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Beyond National Narratives: A Relational Method for Diasporic Literatures Grounded in Francophone Canada

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Abstract

This article asks how to read African diasporic writing in French in Canada without forcing it into national boxes. It reframes the old idea that "one people, one territory, one language" should define literature as a habit that can hide what texts actually do on the page. I propose a simple toolkit of six questions to guide analysis: How does the text create contact across difference? How does the city shape scenes and pace? How do past, present, and hoped-for futures overlap? To whom does the voice speak, and how does it hold more than one audience? How do spoken forms like a proverb or a chant become a written rhythm? How do civic and religious worlds share a scene? Three readings model the approach: Didier Leclair writes the migratory city through thresholds, transit, and offices; Monia Mazigh builds ethical address across civic and faith publics; Guy Armel Bayegnak turns cadence, meaningful objects, and mixed codes into structure. A synthesis shows translation on the page working as a method, and "public-making" as a measure of literary form in minor settings. The article offers a clear, portable way to name how texts build relations beyond national narratives. Although grounded in francophone Canada, the method is designed to travel and can inform the analysis of diasporic and minor literatures worldwide.

1. INTRODUCTION

For more than a century, national narratives have taught us to read literature as the mirror of a nation: one people, one territory, one language, one canon. The formula may look practical, yet it narrows the lens. It trains the eye to seek recognizability first and form later, to file texts into national drawers before asking how they work on the page. In the Canadian francophone field outside Québec, this has made inventive diasporic, multilingual, and hybrid writing appear exceptional or supplementary, when in fact these texts are laboratories of relation.

Christiane Ndiaye names the trap crisply. On the status of writers classed as "immigrant literature," she writes:

> « Cette notion de littérature immigrante, tout en insérant ces écrivains dans l'institution littéraire québécoise, pose quand même un problème dans la mesure où ces écrivains sont installés dans un no man's land. Ils ne sont ni étrangers ni québécois à part entière; d'où encore ici le problème de la définition de la littérature à partir du paradigme du xixe siècle : un peuple, un territoire, une langue, une littérature. En séparant ainsi les œuvres publiées par les auteurs montréalais, pour la plupart, entre le "nous ici" et les "autres" mais d'ici, la catégorisation ne nous apprend rien sur l'écriture. Elle ne procède que de l'idéologie de la célébration de la nation par sa littérature. » (Ndiaye, 2004, p. 57)

> My translation: *The very notion of "immigrant literature," even as it inserts these writers into Québec's literary institution, places them in a no man's land, neither foreign nor fully Québécois. By dividing work between "us here" and "others" who are nonetheless from here, categorization teaches us nothing about writing and simply advances a nationalist ideology.*

Ndiaye's charge relocates the debate from identity to writing. If categorization teaches us nothing about writing, the task is to change how we read. The question becomes operational: what does the text do to make meaning under minor conditions, and how do those operations build publics across difference?

In what follows, nation grammar is shorthand for habits condensed in nineteenth-century arrangements among schools, publishers, festivals, and critics, where literature is cast as the expression of a sovereign people stabilized by language and soil (Bouchard, 2001, p. 121). As François Paré urges, we need a "microbiology of the literary" that opens historiography to marginalities (Paré, 1994, p. 10, my translation). That settlement traveled widely and still lingers in evaluative habits, undervaluing practices crucial in minor and diasporic settings: translation on the page, code-switching as thinking, an orality-to-writing braid, the city as narrative form, and the making of more than one audience at once. Postcolonial francophone theory shows how an "hexagonal" default confuses shared language with shared conditions (Moura, 2005, p. 45). Closer to home, Paré names the structural fragility of minor literatures and the critical shortcuts that make them disappear not for lack of talent but for lack of adequate tools (Paré, 1994).

This article advances a relational, operation-of-writing method to show how African diasporic texts in francophone Canada build publics and forms beyond national narratives. It reads this corpus, outside Québec, through a relational universalism that takes Édouard Glissant's Relation as horizon and method: encounter, opacity, translation, consented incompletion, and the patient work of address (Glissant, 1997, p. 189; see also p. 121). In practical terms, this means replacing belonging tests with operations of writing and asking how a text composes relation, layers audiences, times a scene of waiting, carries cadence from oral textures into print, or lets a prayer or proverb travel without becoming a token. Diaspora here is a poetics, not a backdrop.

To make that poetics usable for teaching, reviewing, and canon building, I propose a compact Diaspora-Poetics Toolkit of six recurrent operations: modes of relation through translation and code-switching; urban spatialities as form; migratory temporalities that braid pasts, administrative presents, and projected futures; voice and address that assemble more than one public; an orality-page continuum that turns cadence and proverb into technique; and negotiations of civic and religious publics that do aesthetic work rather than signal themes. The point is to describe how texts work so hybridity no longer reads as deficit. I focus on African diasporic writing in francophone Canada because it concentrates the very formal problems this method targets, including multilingual address, migratory temporality, and city-based publics, while offering sufficient range to test transferability across genres and regions.

