4-2009

# Global City, Megacity: Calixthe Beyala and the Limits of the Urban Imaginary

Dawn Fulton
*Smith College*, dfulton@smith.edu



## Recommended Citation

GLOBAL CITY, MEGACITY: CALIXTHE BEYALA AND THE LIMITS OF THE URBAN IMAGINARY Dawn Fulton Forum for Modern Language Studies 2009; doi: 10.1093/fmls/cqp001

**Global City, Megacity:**

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The extreme distances between wealth and poverty that characterize contemporary global capitalism play out with particular force in the world's urban spaces. While Raymond Williams' foundational study The Country and the City illuminated the polarities of exploitation between the urban and the rural, today the incidence of human and economic concentration across the globe has generated two separate models of the city: the First-World metropolis with extranational links to other prosperous urban hubs – what Saskia Sassen has termed the "global city" – and the overpopulated, "overurbanized" slum city.[1] As Patricia Yaeger contends, the figures of population growth, unemployment, and abject poverty in the world's "mega-" and "hyper-" cities defy logic and economic formulae, generating the need for a new strategy of reading urban literature that would enable us to "rethink the urban imaginary in the light of contemporary urban crises."[2] As I hope to show here, Calixthe Beyala offers unique insight into this discussion as a writer whose literary work encompasses both models of urbanism, from the African bidonvilles (shanty towns) inspired by her native Cameroon to the immigrant neighbourhoods of her current home in the French capital. While on the one hand her work probes the particular stakes of the urban imaginary in the historical context of African postcolonialism and French republicanist ideology, Beyala's bilateral approach to narrating the city also prompts us to consider the representative scope of both the megacity and the global city in light of the contemporary literary marketplace.

Calixthe Beyala is one of the most widely recognized "francophone" writers today, due in part to the controversial status she has attained as a result of her strong stands on politics, her relationship with the media, and the accusations of plagiarism that culminated in the so-called Affaire Beyala in the mid-1990's.[3] But her work itself has also fuelled her reputation, as the impressive commercial success of her novels has been paired with an array of literary prizes.[4] As Nicki Hitchcott's recent study cogently demonstrates, Beyala has been canny about her public image, drawing attention and often criticism for the ways in which she seems at turns to critique and exploit the intersections between her race, gender, and sexuality and the public's interest.[5] In the notoriously slippery field of "francophone" literature, moreover, Beyala is a notable player in that she enjoys this commercial fame while at the same time eluding classification. The vacillating geographical settings of her novels, along with her own bicultural biography, trace out an interconnectedness between two histories so insistent that it challenges the categorization of her œuvre as either "French" or "African".[6] In many ways, then, Beyala is at once an enigmatic and paradigmatic global francophone African writer.

Beyala's own version of literary urbanism is necessarily inflected by this transnational purview. While her early novels offer grim portrayals of impoverished West African cities, Beyala shifts in the 1990's to a more upbeat tone and a focus on the Parisian landscape. The last decade, meanwhile, has seen a thematic shift back to Africa with La petite fille du réverbère (Paris, 1998) and subsequent novels, followed by another "return" to France with the autobiographically inspired L'homme qui m'offrait le ciel (Paris, 2007). But both settings inspire reflection on the inextricable relationship between France and West Africa – and, I would argue, between global city and megacity. In the two novels that will be the focus of my study, Beyala accomplishes this bilateral perspective in part through the inscribed presence of a cultural

outsider: her 1988 novel Tu t'appelleras Tanga (Your Name Shall Be Tanga), set in the fictional African setting of Iningué, envisions a wordless dialogue between a middle-class French woman and a destitute West African girl, while the 1992 novel Le petit prince de Belleville ("The Little Prince of Belleville", translated as Loukoum), set in Paris' Belleville neighbourhood, establishes a double dialogue between a Malian immigrant father and son and their respective Western addressees.[7] While the two novels differ immensely in tone and thematic focus, this common structure serves as a reminder of the critical question of audience that infuses Beyala's work. Reading these two novels side by side, moreover, exposes the representative impasses that can afflict francophone literary production in a market dominated by the prosperous West, and thereby the narrative limits of both the "Third-World" megacity and the culturally heterogeneous global city.

