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Decolonizing French literary pedagogy through contemporary African Francophone texts:a study of Fatou Diome's Le ventre de l'atlantique and Ahmadou Kourouma's Allah n'est pas obligé

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Abstract

This article examines the contribution of contemporary African Francophone literature to the decolonization of French literary pedagogy through a study of Fatou Diome's Le ventre de l'Atlantique and Ahmadou Kourouma's Allah n'est pas obligé. While French literary curricula have traditionally privileged metropolitan French authors, contemporary African Francophone texts offer alternative perspectives that reflect the historical, cultural, and social realities of postcolonial Africa. Drawing on Postcolonial Theory and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, this study explores how the selected novels challenge Eurocentric literary paradigms and contribute to more inclusive teaching practices. Through qualitative textual analysis, the article demonstrates that both novels foster critical thinking, intercultural competence, and global awareness by engaging with themes such as migration, identity, war, and social inequality. The study argues that incorporating African Francophone literature into French literary education is essential for creating a more representative and decolonized curriculum.

Introduction

The growing movement toward curriculum decolonization has encouraged scholars and educators to reconsider the place of marginalized voices within educational systems. In French literary studies, the curriculum has long been dominated by canonical French authors, often leaving limited space for African Francophone writers whose works represent alternative experiences and worldviews.

The inclusion of contemporary African Francophone literature offers an opportunity to challenge this imbalance. Through their engagement with migration, identity, social injustice, and postcolonial realities, African writers contribute significantly to the diversification of literary education. This article examines how Fatou Diome's Le ventre de l'Atlantique and Ahmadou Kourouma's Allah n'est pas obligé can serve as pedagogical tools for decolonizing French literary instruction

Problem Statement

Despite increasing scholarly interest in curriculum decolonization, French literary pedagogy continues to privilege metropolitan French texts at the expense of African Francophone literature. This imbalance limits students' understanding of the diversity of the Francophone world and perpetuates Eurocentric perspectives on language, culture, and literary production.

Although works such as Le ventre de l'Atlantique and Allah n'est pas obligé address important contemporary issues including migration, globalization, war, and identity, they remain underutilized in literary pedagogy. Consequently, there is a need to investigate how these texts can contribute to the decolonization of French literary education and foster more inclusive learning environments.

Objectives of the Study

General Objective

To examine how Le ventre de l'Atlantique and Allah n'est pas obligé contribute to the decolonization of French literary pedagogy.

Specific Objectives

1. To analyze the representation of African realities in the selected novels.
2. To examine how the novels challenge Eurocentric literary perspectives.
3. To evaluate the pedagogical value of the texts in French literary education.
4. To demonstrate how the novels promote critical and intercultural learning.

Research Questions

- How do the selected novels represent African social and cultural realities?
- In what ways do they challenge Eurocentric literary assumptions?
- How can these novels be used to decolonize French literary pedagogy?
- What educational benefits can students derive from studying these texts?

Theoretical Framework

Postcolonial Theory

Postcolonial Theory provides a framework for understanding the cultural consequences of colonialism and the ways formerly colonized peoples reclaim their voices through literature. The works of Fanon, Said, and Bhabha are particularly relevant because they emphasize resistance, representation, and cultural hybridity.

Within this study, Postcolonial Theory helps explain how Diome and Kourouma challenge dominant narratives about Africa and assert alternative perspectives.

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Culturally Responsive Pedagogy advocates educational practices that recognize and value cultural diversity. The theory supports the inclusion of African Francophone literature because it enables students to engage with multiple perspectives and develop intercultural understanding.

Literature Review

The decolonization of education has become a significant concern in contemporary scholarship, particularly within literary studies where curricula have historically privileged Western epistemologies and cultural productions. According to Smith (2021), decolonization involves challenging colonial structures of knowledge and creating space for marginalized voices and alternative ways of knowing. Within the context of French literary pedagogy, this process requires a reassessment of the dominance of metropolitan French literature and a greater recognition of literary productions from other Francophone regions, especially Africa.

Postcolonial scholars have long criticized the Eurocentric foundations of literary canons. Said (1978) argues that Western representations of non-Western societies have often been shaped by colonial ideologies that construct the colonized as inferior and dependent. Similarly, Fanon (1963) contends that colonial domination extends beyond political control to cultural and intellectual spheres, where the colonized are frequently denied the authority to represent themselves. These perspectives have inspired scholars to advocate for the inclusion of postcolonial texts in educational curricula as a means of challenging dominant narratives and promoting epistemic diversity.