The case studies anchor the method. Leclair composes Toronto through thresholds, transit, and offices that set tempo and address; Mazigh calibrates civic and religious publics across fiction and essay; Bayegnak braids oral textures with print into a poised in-between register that reads as craft, not compromise (Leclair, 2000; 2003; Mazigh, 2015; 2020; Bayegnak, 2011; 2012). Read together, they stage Relation on the page and, in Paré's terms, turn exiguity into force rather than lack (Paré, 1994).

The article offers usable outcomes: a clear toolkit for reading diaspora as poetics, three close readings that model it, and a vocabulary adequate to the texts' operations. If nation grammars reward recognizability, this method rewards craft that builds publics. By the end, a reader can point to a hinge of address, a spatial beat, or a cadence that carries argument, and say why it matters.

2. FROM NATION GRAMMAR TO RELATIONAL UNIVERSALISM: A COMPACT GENEALOGY

If the introduction names the harm of a nation grammar, the next step is to understand how that grammar came to organize reading and why it still lingers in evaluative habits. The nineteenth century forged a settlement among schools, publishers, festivals, and critics that cast literature as the expression of a sovereign people stabilized by language and soil. In the North American francophone context, that settlement traveled with surprising tenacity, shaping canons and public expectations to the present. Gérard Bouchard's reflections on how new collectivities imagine themselves help explain both the usefulness and the blind spots of that model (Bouchard, 2001, p. 367). The nation grammar offered coherence in times of institutional building yet also trained critics to value recognizability over relational invention and to equate linguistic unity with literary unity. Here francophone postcolonial theory functions less as an optional vocabulary than as a corrective lens. Jean-Marc Moura insists that we not confuse a shared French with shared conditions of production and reception. The so-called hexagonal default, the reflex that takes France as the silent norm, bleeds into reading practices elsewhere and naturalizes mismatches between text and apparatus. Minor and diasporic scenes then appear derivative or marginal by definition, when in fact they operate with different constraints, audiences, and temporalities that call for different criteria of value (Moura, 2005, p. 45). François Paré had already given the name exiguity to this structural smallness, a condition that does not preclude ambition or complexity but that requires patient attention to how texts work under asymmetry. His warning was less sociological than critical. Literatures disappear not because they are weak, but because our tools remain calibrated to other scales and other centres (Paré, 1994). Relational universalism names a universal built from encounters and maintained by consented opacity and negotiated translation; it yields shareable criteria that travel because they are produced by relation, not by prior sameness (Glissant, 1997/1990).

Two further clarifications matter for the framework I adopt. First, when I speak of diaspora, I do not mean a sociological label that sits beside the text. I mean a poetics that becomes visible in operations of writing. Code-switching is not a flaw to be corrected for the sake of purity, it is an epistemic gesture that can cue shifts in stance or audience. A gloss is not a remedial crutch, it can be an address to a second or third public. A repeated cadence can carry memory from oral textures into print without turning orality into a museum piece. In other

words, the diasporic condition appears in how the page manages difference, how it braids voices and times, how it asks readers to move. Second, when I speak of minor, I do not mean minor themes or minor ambitions, I mean a field position. Outside Québec, francophone writing often builds with fewer institutional supports, narrower review circuits, and more heterogeneous readerships. This is not a plea for indulgence. It is a demand that our concepts reflect the actual labour that meaning requires in small and diasporic settings (Paré, 1994; Hotte & Paré, 2016).

Space is central in that labour. Diasporic writing in Toronto or Montréal treats the city not as scenery but as form. Bureaucratic counters, subway lines, waiting rooms and peripheral streets create a temporality made of thresholds and pauses, of detours and shortcuts, of routes learned through work and care rather than through leisure. What Mikhail Bakhtin once called chronotope is here the thickening of migrant time on a local map. The point, for my purposes, is not to import Bakhtin, it is to note that such spatialities are legible on the page and that they shape rhythm, point of view and address. Studies of shifting boundaries in Canadian literary spaces have shown how categories of place and genre travel together and how they can be loosened without losing analytic traction. The framework I adopt takes those insights as permissions to read the city as an operator of form and the frontier as a method rather than a line (Lintvelt & Paré, 2001).

A related thread concerns voice and address. Lise Gauvin's analyses of linguistic over-consciousness in francophone literatures remind us that writers who know they write under unequal conditions often stage their own linguistic choices as part of the narrative stance. That staging is not self-indulgence, it is craft. It recalibrates who is being addressed and how. In African diasporic texts in Canada, one frequently finds a double or triple address that refuses to choose between in-group recognition and wider publics. The result is not vagueness. It is a layered hospitality that can widen the circle without erasing the inside jokes and tacit knowledges that bind a community together (Gauvin, 2013, p. 9).