**Cities in Distress: The Foreign Visitor in Tu t'appelleras Tanga**

Tu t'appelleras Tanga draws a stark portrait of urban devastation with particular focus on the plight of children. Its eponymous protagonist, a seventeen-year-old inhabitant of Iningué, describes herself as a "girlchild-woman" ("femme-fillette") to convey the incoherence of childhood in this destitute place. Having been raped by her father and forced into prostitution by her mother, Tanga envisions childhood as a state of innocence and freedom that has no currency in her world: "in my country, a child is born old since he cannot carry the fragrance of springtime inside himself" (7-8). Her landscape is an apocalyptic one filled with "bats, black birds and woodlice" (35), her home is a shanty whose sheet metal walls have been destroyed and rebuilt ten times (22), and she dreams of "a dog and a magpie at the end of a meadow" (16) while under

the constant threat of sexual violence and abuse. The novel's vision of urbanism is perhaps captured most succinctly by the character of Mala, nicknamed "Foot-wreck" ("Pieds-gâtés") because his legs have been devoured by maggots: "They say that Foot-wreck is inhabited by more demons than all of Africa's starving children put together" (56). Tanga and the children of Iningué thus carry allegorical weight as the embodiments of a continent's devastation.

We encounter Tanga through the eyes of Anna-Claude, a white French woman who has been imprisoned in Iningué for disruptive behaviour and finds herself in the same cell as the dying Tanga. Anna-Claude thus functions as the symbolic outsider in this novel, able to draw on her experiences as a victim of anti-Semitism (100) in order to sympathize with Tanga's persecution, but ultimately representative of a prosperous and external metropolitan world. Indeed, this inequity is in some sense the impetus for Anna-Claude's departure from Paris, as her need for Africa appears to arise out of a madness generated by a post-war contentment, an "exasperating calm that had been reigning for forty years" (2). Anna-Claude, a teacher of philosophy, creates an African fantasy out of this madness: a handsome man called Ousmane who has waited all his life only for her; and it is this fantasy, a caricature of a caricature in its recollection of Western discourse on the noble savage, that has brought her to Iningué.

Despite this all too familiar vocabulary of European discourse on the Other, however, it is important to note that Anna-Claude's fantasies of Africa were produced in part by an exposure to the poetics of the Négritude movement. Although the reference is a relatively oblique one, Beyala implicitly aligns the origins of Anna-Claude's search with the reading of Aimé Césaire's Cahier d'un retour au pays natal (Notebook of a Return to my Native Land),[8] the foundational poem of the Négritude movement: "As an adolescent she went through books compulsively. She did research on those people who had not invented gunpowder; the blockhead who had not

distilled the cannon's blast" (101). As Eloise Brière puts it, Anna-Claude goes to Iningué in search of "an Africa that was born in Paris in the 1930's".[9] Rather than indexing travel narratives of the eighteenth century and thereby a dichotomous cultural relationship between Anna-Claude and Tanga, then, Beyala underlines the fundamentally transnational moment that was the Négritude movement, situating Anna-Claude's fabricated image of Africa in a discourse already inflected with the intellectual and political intersections of Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean.

