a result of inadequate job opportunities even for the French nationals. The arrival of black immigrants is normally perceived as an attempt to compete for the limited job opportunities. Card (1990:249) notes in his famous paper on the Mariel Boatlift, a three-day riot which occurred in several black neighbourhood following the arrival of the Cuban immigrants in Miami in 1980, killing about 13 people. The government sponsored Committee that was set up to investigate the riot cited labour market competition of Cuban refugees as an important factor. We can deduce therefore that native French indigenes feel that black immigrants 'steal their jobs' because the prospect of securing jobs by the indigenes drops drastically with the arrival of the black immigrants. The underlying reason is that it becomes more difficult to get employment given the number of people in the labour market.

The protagonist continues searching for any job to make ends meet in a foreign land and he remembers his African background. He believes that his ancestors will definitely come to his aid even in France. It is believed in African society that the deities have a way of assisting those who call unto them in distress. The beckoning can be in form of sacrifice or pouring of libation to appease the gods. Having searched unsuccessfully for jobs, the protagonist, as an African thought about the spiritual intervention. She observes assuredly:

Toujours sans travail, je continue à croire que l'oeil de mon grand-père éclairerait mon chemin en Europe. Après tout, les dieux africains qui recevaient des sacrifices physiques promettaient la protection éternelle aux mutilés comme à leurs descendants.
(Diome 89).

The introduction of the deities and gods is seen as an identity for the author. It shows the inherent African beliefs in different supernatural beings worshipped in the continent. Traditional African religions are diverse and varied depending on the ethnic group and the region they are associated with. Most indigenous religion incorporate the worship of a distant gods, ancestors and lesser demi-gods. Indigenous African religions refer to the indigenous or native religious beliefs of the African people before the Christian and Islamic colonisation of Africa. Apart from the high level of belief in the protective power of sacrificial offerings, a lot of people also believe that calling on the gods can solve certain daunting challenges that

defy physical intervention. This perhaps explains the reason why the protagonist thought about his ancestors having exhausted fruitlessly all possible options.

Eventually, as if the African deities were listening to her supplications, she comes across another online vacancy for a French teacher who must be a graduate. She heaves a sigh of relief and she becomes confident that she will get the job given her degree in French language. She goes out on a Monday morning to keep the job appointment. She dresses moderately and she prepares well for the interview. She is inexplicably disappointed again because the French woman who needs a private teacher for her daughter does not mince words in expressing her disgust for the protagonist's colour. She notes unapologetically:

Je veux une personne de type européen... Je ne veux pas qu'on me bousille l'éducation de mon enfant. (Diome 91).

I want someone of European origin ... I do not want my child's education to be destroyed. The young lady realises again the price she has to pay for being black. She is visibly angry but not surprised by the woman's outburst. She understands the extent that racism has pervaded the French society. Intelligence, as far as she is concerned, is a person's capacity to acquire knowledge, apply it and also engage in abstract reasoning. She is of the opinion that being black has nothing to do with her academic endowment if only she can be given an opportunity. Her submission is premised on various findings by renowned psychologists. Lynn (2002:57) observes: Therefore, a genetic link between skin colour and intelligence among African American cannot be supported. Hunt (2010:23) corroborates Lynn's opinion, he notes: no gene related to difference in cognitive skills have across the various racial and ethnic groups have ever been discovered. He notes further that while several environment factors have been shown to influence the IQ gap, the evidence for a genetic influence has been quite negligible. The helpless lady left the office but she makes her opinion known to the egocentric woman. She concludes:

Au revoir madame, mais si vous aviez ce que j'ai dans la tête, vous ne seriez pas caissière au supermarché. (Diome 91).

The Caucasian is angry with the uncomplimentary remarks of the applicant and she says in anger: *Rentre dans ta forêt.* (P.92). Go back to your forest. She makes the statement to also taunt the black applicant for her unpleasant comment. The protagonist left the supermarket disappointed but quite satisfied by her spontaneous outburst to the white lady. She continues searching for job opportunities and she ultimately got a housemaid job with Dupire family. The family, like other Caucasian family, also appears hostile, egocentric and conservative. She endures several instances of abuse, humiliation and exploitation because of her pressing economic needs. She makes reference to her African childhood experience as being her source of inspiration, while also praising her grand- parents who educate her about various life challenges. She also makes reference to several Freud's theories about human being. She observes:

J'affirme que toute l'étude de Freud sur l'être humain est approximative... Quand à moi, ce n'étais pas seulement une force d'adulte qui me permettait d'affronter les tâches rudes et les quolibets. Mes souvenirs d'enfance m'étaient d'un grand secours. (Diome 106&107).