All of this leads to a simple methodological consequence. If categorization, as Christiane Ndiaye puts it, teaches us nothing about writing, then the framework must push us to read for operations, not origin. The framework I rely on brings together four strands. From Bouchard, the historicity of nation-making and its limits in plural settings. From Moura, a postcolonial francophone insistence that language is not a proxy for conditions and that canons are mobile. From Paré, the diagnostic clarity that exiguity is a field position that demands adapted tools rather than condescension. From Glissant, a way to make universality follow relation instead of demanding that relation simplify itself to meet a prior universal (Bouchard, 2001; Moura, 2005; Paré, 1994; Glissant, 1997). These strands do not cancel the value of national histories. They counterbalance their gravitational pull so that other forms of coherence can appear.

Because categorization teaches little about writing, the framework above does not jump straight to technique. It first asks where these texts circulate and to whom they speak. The next section sketches a quick cartography of sites, publics, and inequalities in francophone Canada outside Québec, so that method can answer to the field it reads.

3. CARTOGRAPHY OF THE FIELD: SITES, PUBLICS, INEQUALITIES

Before reading lines, we need a map. Outside Québec, francophone writing moves through uneven infrastructures that shape who can listen, where books are launched, which reviews appear, and how long attention lasts. Montréal and Toronto offer distinct audience ecologies. Montréal concentrates publishers, festivals, and media that still lean toward centre/periphery habits; Toronto gathers multilingual readers across schools, settlement services, workplaces, and community venues that are not always recognized as literary circuits. Ottawa and Gatineau add a civic corridor where public institutions meet small presses and where bilingual policy shadows reception. Rather than a vertical dependence, what is needed is "interdependence without paternalism" between the Québec center and Franco-Canadian peripheries (Doyon-Gosselin, 2010, p. 55, my translation). In these places, the same page can recruit different publics and must often do so without the scaffolding that larger fields supply (Hotte & Paré, 2016; Lintvelt & Paré, 2001). This is the field to which the method answers: form will be read under the pressures this map makes visible.

Publics are layered rather than singular. A book may address francophone readers who live in English-dominant neighborhoods, newcomers who read across codes, and institutions that prefer tidy categories. Gendered experience and faith inflect access and reception. Women's networks often carry books through reading groups and community events, yet these circuits leave scarce traces in prize lists and course outlines. Faith-marked idioms can be legible in community halls and opaque in media that expect a secular uniform, even when the prose uses them as aesthetic means rather than as badges. Immigration status and professional precarity also matter. Highly qualified writers publish through small or regional presses, secure brief visibility, then meet a ceiling when national juries and outlets revert to recognizability. None of this decides literary value. It does decide where a reader first meets a text and what evaluative reflexes are primed in that meeting (Moura, 2005; Hotte & Paré, 2016).

Inequalities appear as patterns rather than as villains. Prize circuits tend to reward the already plausible. Syllabi reproduce what juries have flagged, then teach it as the shape of the field. Festivals book what syllabi confirm and what media already recognize. Review cultures follow the same route, which means hybrid forms are often praised for subject while being faulted for the very techniques that let them hold more than one public. Code switching is labelled noise, repetition cute, a ritual echo off-topic. These misreadings are not inevitable. They are the predictable result of habits tuned to a homogeneous listener and a single calendar. Naming the patterns clarifies stakes for the close readings that follow. When a scene slows at a counter or when a proverb carries an argument, the page is solving a problem that the field has created. Our task is to describe that solution as craft rather than as compromise (Bouchard, 2001; Hotte & Paré, 2016).

With this map in mind, the case studies can be read as tests of how form answers to place. Toronto in Leclair is not scenery, it is a medium that sets tempo and address. Civic and religious idioms in Mazigh are not themes at the margin, they are tools that keep more than one public in the same frame. The orality to print braid in Bayegnak is not a residue, it is an engine that sustains coherence where institutional supports are thin. The next section states the toolkit that will make these operations visible on the page. Then the readings put it to work, so that evaluation follows the field rather than asking the field to simplify itself for evaluation.

4. METHOD: THE DIASPORA-POETICS TOOLKIT

This toolkit turns a principle into practice: read for operations of relation, not for tests of belonging. What follows is not a protocol to administer but a lens to hold. I describe six recurrent operations as I meet them on the page. Each is named in terms of what the text does to compose encounter, and each admits nuance rather than compliance. The aim is clarity for analysis, not pedagogy.