Tanga's story of poverty and exploitation, which makes up the bulk of the novel's content, acts as a kind of corrective to Anna-Claude's caricatured fantasy. The stereotypical images of a pastoral, timeless continent that Anna-Claude had herself passed on to her students, "the Africa of the evil eye, fetishers and marabouts" (3), are soon replaced by Tanga's relentless descriptions of urban decay and human despair. The French woman's desire to "bring [Ousmane] out of hiding" comes sharply up against the reality she finds: "Nothing appeared. Instead, the hyenas of Iningué's misery gathered around her – its fallen spectres, its tattered horizons, its vibrations of suffering" (61). Anna-Claude's realization thus serves as an interpretive model, the antidote to the repeated imagery of exoticism presented by the European gaze. A brief parable in Tanga's narrative captures this moment of encounter as a moment of aural distortion:

In my country, the foreign visitor sometimes hears the chirping of a bird. "Life," he thinks and lies down under his parasol, munches on some peanuts, and drinks his aperitif. Let him not make that mistake again. They are the cries of a child crushed by the earth that has sired it. (108)

Ultimately, of course, this distortion is generated not by any external factor but by the interpretive predilections of the listener. As long as the expectations of the foreign visitor are

fuelled by a pre-existing desire for a certain notion of "Africa", Tanga suggests, her own story will remain inaudible.

While Anna-Claude appears to rewrite this parable by "hearing Tanga's cries", however, her interpretive exemplarity is somewhat attenuated by the narrative limits undergirding this insight. The novel's title refers to the transcendent form of exchange that must take place between the two women for true communication to be realized: Tanga's story is not told through words but rather through a mystical transference of minds and identities. "[E]nter into me," she bids Anna-Claude, "My secret will be illuminated. But first, the white woman in you must die. […] You shall be seventeen seasons old; you shall be black; your name shall be Tanga" (7). Anna-Claude's position of privilege, in other words, must be abandoned in order for this exchange to occur; her role must become a first-hand empirical one rather than that of a listener. Indeed, the wordless dialogue that takes place inside the Iningué prison walls culminates in what appears to be a permanent appropriation of Tanga's identity by Anna-Claude, as she responds to the prison chief's questions by identifying herself as "'Girlchild-woman, black, seventeen, whore some of the time'" (125). As Susan Arndt points out, however, this utopic vision of human understanding is confined to the prison cell, a site already marked by Anna-Claude's loss of privilege and the humiliation of both women by the male prison guards.[10] The novel closes with a statement uttered by Anna-Claude, explicitly on behalf of both women, that accuses Tanga's visiting mother of having "killed [them] both" (137). But the fact that Tanga's mother sees the woman before her as Anna-Claude and that the policemen necessarily dismiss the French woman's claims to Tanga's identity as madness underlines the contingent status of this unmediated transubstantiation. The transference of Tanga's story to Anna-Claude is an enclosed dialogue, one that does take verbal form in the novel, but that in its very hermetic nature points

to the limits of narrative exchange between a middle-class French intellectual woman and a seventeen-year-old prostitute from the bidonville of Iningué. The very conditions of their communication, in other words, cast doubt on the perceptive and interpretive abilities of the "foreign visitor" in the African megacity. Without the requisite abandonment of privilege, Beyala suggests, the risk is that this visitor will persist in hearing "life" and the chirping of birds while turning a deaf ear to the cries of the city's children.

The apprehension expressed in this novel with regard to the foreign visitor's interpretive shortcomings would seem to speak also to the often fraught relationship between Calixthe Beyala and her reading public. While the sales of Beyala's works indicate steady popularity in Europe and North America, her reception has been less warm in Africa, where she has been criticized for a one-dimensional and overly negative portrayal of the continent.[11] Nicki Hitchcott's study on Beyala carefully dissects the dynamics of manipulation and distortion affecting the relationship between this controversial writer and her audience, exploring the ways in which Beyala consciously "perform[s] her own marginality in a strategic attempt to reappropriate exoticism for her own ends."[12] As Hitchcott demonstrates, Beyala's trajectory starkly illuminates the impossible position in which the media and reading public can tend to place contemporary African writers – where every statement and portrait is measured against the eminently impracticable gauge of "authenticity" – while also revealing the ample evidence of Beyala's keen awareness of these contingencies. Given the gap of inequity between the French-language publishing market and the representative space of her novels, then, Beyala's deaf foreign visitor in Tu t'appelleras Tanga seems to stand as a caveat to the overly transparent consumption of Tanga's story. Though mounted in explicit opposition to Anna-Claude's pastoral invention, Tanga's inexpressible narrative suggests that the relentless negativity of its vision may