Within Francophone studies, the question of representation has generated considerable debate. Moura (2007) observes that African Francophone literature has often occupied a marginal position within French literary institutions despite its significant contribution to the development of the French language and Francophone culture. Likewise, Miller (2012) argues that the traditional organization

of French literary curricula tends to reinforce hierarchical distinctions between metropolitan France and its former colonies, thereby limiting students' understanding of the diversity of the Francophone world.

Contemporary African Francophone literature offers important resources for addressing these limitations. Through their exploration of migration, identity, globalization, and social inequality, African writers challenge essentialist conceptions of culture and provide alternative perspectives on the French-speaking world. As Forsdick and Murphy (2003) note, Francophone African texts reveal the plurality of experiences that characterize contemporary Francophonie and encourage readers to move beyond narrow national frameworks.

Research on Fatou Diome's Le ventre de l'Atlantique has largely focused on issues of migration, transnationalism, and identity formation. Hitchcott (2010) argues that Diome's novel destabilizes idealized perceptions of Europe by exposing the socio-economic inequalities that shape migratory experiences. Similarly, Hargreaves (2013) contends that the text presents migration as a complex negotiation between aspiration and disillusionment, thereby challenging simplistic narratives of success associated with movement to Europe. Through its representation of transnational identities, the novel encourages critical reflection on globalization and cultural belonging.

Studies on Ahmadou Kourouma's Allah n'est pas obligé have emphasized its critique of war, political corruption, and social injustice in postcolonial Africa. Gyasi (2006) observes that Kourouma employs the voice of a child soldier to expose the brutality of armed conflicts and the failures of political leadership in West Africa. Likewise, Adesanmi (2004) argues that the novel functions as a powerful indictment of both local and international structures that perpetuate violence and instability. The narrative's focus on marginalized experiences provides valuable opportunities for critical engagement with questions of ethics, human rights, and historical memory.

From an educational perspective, the integration of African Francophone literature aligns with the principles of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. Ladson-Billings (1995) maintains that effective teaching should recognize students' cultural identities and draw upon diverse cultural resources to facilitate learning. Gay (2018) further argues that culturally responsive curricula enhance student engagement, critical thinking, and intercultural competence. By incorporating African Francophone texts into French literary education, educators can expose students to a broader range of cultural experiences and perspectives while fostering a more inclusive learning environment.

Despite the growing body of scholarship on African Francophone literature and curriculum decolonization, relatively few studies have specifically examined the pedagogical role of Le ventre de l'Atlantique and Allah n'est pas obligé in the decolonization of French literary education. Existing research has primarily concentrated on literary, linguistic, and postcolonial analyses of these texts. Consequently, there remains a need for studies that explore how these novels can be mobilized as pedagogical tools to challenge Eurocentric curricula and promote inclusive literary instruction. This article seeks to address this gap by investigating the contribution of Diome's and Kourouma's novels to the decolonization of French literary

Textual Analysis

Migration and the Critique of Eurocentric Dreams in Leventrede l' Atlantique

Fatou Diome's novel challenges idealized representations of Europe by exposing the realities of migration. Through the experiences of Salie and Madické, the text reveal show Europe is often imagined as a space of unlimited opportunity while the difficulties faced by migrants remain obscured.

The novel encourages students to critically examine dominant narratives surrounding migration and globalization. Rather than presenting Europe as the unquestioned center of progress, Diome highlights the inequalities that shape transnational mobility.

From a pedagogical perspective, the novel promotes critical thinking and global citizenship by encouraging learners to reflection issues of belonging, identity, and social justice

War, Violence, and Marginalized Voices in Allah n'est pas obligé

Kourouma's novel recounts the experiences of Birahima, a child soldier caught in the civil wars of West Africa. By giving narrative authority to a child victim of conflict, the novel challenges conventional representations of war and fore grounds voices often excluded from historical narratives. The text exposes the devastating effects of political instability while questioning international indifference toward African conflicts. Students are encouraged to engage critically with issues of human rights, ethics, and political responsibility.

The novel therefore functions as a powerful educational tool for discussing social justice and historical memory.