I begin with mode of relation, the way a text composes encounter across difference. Sometimes it translates, sometimes it lets languages brush without gloss, sometimes it code-switches and layers audiences inside a single paragraph. I look for calibrated opacity and selective explanation that produce a workable hospitality rather than a forced transparency. In Glissant's terms, opacity is not failure but a right that enables Relation to occur without erasure (Glissant, 1997/1990, p. 189; see also p. 121). When a page withholds a gloss so that rhythm can breathe, or offers one because rhythm requires it, I treat that calibration as craft.

Spatialities come next. The diasporic city is not background, it is form. Thresholds, routes, counters and rooms regulate tempo, perception, and who can speak to whom. A queue slows syntax, a bus ride syncopates dialogue, a back-room kitchen widens intimacy. I read for these pressures not as décor but as compositional forces that shape address. In this sense frontier is a method, not a border to police: adjacency, friction, provisional corridors of speech (Lintvelt & Paré, 2001). A scene's setting thus becomes legible as a device that organizes turn-taking, risk, and the timing of revelation.

Temporalities of migration braid calendars. A remembered elsewhere leans on an administrative present while a conditional future depends on papers, contracts, childcare. The overlap manifests in pacing, tense shifts, refrains, and the ordering of scenes. I mark where a line holds its breath at a window, where a paragraph accelerates after news arrives, where a memory supplies the missing word a character needs to act. The question is whether tempo clarifies stakes and carries argument, not whether chronology is linear. The temporal braid is evidence of labour: a way to keep more than one clock audible without letting any become noise.

With voice and address, stance meets circle. In minor settings, a text often sustains two or three concentric publics at once, an inner intimacy that honours tacit knowledge and a wider hospitality that refuses to exoticize. I track the hinge sentence that keeps both alive, the small swivel by which the prose invites a second reader without betraying the first. Lise Gauvin's account of linguistic over-consciousness helps name this precision: choosing register or code is not neurosis, it is part of narrative stance when conditions are unequal (Gauvin, 2013, p. 9). What matters analytically is to describe the technique that carries layered address, not to convert it into a deficit.

The orality–writing continuum concerns transfers rather than oppositions. Cadence, chant, proverb and ritual texture can migrate to the page and become pacing, paragraphing, argumentative refrain. I look for repetition that does structural work, for a proverb that moves from moral to method, for named objects that mediate identity instead of serving as static tokens. In Paré's vocabulary, exiguity names a structural smallness that requires such engineering of rhythm and return; it is a condition to which craft answers, not a lack to be

masked (Paré, 1994, pp. 9–16). The page shows how voice becomes syntax, how syntax becomes structure.

Finally, civic and religious publics appear not as themes to be affirmed or refused but as idioms through which public life is conducted. I read how ritual or scriptural echoes share a scene with deliberation, how punctuation and pacing admit the devotional without collapsing into sermon, how civic speech survives more than one normative frame. Jean-Marc Moura's warning remains a useful guardrail: a common language does not guarantee common literary conditions or shared rules of public address (Moura, 2005, p. 45). Analytically, I ask whether the scene holds both frames without flattening either, and by what technical means it does so.

Two clarifications guide my use of this lens. First, I treat these six operations as a profile, not as a score. A reading notes where a text concentrates its energy, relation and spatialities for one, voice and civic address for another, cadence and interlanguage for a third, then compares how those concentrations solve problems of legibility and coherence under constraint. The profile remains descriptive. It does not rank hybridity, it names technique. Second, because form answers to field, I return each profile to the conditions that meet it downstream, without moralism: which publics are plausibly assembled by these choices, what frictions they encounter, which misreadings they predictably trigger, and how those misreadings can be corrected by staying with the page.

4.1. How to use this toolkit

Select short, form-dense passages, read once descriptively and then inferentially, and tag local evidence with compact codes: REL, URB, MIG, ADD, ORA, PUB. Count an operation when at least two independent markers appear within roughly 8–12 lines; for example, a braided comparison for REL, site-specific nouns or thresholds for URB, tempo shifts or deferrals for MIG, vocatives or glosses for ADD, patterned repetition for ORA, or a speech act that assembles a group for PUB. Allow co-occurrence but note dominance when one operation governs the scene. Record page numbers/line ranges and brief quotations for auditability, and test a competing explanation before final attribution.

With this toolkit, I turn to the texts. The aim is not to certify but to watch operations at work—where relation is built and how they hold under pressure. I begin where space and time speak most clearly: Toronto in Didier Leclair, a city that becomes a method as much as a setting. These pages let me test the first axes: relation, urban spatialities, and migratory temporalities, before moving to Monia Mazigh for address and civic publics, then to Guy Armel Bayegnak for the orality–page continuum. What follows is a set of close readings that treat public-making as a feature of form and let the page teach the criteria back to us.