ultimately be just as much a product of Western desire as Ousmane himself: a reductive, exoticized vision of Third World poverty, playing just as forcefully into what Graham Huggan terms "the postcolonial exotic" as Anna-Claude's corrected fantasy.[13] And just as the poetics of the Négritude movement played a pivotal role in Anna-Claude's fabricated imagery of an "authentic" Africa, Beyala's own literary representations can easily be implicated in the perpetuation of a media-fed vision of an African continent in distress.

The image of the megacity proposed by this novel thus seems to come sharply up against this narrative impasse. The current conditions of the literary publishing market for francophone African writers underwrite an audience that is predominantly not only literate and middle-class but also geographically external, while Beyala's restriction of the communication between Tanga and her "foreign visitor" to a utopic world of non-verbal understanding implies that any representative attempt in such circumstances is inevitably inflected by the inequity of this relationship. Thus while Patricia Yeager calls for a new "metropoetics" that would allow us to analyze the literature emerging from areas of contemporary urban crisis,[14] Beyala's novel seems to ask us to reflect also on the necessary limits of that urban imaginary. In this respect, the trap of "authenticity" takes on a new inflection in visions of urbanism, as it is indeed in the very insistence on the apocalyptic, on the incomprehensible economics of the megacity, that the literary imaginary betrays the predispositions of its public.

**Globalism vs. Universalism: Pedagogy and the Republic in Le petit prince de Belleville**

Given the narrative obstacles presented in Tu t'appelleras Tanga, the formal structure of Le petit prince de Belleville seems to signal an intensification of Beyala's engagement with the

question of readership. In a twist on the tradition of what Bennetta Jules-Rosette has termed "Parisianism" – the transformation of the literary landscape effected by the African gaze on French society –,[15] Beyala juxtaposes the voices of two "Africans in Paris": that of the young Loukoum and that of his father, Abdou, both recently migrated to Paris from Mali. Rather than forming a chorus of immigrant experiences, however, Beyala underlines instead the disjuncture between these two perspectives by systematically alternating them. Abdou's narrative, addressed to a European man referred to as "l'ami" ("friend"), appears in studied, poetic language in the opening passages of each section, while Loukoum's voice adopts an informal, argotic language inflected with the various linguistic worlds he enters and also addressed to a European listener. And whereas Abdou's is a tale of profound alienation and disillusionment in an inhospitable land that strips him of his patriarchal power in the home, Loukoum's status as an outsider in Paris is far less determinate. As a child with fading memories of his years in Mali who moves back and forth between the school and the home in his new Parisian surroundings, stopping often in the streets of Belleville on his way, Loukoum holds a liminal space as both insider and outsider to multiple worlds, both familiar with and mystified by mainstream Parisian society and by the West African community of which he is a part.

In fact, Loukoum's age functions as a kind of discursive passport, allowing him to report on what he sees with a wide-eyed candour that echoes the defamiliarising gaze of Tanhoé, Bernard Dadié's protagonist in Un nègre à Paris (An African in Paris), and of the Persian visitors in Montesquieu's Lettres Persanes (Persian Letters) before him.[16] The character's cultural identity is in a sense replaced by his youth, so that the index of strangeness can be applied at will to the various cultural worlds he enters. Indeed, the eminently popular text referenced in Beyala's title, Antoine de Saint Exupéry's Le petit prince (The Little Prince), is a veritable ode to

childhood as a state of moral, philosophical, and perceptive acuity, an outsider's gaze upon an unfamiliar adult world that offers the key to an insightful and uncorrupted vision of society.[17] Like Saint Exupéry's little prince, Loukoum peppers the worlds he encounters with incessant questions, questions that are designed to produce the same kind of frisson in the reader that Saint Exupéry's text (and Montesquieu's and Dadié's) does: a recognition that this ingenuous voice is pointing out the time-worn social and cultural conventions thoughtlessly and unreflectively reproduced by "adult" society on a daily basis. Given the particular success of Beyala's "Loukoum" novels, the apparent ingenuity of this outsider's view on Paris would seem to have sustained a significant commercial market.[18]