The narrator is visibly nostalgic about her youthful African background which prepares her for future trials as being experienced in France. She is resolute, uncompromising and unwavering. These youthful attributes imbibed from her past unpleasant and daunting experiences assist her in coping with the affront, humiliation, exploitation being persevered in France. This also brings to the forefront, the fact that an average African man can survive any harsh situation. She is largely inspired by her knowledge of Freud which stipulates that human beings are influenced by his past experience. Freud insists that events in our childhood have a great influence on our adult life, forming our personality. For instance, pain, stress and anxiety occasioned by past traumatic experience in one's past is hidden from consciousness and may be of assistance or cause problems in adulthood. In most cases, we continue to work towards fulfilling our aspirations developed in childhood. Freud observes that adulthood is an extension of childhood experiences and it can either make or mar our future personality. She would have resigned to fate and possibly accept her miserable situation but with her doggedness occasioned by her strong African's will, she is able to achieve her educational aspiration in an extremely hostile and racist environment. She continues working in the Dupire's household, enduring various inconveniences and racist tendencies of the couple. Unknown to the white couple, all the recurrent naggings, insults and degradation being inflicted on the narrator inspire her to forge ahead instead of upsetting or discouraging her. She notes:

L'image dégradante que monsieur Dupire collait n'était pour moi qu'un tas de broussailles qu'il fallait franchir pour accéder à la rivière désaltérante. Il pouvait donc continuer, car ma sueur faisait pousser ce que sa salive ne pouvait tuer. Le diable peut bien profiter de la nuit, mais le soleil ne tardera pas à venir pour lui crever les yeux.(Diome 108).

She is motivated instead of being traumatised. She forges ahead with her housemaid tasks and her studies with a strong determination to succeed with the peanuts she earns. Evidently, it has been a difficult sojourn in France but she remains unruffled. On a fateful day, Monsieur Dupont ran into the narrator at the main university library. He is incomprehensibly surprised because he never expected to meet her in such a place. It is the straw that ultimately breaks the camel's back. He asks in utter disbelief:

Vous, ici? Mais que faites-vous ici? (Diome 109).

She responds confidently, *comme vous, monsieur, je cherche des livres*. Mon. Dupire is evidently upset and he asks further:

Mais enfin, dit-il, pour qui, pourquoi? The black lady answers: *Pour moi monsieur, pour les lire.* Mon Dupire asks another question, *mais enfin, seriez-vous étudiante ?Oui, repondit-je. En quoi? Continua-t il. En lettres modernes. Oui, mais en quelle année, ajouta-t-il, saisi d'un besoin soudain de m'évaluer. En D.E.A.* He notes finally before leaving the library without accomplishing his mission. He observes: *Mais, mais, mais, vous ne m'aviez pas dit que...*(Diome 109). He cannot believe himself and he continues ruminating in his mind the shocking revelation. He asks himself a rhetorical question, what is a housemaid doing with D.E.A, Diplôme d'études approfondies? A certificate that prepares one for a Doctorate degree. He is marvelled by the academic potentials of a seemingly helpless black lady. Regrettably, instead of motivating her to complete the programme, he decided with his wife to truncate her academic programme by terminating her appointment in their household. He now realises that all the negative comments made about the narrator were inconsequential. The author observes:

Dupire venait de comprendre qu'aucune de ses goujateries n'avait échappé à ma cervelle de femme de ménage qu'il supposait peu élastique.(Diome 110).

The white couple is determined to make life difficult for the narrator and madame calls her to intimate her about the family decision. She calls on a Sunday morning and notes unapologetically:

Allo, dit une voix féminine, c'est madame Dupire, je voulais dire que pour les semaine à venir, nous n'aurons pas besoin de vos service, ... nous vous recontacter. (Diome 11).

She receives the unpleasant message with utter shock and disappointment because she thought she would be motivated in her academic exploits, but she remains focused to complete the programme despite the unexpected setback. It is remarkable to note that several university students experience financial stress but the frequency and intensity differ from one to another. Majority of these set of students are most likely to be of African origin according to Grable and Joe 2006. There is considerable racial difference between black and white university students in terms of consumption pattern and purchasing power. While most white students have sufficient funds at their disposal, black students struggle to make ends meet. This financial difficulty predisposes most African students to academic stress which can reduce motivation, hinder academic achievement and lead to increased college dropout rate according to (Pascoe et al, 2020). The narrator, however, proves Pascoe et al wrong with their assertion as she remains strong and more resolute to conclude her studies. It is therefore heart warming to discover that most black students end up excelling in their studies even to the admiration of their white colleagues. The narrator eventually concludes her studies, thereby enhancing her social status. She also forges ahead in her academics and she starts lecturing in the Strasbourg University on the successful completion of her PhD in French literature. She ultimately succeeded in ascending the French occupational labour as a result of her sound education. Her residence status also changes and this enables her to have access to good job

opportunities which had eluded her during her studies. She becomes a source of reference to most African students in France who encounter daunting challenges in their academics.

Conclusion

We have been able to ascertain in this paper that several young students of African origin endure endless forms of racial discrimination in France in their quest to acquire education and most importantly to be gainfully employed. These unsuspecting and naïve young black students travel to France with so much aspirations of improving their educational status and also engaging in lawful occupations at the end of their studies. Lamentably, these black students become disillusioned given their unpleasant racial experiences in their attempt to secure admission or to have access to good job while in school. Most of them displayed the African spirit and determination to excel in an hostile environment before realising their aspirations. The protagonist in the text being reviewed demonstrates her strong will to achieve her ambition in a highly stratified society. She does not allow the seemingly racial inequality to overwhelm her. We are therefore compelled to call on African leaders to ensure that conducive atmosphere is provided in the continent so as to disabuse the minds of several young Africans who are of the opinion that their educational and occupational aspirations cannot be realised in the region. Most of these unwary young men and women travel to Europe in search of greener pastures because of poor economic opportunities. They are forced to leave the continent for several other reasons like bad governance, corruption, ethnic wars, worsening educational facilities among others. It is expected that African leaders will work assiduously so as to find lasting solutions to some of these challenges which force young Africans to leave the region.

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