5. DIDIER LECLAIR: POLYPHONY AND THE MIGRATORY CITY

Didier Leclair's urban prose gives Toronto a pulse both ordinary and intricate, a rhythm learned in transit, at counters, in rented rooms, in the quick swivels of attention when one voice answers another across languages. The city is not a postcard; it is a medium. Routes of work and care draw the map, and tempo follows: a queue slows a sentence, a bus latch clicks dialogue into shorter beats, a walk across an industrial block lengthens perception and gives a paragraph time to think. Narrative treats spatial detail as compositional pressure rather than décor, which is where an operation-of-writing method begins to see relation at work. In *Toronto, je t'aime*,

streets and offices regulate who can speak to whom and under what conditions; in *Ce pays qui est le mien*, itineraries of looking for work, finding a room, or filling out forms bend the story toward scenes of address that must build more than one public at once (Leclair, 2000; Leclair, 2003). Paré reminds us that major cultures long repressed "any effort to translate space," even committing a symbolic "murder of space," a pattern minor fields must reverse through form (Paré, 1994, p. 82, my translation). Consider the métro guichet and its glass partition as a scene-setting device that times speech and surveillance (Leclair, 2000, p. 43), the rattling underground ride that compresses sentences (Leclair, 2000, pp. 41–42), and the winter city as a labour setting in Toronto itself (Leclair, 2003, pp. 11, 13).

Read under a relational lens, Leclair's pages make translation visible without turning it into spectacle. Code-switching appears in the contour of a reply, in the tact of a gloss offered to a character who needs it, in the refusal to flatten a name. There is no pedagogical overexplanation; yet there is hospitality in the way a term reappears with enough context to carry a second reader along. Glissant's notion that opacity is a condition for encounter helps name this balance. Leclair does not grant transparency as a default right; he calibrates legibility, and the calibration itself becomes craft. A borrowed word makes a soft echo across a scene; a sign in another language folds into description without italics; a joke survives the border between idioms because the narrative refuses to annotate it to death. Relation is achieved in these micro-choices that let languages brush without collapse while still inviting the reader to move closer (Glissant, 1997/1990).

Time in Leclair's fiction is the time of migration as it thickens on a local map. The past leans into a present tense filled with paperwork and waiting rooms, while the future appears as conditions and thresholds: a contract that might stabilize a month, a letter that might change a status, a friend of a friend who might open a door. On the page, this braid shows as small accelerations and decelerations. A sentence holds its breath before a window clerk, then releases once the stamp lands with a thud. A memory accelerates description and carries a scene forward because it supplies the word a character was missing a second earlier. The method's point is not to label flashback and anticipation; it is to recognize how narrative tempo measures migrant time, organizing scenes of recognition and misrecognition in ways a nation grammar cannot read. In Leclair, metro checkpoints and ticket windows stage that timing in micro (see "employés du métro" behind glass, *Toronto, je t'aime*, p. 43), while job churn and service work anchor the longer rhythm of precarious months (*Ce pays qui est le mien*, pp. 13, 50, 148).

Voice and address follow the same logic of layered hospitality. Leclair often stages moments where a narrator knows that more than one audience is listening. The prose grants intimacy to readers who share the tacit knowledge of a place, a language, a form of humour; it also keeps a second circle open, a wider public the book is willing to teach by example, not lecture. Lise Gauvin's work on linguistic over-consciousness clarifies why such staging can be a virtue in minor settings: it is not a nervous tic, it is an ethics of address that explains itself just enough to widen a circle without erasing the inner ring (Gauvin, 2013). In practice, this often means a sentence with a hinge, a brief swivel from in-group cadence to a more general rhythm, or a proper name left unitalicized yet clarified when a second description echoes it a page later. These small mechanics carry burdens larger institutions would otherwise bear: they build publics on the page.

The city remains the great operator. If boundaries float in Canadian literary space, as François Paré and collaborators argue, then the frontier here is not a line to be crossed but a method for organizing perception (Lintvelt & Paré, 2001). Leclair's Toronto is such a frontier. Subway platforms make characters adjacent who would not otherwise meet; service counters rehearse the choreography of unequal time; parks and community kitchens invent provisional convivialities that fiction can test and refine. The prose does not pretend that proximity solves anything. It shows what proximity requires: patience, timing, a willingness to accept that a sentence may need to carry two registers at once and that a scene may need to hold a silence after misunderstanding without rushing to correct it. In Paré's sense, this is exiguity as discipline rather than lack, a craft developed under conditions where recognition arrives late or not at all, and where the page must do work that a more generous field would sometimes do offstage (Paré, 1994).

Orality carries into print in measured ways. Repetition is structural; it keeps a motive alive across chapters and helps a character recover a stance after a setback. Proverbs surface without italics, denying the comfort of a cultural museum and giving the saying the dignity of argument. An emblematic object, a coat, a meal, a document sleeve, gathers meanings across scenes and becomes a relay that moves identity forward without turning it into a token. The orality–page continuum is useful here because it describes these transfers without enforcing a binary. The novel shows how chant becomes cadence, how cadence becomes pacing, and how pacing becomes the skeleton of an episode. What might appear as simple style becomes a solution to problems of coherence in small and mixed publics, where a story must hold even when recognition is partial and cues are absent.