The allusion in the novel's title also happens to be a reference to one of the most well-read texts the world over: Saint Exupéry's Le petit prince is France's top-selling book and, translated into over 160 languages and dialects, one of the fifty top-selling books worldwide. Its golden-haired prince – despite hailing from another planet – is an instantly recognizable symbol of French national identity; indeed, his image and that of the author were featured on the 50-Franc note for a short period before the shift to the euro. But given the emphasis on childhood and didacticism in this novel, it is worth noting also that Saint Exupéry's text has been of significant pedagogical value in French language classrooms by virtue of its short, simple sentences and ready symbolic reach. Students across the globe have undertaken French language acquisition via an acquaintance with Saint-Exupéry's beloved characters and illustrations – and Loukoum is no exception. The novel's explicit reference to the text that inspired its title arises in the context of Loukoum's initial encounter with the French educational system: when he defends his literacy by writing in Arabic on the chalkboard, his teacher tells him that "it [is] shameful for a boy not to be able to read anything but the Koran, that it [is] contrary to the French lifestyle,"

and that he will be sent to a special school if he doesn't learn to read and write French by the end of the term (3). Saint Exupéry's text thus figures diabolically here as the "test" to prove that Loukoum cannot read, while subsequently a golden-haired boy named Pierre Pelletier is assigned to patiently help him with his studies so as to "save" him from expulsion to the special school.

The symbol of French national identity that is Le petit prince is thus the very medium of Loukoum's cultural assimilation at school. Indeed, in playing with the politics of recognition behind Le petit prince's remarkable popularity, Beyala also seems to be suggesting a parallel between the book's universalist reach and the claims to universalism of French pedagogy. While for his teacher the acts of reading and writing can only occur in the absolute framework of the French language, Loukoum explicitly sets her "test" of his skills in opposition to his knowledge of Arabic, thus relativising the teacher's pedagogical practice as culturally specific. Beyala's unmasking of the French republicanist ideology behind these pedagogical instances seems further confirmed by the novel's opening lines, where Loukoum's father laments the cultural loss effected by the family's migration: "To lend my son to authorities other than my own – to men and women whom I do not know but who are qualified to teach, so they tell me. And so the child breaks away from me" (1). The educational model symbolized by Le petit prince is thus presented here as a particular cultural erasure rather than as an acquisition in the absolute terms of universalism, in a gesture that puts Saint-Exupéry's text squarely back in its French cultural framework.

This pointed critique rendered in an apparently light-hearted and humorous tone is typical of Beyala's narrative strategy in Le petit prince de Belleville, and speaks to the particular vision of the late-twentieth-century Parisian metropolis that emerges in this novel. For despite his own hybrid position on the borders of mainstream French society and the Belleville immigrant

community, Loukoum's narrative ultimately offers up a vision of Paris as a persistently segregated space. Just as Arabic is "read" as illiteracy through the lens of the French educational system, the culturally and religiously divergent practices of the Malian community in Belleville have no parlance in the architecture of the Parisian landscape. Loukoum's family, for example, redefines its official genealogical structure so as to conceal Abdou's polygamous relationships from the state, an obfuscation that in turns labels them as criminals.[19] Abdou's protest underlines the rhetoric of universalism that writes out any attempt to address questions of difference: "I have done nothing wrong. It's your legislation that has not integrated my customs" (167). The "black people of Belleville" (173) do make their mark on the privileged space of Paris proper – in contrast, for example, to the immigrant and beur communities of the marginalized banlieue – generating a kind of African microcosm in Paris.[20] But Loukoum's narrative posits their mapping as a tenuous one, excluded from civic infrastructures ("we don't have the basic necessities such as the city gas of Paris which doesn't come all the way out here" [55]) and easy to overlook ("Paris is a lot bigger than any other place. […] [Y]ou could certainly sleep there and starve, too, without anyone taking notice" [149]). The rejection of Loukoum's Koran as "contrary to the French lifestyle" thus takes cartographic form as a spatial politics of exclusion.