Decolonizing Knowledge through African Perspectives

Both novels contribute to the decolonization of knowledge by centering African experiences and perspectives. Rather than portraying Africa through colonial lenses, the texts present complex social realities that challenge stereotypes and simplistic narratives.

By engaging with these works, students develop a more nuanced understanding of the Francophone world and recognize the plurality of voices that constitute French-language literature.

War, Childhood, and Counter-Narratives in Allah n'est pas obligé

Ahmadou Kourouma's Allah n'est pas obligé provides another powerful resource for decolonizing French literary pedagogy. The novel recounts the experiences of Birahima, a child soldier who traverses several West African countries during periods of civil conflict. Through the voice of a child narrator, Kourouma challenges conventional representations of war and foregrounds perspectives that are often marginalized in historical and political discourse.

Birahima's narrative exposes the brutality of armed conflict while simultaneously critiquing political corruption, ethnic violence, and international neglect. As Kourouma (2000) demonstrates, the suffering of children in wartime is not merely a consequence of local instability but is also linked to broader systems of power and exploitation. According to Gyasi (2006), the novel functions as a form of literary testimony that compels readers to confront uncomfortable realities often excluded from dominant narratives about Africa.

The pedagogical significance of the novel lies in its capacity to foster critical reflection on issues of justice, ethics, and human rights. By presenting historical events through the perspective of a child soldier, Kourouma humanizes victims of conflict and challenges stereotypical portrayals of Africa as merely a continent of violence. Adesanmi (2004) notes that Kourouma's narrative strategy disrupts conventional modes of representation and invites readers to engage critically with the political structures that sustain violence.

Within the framework of culturally responsive pedagogy, such narratives provide opportunities for students to explore questions of social responsibility and historical memory. Recent studies on decolonizing curricula emphasize that meaningful educational transformation requires the inclusion of voices and experiences traditionally excluded from institutional knowledge systems (Chimbi, 2026; Antwi & Adjei-Boateng, 2026).

Discussion

The analysis demonstrates that Le ventre de l'Atlantique and Allah n'est pas obligé possess significant pedagogical value. Both texts challenge Eurocentric assumptions, encourage critical engagement with contemporary issues, and promote intercultural competence.

Their inclusion in French literary curricula would contribute to a more balanced representation of Francophone literature and support broader efforts toward curriculum decolonization. Furthermore, the themes explored in the novels align with contemporary educational goals that emphasize diversity, critical inquiry, and global awareness.

Decolonizing French Literary Pedagogy through African Perspectives

A comparative reading of Le ventre de l'Atlantique and Allah n'est pas obligé demonstrates how contemporary African Francophone literature contributes to the diversification of literary knowledge. Both texts challenge the historical dominance of metropolitan French perspectives by centering African experiences and concerns. While Diome focuses on migration and transnational identity, Kourouma addresses war, childhood, and political instability. Together, these works provide students with access to social realities often absent from traditional French literary curricula.

The inclusion of such texts aligns with current discussions concerning curriculum decolonization. Scholars argue that decolonizing education does not require the rejection of the Western canon but rather the creation of a more balanced and inclusive curriculum that recognizes multiple knowledge traditions (Dei & Cacciavillani, 2024; Ntloedibe, 2025).

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Moreover, the pedagogical value of these novels extends beyond literary analysis. Their engagement with migration, identity, conflict, and social justice encourages the development of critical thinking, intercultural competence, and global awareness. Such competencies are increasingly recognized as essential components of contemporary education (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995). Consequently, Le ventre de l'Atlantique and Allah n'est pas obligé should be regarded not only as important literary works but also as pedagogical resources capable of supporting the broader project of decolonizing French literary education.

Recommendations

1. French literature curricula should incorporate more African Francophone texts.
2. Comparative studies between African and French literary works should be encouraged.
3. Educators should adopt pedagogical approaches that foreground diverse cultural perspectives.
4. Universities should support research on decolonial literary pedagogy.
5. African Francophone literature should be recognized as a central component of Francophone studies rather than a peripheral field

Conclusion

Fatou Diome's Le ventre de l'Atlantique and Ahmadou Kourouma's Allah n'est pas obligé demonstrate the transformative potential of contemporary African Francophone literature within French literary education. By addressing themes of migration, war, identity, and social justice, the novels challenge Eurocentric literary traditions and promote a more inclusive understanding of the Francophone world. Their integration into French literary pedagogy represents an important step toward curriculum decolonization and the creation of more equitable educational practices

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