Across these operations, Leclair emerges as a novelist of relation rather than belonging. The pages are not interested in declaring identities for the record; they track how a character learns to speak so that more than one listener can hear, how a walk across a neighbourhood diagrams what a city demands, how an office hour teaches a rhythm that fiction can borrow and bend. Under a nation grammar, such scenes register as sociological filler; under a relational method, they are motor and measure. They show how literature in minor settings builds what it needs through style, and how that style deserves to be read as craft, not compensation. This is why Leclair anchors the larger argument. He demonstrates that polyphony can be patient rather than loud, that translation can be a quiet habit rather than a spectacle, and that the migratory city can be made legible without reducing it to a symbol. In that clarity, the toolkit finds its first test: relation appears as technique, and technique appears as a way of making publics that a national drawer could never hold (Leclair, 2000; Leclair, 2003; Glissant, 1997/1990; Lintvelt & Paré, 2001; Paré, 1994; Moura, 2005).

5.1.Monia Mazigh: Gendered Publics and Ethical Address

Monia Mazigh writes toward more than one audience at once, and the choice is not cosmetic. The prose asks how a voice can remain faithful to a community's tacit knowledge while opening a second circle where civic debate is possible. The answer is neither confessional retreat nor secular erasure. As a Canadian frame puts it, the question is civic: "Is it a public or a private identity… and does it make sense in a secular democracy such as Canada?" (Aziz, 2015, p. 9). It is an ethics of address that treats faith as an idiom of public life, not merely a private belief to be bracketed. History has also "diminished [women's] voice and visibility in

public space," a double pressure that Mazigh's scenes counter by craft (Charles, 2020, p. 227). Read under a relational lens, her novels and essays turn friendship, family, study, protest, bureaucracy, and prayer into compositional laboratories where audiences are layered rather than sorted. The result is a writing that tests how relation can hold across difference without reducing any party to a symbol (Mazigh, 2015; 2020). In *Du pain et du jasmin*, the civic city emerges in university corridors and street gatherings around the Tunisian "bread" revolt (Mazigh, 2015, pp. 27, 36, 39–42); in *Farida*, mosque, veil, and Ramadan anchor ethical address without enclosing it (Mazigh, 2020, pp. 23, 27, 36, 50, 55; see also Charles, 2020, p. 255).

Modes of relation appear first at the level of sentence and scene. Mazigh lets an Arabic term or reference enter quietly, without typographic alarm, then allows a few lines of context to carry a second reader along. The page does not abandon opacity as a right, yet it cultivates a practiced hospitality. This is Glissant's wager in miniature: languages brush while the prose calibrates legibility moment by moment, not by promising full transparency in advance (Glissant, 1997/1990, p. 189; see also p. 121). A brief gloss appears when it serves the rhythm of a conversation. A proverb does argumentative work before a general description supplies a foothold. Relation is built through these micro-choices that neither flaunt difference nor hide it; the text becomes a place where readers learn to approach rather than consume a world not theirs by default.

Spatial composition keeps that ethic concrete. Streets, campuses, community centers, parliamentary corridors, and kitchens do not simply host action; they regulate who can meet whom, what can be said aloud, and what must be deferred. A women's gathering becomes a forum where knowledge circulates without claiming official status. A rally crosses a square and the prose tracks how the crowd's movement opens a fragile corridor of speech. An office visit becomes a negotiation between a citizen with layered obligations and a clerk who cannot see those layers from behind a window. To read for spatialities here is to notice how place shapes address: the same sentence means something else in a living room, a committee room, or under a streetlight after a meeting. The city sets tempo and pressure, and the narrative times its turns so that more than one public can remain present in the same paragraph. In *Du pain et du jasmin*, these shifts appear in the alternation between domestic thresholds and street-level mobilization (Mazigh, 2015, pp. 20, 24, 39–42).

Time in Mazigh's writing is not the flat present tense of policy debate. It is a braid of migration memory, administrative deadlines, and projected futures tied to collective action and private resolve. A remembered morning prayer recalibrates the energy of an afternoon meeting. A letter from an institution bumps up against a family schedule that runs on the tight margins of care work and study. A coming election hovers over a quieter scene of mentoring. What another vocabulary might call chronotope appears here as civic time in a diasporic setting, the thickening of calendars a text must hold together without reducing them to anecdote. The method's attention to temporalities makes these overlaps legible as craft: a chapter slows when the weight of a form presses on a character's options, then quickens when a conversation opens a door a policy had kept shut.