Following a brief conversation with his father about the threat of the xenophobic agenda of the Front National's leader, Jean-Marie Le Pen, Loukoum constructs a hypothetical letter, written to President Mitterand, that points revealingly to the particularity of the immigrant experience in France. Like much of Loukoum's narrative, the letter is an exercise in discursive ambiguity thanks to the multiple registers and epistemologies embodied in his voice. While Loukoum's conversation with his father underlines his ignorance of European history ("What's [...] a Nazi?" [12]), for example, the letter suggests a canny knowledge of French state policy and

ideology. Assuring Mitterand of his confidence that the French president will prevent Le Pen from implementing his plans of immigrant expulsion, Loukoum explains:

It's not Monsieur Le Pen's fault if he suffers from misinformation, for social separation makes all people stay in their own district without intending any harm. So I'm suggesting to you that you organize a committee whose goal it would be to do a census on Negroes in distress, especially those stuck in maids' rooms without an elevator, who aren't able to give any sign of their presence except by having wild parties. There are so many of them who are illegal residents and unemployed, that it would nail the mouth of the President of the National Front shut. (13)

While Loukoum, in his own gesture of exceptionalism, takes care to separate his father from these "Negroes in distress" by reminding Mitterand that Abdou received his residency papers in 1981 and by insisting that the Negroes in question "are in no way, absolutely no way at all, exactly like my dad" (13), the letter nonetheless succinctly asserts the invisibility and precarious situation of the city's minority immigrants. Moreover, its explicit reference to the census identifies a link between this marginalization and the French state policy against the use of race or ethnicity in its demographical data.[21] Much as the nation's cherished secularism leaves polygamous family structures out of the equation by confining difference to the private sphere, the French republicanist resistance to communautarisme (community-based group identification) ensures the civic invisibility of the nation's "uncounted" minorities.[22]

Much less than a space of cultural exchange and diversity, then, Loukoum's gaze presents a city that sequesters its alternative narratives in hidden corners where they will not significantly alter the urban landscape. The dual "lessons" presented by Loukoum's story and his father's

suggest an impasse of choices for the non-European immigrant: to abandon any symptoms of cultural or religious difference, or to remain in a state of illegitimacy, geographical displacement and "social separation," as Loukoum's imaginary letter puts it. Given the novel's implicit indictment of French universalist ideology as the source of this impasse, Beyala suggests that the tension between French national identity and communautarisme ultimately expresses itself in the metropolitan landscape as a recalcitrant nationalism, in a cultural homogeneity that is decidedly un-global in its cartography. The kind of integration that would generate the ethos of a transnational or global city at the cultural level, in other words, seems to demand a mixing of public and private that would fundamentally undermine the French republicanist project. Thus while the status of Paris as one of the select few global cities foregrounds its prosperous links with other commercial hubs, these transnational exchanges do not necessarily translate from the economic to the cultural, or, more importantly, from the extra-national to the intra-national.

**Invisible Cities**

Despite the marked stylistic and thematic differences between Tu t'appelleras Tanga and Le petit prince de Belleville tracing an apparent parallel with the dichotomy between global city and megacity, each novel ultimately presents a critique of the economic iniquities at work in urban cartographies. The popularity of the two texts suggests further that, especially in the case of Le petit prince de Belleville, these are narratives that speak to the French-language audience, even as the gap between reading public and thematic content seems to underwrite the very economic and cultural gaps under critique by Beyala. In the case of Tu t'appelleras Tanga, this may be a reflection of Beyala's sensitivity to the projected desires of the European reader, or

what Hitchcott terms a "reappropriated exoticism"; while in the case of Le petit prince de Belleville it is perhaps the uncanny appeal of merging the exotic and the familiar.[23] But in this respect too the novels may have more in common than it first seems: given the isolation of Belleville's "transposed Africa" as it is mapped out in Le petit prince de Belleville, the attraction of this later novel may be less the combination of the exotic and the familiar but, more precisely, the (self-contained) presence of the exotic in the familiar. Loukoum's tale of an African immigrant community excluded from the Parisian urban infrastructure and marginalized by republicanist state policy, in other words, suggests a vision of the global city that maintains the exoticism of the non-European immigrant by isolating the foreigner both spatially and ideologically.

Beyala thus suggests a caveat about Parisian narratives of immigration that is strikingly similar to the concern raised in Tu t'appelleras Tanga: that here too preset patterns of consumption dictate a tightly restricted narrative field. This caveat takes form in the later novel through a brief encounter between Loukoum and the mother of his white classmate (and love interest) Lolita. Having invited him into her well-appointed home, Lolita's mother inquires with guarded interest about Loukoum's family life, "listen[ing] reverently" to his response, Loukoum claims, until he fails to provide the anticipated narrative:

White people listen to black people when you tell them your woes. But when you tell them that all is well, that you don't need them, then they don't listen any more.

Well, I wasn't going to do her that favour and tell her that my dad has two wives and lots of mistresses, that my mother is a whore. No, I told her a story white people don't like to hear.

That we were well off. That my dad works in the mayor's office. That my mum is a cashier at Ed's. (106)

The fact that Lolita's mother quickly loses interest in this manufactured portrait of a "happy family" seems to confirm Loukoum's understanding of his own and his family's status as exotic others in the Parisian landscape and of the ways in which his narrative is produced and consumed by the society that surrounds him. At the same time, his dexterity with these various external readings throws the representative scope of the novel itself into question, as the "woeful" story recounted in its pages has indeed sustained the interest of a European public, fulfilling the desire for an "authentic" insider's account of its immigrant communities.

Just as the narrative of the "Third-World" megacity confronts the tenacity of public expectation for a rhetoric of disaster, then, the narrative of the Parisian immigrant experience faces a similar demand for the exotic that necessarily sequesters it in a literary subcategory. Literary tourism signals the Achilles' heel of the francophone African writer, it seems, both outside and inside the hexagon. What Beyala's work suggests further is that, precisely due to the contingencies of the postcolonial literary marketplace, the narrative of Parisian immigration, for the time being at least, is confined to producing something other than the narrative of the global city. The dichotomy between prosperity and poverty that defines contemporary urbanism does not incorporate the vision of the "ethnic ghetto" dramatized by Beyala and amply consumed by readers. And as Loukoum's dialogue with Lolita's mother suggests, there may be little or no Western market for the story of a "respectable" middle-class African family in Paris, proudly and visibly working for the state.[24] This ghettoisation of francophone literature of immigration in turn maintains the French cultural identification of the global city in a manner that, as we have

seen, is ultimately incoherent with cultural transnationalism. The bilateral French-African story that emerges from the juxtaposition of these two very different Beyala novels is thus the suggestion that the megacity and the global city may be equally unnarratable, and that in both cases this impasse is a result of the present contours of the global francophone readership.

Smith College

Northampton, MA 01063

**Notes**

[1] See R. Williams, The Country and the City, (New York, 1973); S. Sassen, The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo (Princeton, 2001); and M. Davis, Planet of Slums (London, 2006).

[2] P. Yaeger, "Introduction: Dreaming of Infrastructure", PMLA 122:1 (2007), 9-26 (p. 13).

[3] Beyala was accused of plagiarism in two of her novels and ultimately convicted of plagiarism in Le petit prince de Belleville (Paris, 1992). See N. Hitchcott, Calixthe Beyala: Performances of Migration (Liverpool, 2006), pp. 30-32; and K. W. Harrow, Less Than One and Double (Portsmouth: 2002), pp. 97-155.