Voice and address carry the heaviest load. Mazigh writes in a register that trusts in-group readers to pick up what is not explained while refusing to close the book to a wider public. This is not balance for its own sake; it is a technique that keeps concentric circles of readership alive in the same breath. A sentence begins with an intimacy that presumes shared references, then swivels slightly to clarify a term, an event, or a risk for the second circle. The swivel is small, yet it preserves the dignity of the first address while making room for the second. Lise Gauvin's account of linguistic over-consciousness helps name this precision: in minor settings, choosing a register or a code is part of the narrative stance (Gauvin, 2013, p. 9). In practice, effects are modest and exact: a proverb is left unitalicized yet becomes clear when echoed later; a proper name sits in French while carrying another cadence; an aside supplies just enough grain for a newcomer to follow without flattening what was intimate a moment earlier.

The orality–writing continuum matters here, handled with restraint. Repetition sets a cadence that carries ethical claims forward without turning them into slogans. A scriptural echo may pass through a scene, yet pacing does the aesthetic labor, not a borrowed authority. Named objects such as clothing, food, and documents work as mediators that move meaning across publics without becoming tokens. The novel gives these objects time enough for significance to accrete through use and attention rather than authorial commentary. In a field where exiguity is the normal condition, this craft replaces institutional scaffolding with rhythm and care, so coherence is built on the page rather than guaranteed by a canon or a ready-made audience (Paré, 1994, pp. 9–16).

What distinguishes Mazigh in this corpus is the way civic and religious publics articulate rather than cancel each other. Scenes of worship do not suspend citizenship; they become hinges through which civic life is conducted. A committee hearing is not neutral; it is a place where a life lived in more than one idiom must argue without shedding any part of itself at the door. Mazigh names the stance as partnership: "It would be far more pertinent to speak of partnership, musharaka" (Mazigh, 2015, p. 39). The method takes these hinges seriously as form, not only as theme. It looks at punctuation, pacing, and the distribution of dialogue to see how the prose keeps the ritual and the deliberative in the same frame. Postcolonial francophone theory offers the guardrail: a shared language does not guarantee shared conditions or norms of public argument (Moura, 2005, p. 45). Mazigh's scenes bear that reminder out by crafting a rhetoric that can survive more than one audience and more than one test of legitimacy at once.

Across *Du pain et du jasmin* and *Farida*, this compositional ethic refuses easy binaries. Public and private intertwine without collapse. Secular and religious idioms communicate without one consuming the other. Insider and outsider audiences are courted, yet neither is flattered with total transparency. The toolkit helps name how this is achieved: calibrated modes of relation, spatial forms that set conditions of speech, a braided temporality that registers pressure and hope, layered address that keeps more than one circle alive, careful transfers of oral textures into print, and a negotiation of publics that treats faith as an aesthetic resource rather than a threat or badge. The payoff is not only ethical. It is literary. Page after page, relation becomes technique, and technique builds the publics a nation grammar cannot imagine.

5.2. Guy Armel Bayegnak: Braiding Orality and Print

Guy Armel Bayegnak writes in an in-between register at once familiar and freshly made. The pages remember ritual, chant, proverb, and call-and-response, yet commit to the disciplines

and freedoms of print. The result is not compromise but poise. Souleymane Diamanka names it succinctly as "oraliterature" (Diamanka, 2021, p. 74). The prose carries an oral memory while treating the page as a workshop where pacing, paragraphing, and typographic quiet do work a voice once did. Read as operations of relation, the novels show how cadence becomes structure, how emblematic objects speak across scenes, and how interlanguage resists tidy standardization to keep several worlds audibly present at once (Bayegnak, 2011; 2012). In *Cœur de lionne*, cadence and song organize group scenes (p. 28), ritual and school thresholds set timing (p. 37), and garments mark identity work without tokenism (p. 32). In *Le plancher se dérobe*, cadence is hammered into the prose early (2012, p. 9), repetition and paperwork drive pressure (p. 18), and song returns as structure (p. 25).

Cadence is the first signal. Repetition returns like a refrain, not to decorate but to keep pressure alive. A line comes back altered by a detail, a clause reappears through another voice, a key verb recurs where a synonym would be easier. The rhythm produces attention and builds coherence where the field does not supply it. One hears call-and-response without theatrical flourish, the page absorbs the beat and redistributes it as syntax. Under Paré's exiguity, such craft sustains meaning under unequal conditions, a "microbiology of the literary," close to the grain where small fields engineer rhythm and return (Paré, 1994, p. 10, my translation).

Objects and garments become mediators. A coat worn thin by winter work, a headscarf folded with care, a sleeve of documents, a shared dish at day's end: they move, gather, and pass along significance rather than sit as tokens. A garment holds a scene when words fail. A pot carries history into dialogue. A document's stiffness turns into tension a sentence must manage. The method reads these not as symbols but as relays whose travel and wear accumulate argument about what a life must juggle. The dossier and papier pressure points in *Le plancher se dérobe* make this visible at the turn of a page (pp. 17–18).