[4] These include the Grand prix littéraire de l'Afrique noire (1993), the Prix François Mauriac de l'Académie française (1994), the Prix tropique (1994) and the Grand prix du roman de l'Académie française (1996).

[5] See Hitchcott, Calixthe Beyala.

[6] On this topic see also O. Cazenave, "Calixthe Beyala's 'Parisian Novels': an Example of Globalization and Transculturation in French Society", Sites 4:1 (2000), 119-27; D. Thomas, "Daniel Biyaoula: Exile, Immigration, and Transnational Cultural Productions", in: Immigrant Narratives in Contemporary France, ed. S. Ireland and P. J. Proulx (London, 2001), pp. 165-76 (pp. 166-68); and Hitchcott, Calixthe Beyala, pp. 89-111.

[7] See C. Beyala, Tu t'appelleras Tanga (Paris, 1988); C. Beyala, Your Name Shall Be Tanga, trans. Marjolijn de Jager (Oxford, 1996); C. Beyala, Le petit prince de Belleville (Paris, 1992); and C. Beyala, Loukoum, trans. Marjolijn de Jager (Oxford, 1995).

[8] A. Césaire, Cahier d'un retour au pays natal (Paris, 1939); A. Césaire, Notebook of a Return to my Native Land, trans. M. Rosello and A. Pritchard (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1995).

[9] E. Brière, "Problématique de la parole: le cas des Camerounaises", L'esprit créateur 33:2 (1993), 95-106 (p. 101) [my translation].

[10] S. Arndt, "Boundless Whiteness? Feminism and White Women in the Mirror of African Feminist Writing", Matatu 29-30 (2005), 157-72 (p. 170).

[11] See Hitchcott, Calixthe Beyala, pp. 20-22; and R. B. Gallimore, L'œuvre romanesque de Calixthe Beyala (Paris, 1997), pp. 35-61.

[12] Hitchcott, Calixthe Beyala, p. 3.

[13] See G. Huggan, The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins (London, 2001).

[14] P. Yaeger, "Introduction", p. 13.

[15] B. Jules-Rosette, Black Paris: The African Writers' Landscape (Urbana, 1998).

[16] B. Dadié, Un nègre à Paris (Paris, 1959); B. Dadié, An African in Paris, trans. K. C. Hatch (Urbana, 1994); C. Montesquieu, Lettres persanes (Paris, 1973); C. Montesquieu, The Persian Letters, trans. G. R. Healy (Cambridge, 1999).

[17] A. de Saint Exupéry, Le petit prince (Paris, 1943); A. de Saint Exupéry, The Little Prince, trans. K. Woods (San Diego, 1971).

[18] Le petit prince de Belleville was followed by a sequel, Maman a un amant (Paris: 1993).

[19] On this topic see C. Toman, "A Day in the Life of Belleville: The New Face of Contemporary France in a Paris Neighborhood", in: French Prose in 2000, ed. M. Bishop and C. Elson (Amsterdam, 2002), pp. 257-63 (p. 261).

[20] In an interview for Amina, Beyala describes her vision of Paris in Loukoum as one of "Africa transposed to Paris". See N. Mouelle Kombi, "Calixthe Beyala et son petit prince de Belleville", Amina 268 (1992), 10-12 (p. 11) [my translation].

[21] See A. G. Hargreaves, Immigration, "Race" and Ethnicity in Contemporary France (London, 1995), pp. 3-4.

[22] See J. R. Bowen, Why the French Don't Like Headscarves (Princeton, 2007), pp. 155-81.

[23] Hitchcott, Calixthe Beyala, p. 3.

[24] I refer here to the original French phrase in the passage cited above, where Loukoum describes his imaginary family as "des gens bien", meaning "good" or "respectable" people (C. Beyala, Le petit prince de Belleville, p. 155).