Interlanguage completes the braid. French hosts the pressure of another idiom without typographic alarm. A name keeps its shape, a proverb arrives as assertion rather than museum piece. A turn of phrase scented by another language lives inside French and no one apologizes. The point is not mixture for its own sake but the calibration of legibility when several codes are in play and no single code can hold the load. Glissant's right to opacity justifies withholding where explanation would break the music, context appears when it serves rhythm (Glissant, 1997/1990).

Space and time serve this braid. Rooms carry voices differently. A kitchen receives repetitions too intimate for an office. A bus ride syncopates dialogue. A church basement holds a silence a classroom would not. Time bends with similar tact. Memory charges a present line. A future hope tightens a scene and slows speech. These choices are bearings rather than décor, they let the book write endurance and adjustment without naming them out loud.

Because voice and address are tactical in minor settings, narrators often make their stance audible. A sentence tips toward an in-group cadence, then opens a second circle without betraying the first. Gauvin's linguistic over-consciousness names the maneuver, not insecurity but the craft of keeping more than one public alive in the same breath (Gauvin, 2013). A proverb may think first, a later echo supplies just enough grain for a newcomer to follow.

What can look like uneven standardization reads as deliberate interlanguage that protects lived speech. Spelling stabilizes on the page, but residues of accent and neighbourhood remain in order and cadence. Registers slide, and the slide measures passage between institutions and intimacies rather than error. Moura's warning holds, a shared language is not shared conditions (Moura, 2005). Bayegnak writes to make that plurality legible without scandal and to give readers enough scaffolding to move with it.

A further aspect deserves emphasis. The orality to writing continuum also recalibrates authority. A repeated phrase asks to be considered because it works, because it fits the rhythm of care, not because it is old. A ritual gesture brings steadiness to a character's choices, and the prose carries that steadiness forward. Hybridity becomes poetics, not deficit or badge, but a set of tools for solving narrative problems a nation grammar does not recognize.

Across *Cœur de lionne* and *Le plancher se dérobe*, these operations produce writing both exacting and generous, exacting in tuned cadence and guarded opacity, generous in letting objects gather significance and trusting readers to meet the text partway. The novels make publics by style rather than pedigree, with enough patience that the making becomes visible, allowing criticism to describe technique rather than rehearse belonging, and to value the craft small literatures devise to keep their worlds coherent on paper (Bayegnak, 2011; 2012; Glissant, 1997/1990; Paré, 1994; Gauvin, 2013; Moura, 2005).

6. CONCLUSION: LITERATURE AFTER THE NATION GRAMMAR

This article has argued for reading beyond a nation grammar that sorts texts by people, territory, and language before asking how they work. A portable, teachable method (six operations of relation) lets critics describe craft and judge adequacy on the page rather than by belonging tests. Across Leclair, Mazigh, and Bayegnak, translation functions as method; spatial and temporal composition carry migrant time; voice and address sustain concentric publics; an orality to print braid turns memory into pacing; civic and religious idioms share a scene without collapse. These moves are not exceptions; they are literature.

The method's portability matters because minor settings demand evidence more than rhetoric. A reviewer can name where relation is built or broken, quote a hinge of address, show how a queue or bus platform regulates tempo, or track a refrain's work across chapters. A teacher can ask students to build a profile along the same six lines and translate it into a public review. A jury can discuss a passage where calibrated opacity protects meaning without turning legibility into a test of assimilation. In each case, evaluation follows operations, not origins (Paré, 1994; Moura, 2005; Glissant, 1997/1990).

Returning to Christiane Ndiaye brings the argument full circle. Her diagnosis remains exact: « la catégorisation ne nous apprend rien sur l'écriture » (Ndiaye, 2004, p. 57). The point is not to abolish categories; institutions still need names. It is to reorder them after reading. Once operations are described—how translation is performed or withheld, how publics are layered, how cadence bears argument—categories can follow as summaries rather than gates. This is how a relational universalism becomes thinkable. Universality is not a prior yardstick; it is an outcome of encounters the page composes with care, consented opacity, and a discipline of address (Glissant, 1997/1990).

The same toolkit can travel to other diasporic francophone sites in Canada where field conditions and publics differ: Ottawa and Gatineau, Prairie cities where francophone communities meet newer African migrations, Vancouver's coastal circuits, Montréal neighborhoods where multiple diasporas share space without sharing calendars. Adjacent corpora such as Afro-Caribbean and Maghrebi francophone writing in Canada invite the same operation-first approach, with adjustments the texts themselves will teach. Read for relation, describe the work on the page, and let that work revise how we judge. If nation grammars taught us to reward recognizability, these books teach something else: literature under constraint invents publics through form. Criticism can meet that invention with methods as plural and exacting as the texts that call for them.

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