



4

The Sea as a Liminal Space in Francophone Migration Narratives

Pragati Das, PhD research scholar in French, Visva Bharati University, Bolpur – Santiniketan
Page No. 23- 30

Abstract: Migration across seas and oceans has become one of the most powerful phenomena in contemporary Francophone literature, where maritime space often embodies the hopes and hazards of exile.

This paper examines the representation of the sea as a liminal space in Fatou Diome's *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* (2003) and Laurent Gaudé's *Eldorado* (2006). In both novels, the sea functions as more than a geographical frontier. It is a symbolic crossing point where hopes of moving forward meet the harsh realities of displacement. This study highlights the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea as the sites of hope and possibility, but also sites of death and disillusion.

Drawing on Homi Bhabha's concept of liminality and the "Third Space", Paul Gilroy's notion of the Black Atlantic and Edward Said's reflections on Exile, the paper explores how the sea embodies both transformation and trauma in the migrant journey. In Diome's *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique*, the crossing of the ocean is represented as an ambivalent opportunity which nourishes the imagination of migrants while simultaneously exposing the impossibility of return. In Gaudé's *Eldorado*, the Mediterranean emerges as a perilous crossing, a space of suffering that tests the resilience of migrants.

Although both novels have been studied independently in relation to migration and exile, little attention has been given to a comparative reading of the two texts on the shared representation of the sea for the migrants. This paper therefore fills a critical gap by demonstrating how Diome and Gaudé inscribe maritime space as a site of ambivalence. Ultimately, the study argues that the sea in these narratives becomes the ultimate metaphor of exile: a space where borders dissolve, identities of migrants is renegotiated.

Keywords: Migration, Exile, Border-crossing, Displacement, Diaspora

Introduction

Migration has long been one of the defining experiences of the modern world, reshaping societies, cultures, and literatures across the globe. In contemporary Francophone literature, the phenomenon of migration is very prominent. Authors from former French colonies like Africa, the Caribbean, and beyond write narratives to articulate the complex realities of postcolonial displacement. The migrant also experiences of exile, alienation and cultural negotiation. Within these narratives, the sea emerges not only as a mere geographical barrier but also as a symbolic site of negotiation between origin and destination, hope and despair, belonging and estrangement.

The sea, especially the Atlantic and the Mediterranean, functions as more than a natural boundary in Francophone migration narratives. On one hand, the sea symbolizes the possibility of escape, mobility, and self-reinvention. On the other, it represents danger, alienation, and the threat of erasure. This liminal space is charged with both possibility and peril: it can symbolize escape and self-reinvention just as powerfully as it signifies danger, erasure, and death. It is this inherent duality of possibility and peril that makes the sea such a rich domain in literary texts of migration.

Literature Review



This paper explores the central role of the sea in two Francophone novels: Fatou Diome's *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* (2003) and Laurent Gaudé's *Eldorado* (2006). Both novels foreground the sea as an in-between space, a site where the migrant's desires collide with the material needs and psychological difficulties during displacement. Fatou Diome, a Franco-Senegalese writer, focuses on the Atlantic Ocean, which separates her narrator's island home of Niodior in Senegal from the inaccessible opportunities of France. The sea here becomes a paradoxical space: a belly that nourishes dreams of Europe, yet underscores the difficulty of return. In contrast, Laurent Gaudé's *Eldorado* is set in the Mediterranean, narrating the perilous journeys of African migrants who risk their lives to reach Europe. In *Eldorado*, the sea emerges as a brutal and transformative frontier where lives are lost or reborn.

Fatou Diome's debut novel *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* has generated a wide range of interpretations, many of which focus on the symbolic weight of the Atlantic Ocean and the diasporic imagination. The narrative centers on Salie, a Senegalese woman living in France, who reflects on her life between two shores and the struggles of her younger brother Madicke, who dreams of migrating to Europe. Critics have repeatedly emphasized the ambivalence of the Atlantic as both a bridge and a barrier.

Several scholars have analyzed the Atlantic as a metaphor for diasporic longing and the impossibility of return. There are some ecological approaches where the Atlantic Ocean, acting as a person, itself participates in shaping human experiences of exile. Overall, *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* has been firmly established as a canonical example of Francophone migration literature.

Laurent Gaudé's *Eldorado* has also inspired significant discussion on the portrayal of the Mediterranean as a deadly frontier. The novel presents narratives of migrants attempting to reach Europe by sea and Captain Piracci, a naval officer, whose encounters with a suffering migrant transforms his understanding of justice and humanity.

Scholars have interpreted that the Mediterranean is not only a natural danger but also a political weapon, controlled by the enforcement of borders and the indifference of authorities. Europe's border policies cause the deaths of migrants at sea. Thus, *Eldorado* generally converges on the Mediterranean as an ambivalent space: it offers passage and transformation but also death and despair.

Although *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* and *Eldorado* share striking thematic resonances, they have rarely been studied together. Most studies remain confined to analyses of each novel separately, with Diome studied in African diaspora contexts and Gaudé in Mediterranean crisis literature. A comparative analysis of the sea as a liminal space in both novels remains unexplored. This paper studies how both the authors use the sea as the primary symbolic threshold of the migrant experience.

Theoretical Framework

The sea, as a liminal space in Francophone migration literature, demands critical theories that address postcolonialism, diaspora, and the construction of cultural identity. By integrating insights from Homi K. Bhabha, Paul Gilroy, and Edward W. Said, we obtain an interpretative framework for analyzing how Fatou Diome and Laurent Gaudé portray migration as both a physical crossing and a deep psychological negotiation. These theoretical frameworks collectively emphasize the inherent ambivalence of exile, the instability of borders, and the capacity for cultural identity to emerge from "in-between" spaces rather than fixed geographical or cultural locations.

Homi K. Bhabha: Liminality and the Third Space

Homi K. Bhabha's theorization of liminality and the "Third Space of enunciation" is especially productive for understanding the maritime circumstances in both novels. Bhabha proposes that cultural identity is not located in a person's origin culture but emerges from the negotiation and interaction between different cultural worlds. He defines this in-between site as the "Third Space," a conceptual realm where cultural hybridity is actively forged.

"The stairwell as liminal space, in-between the designations of identity, becomes the process of symbolic interaction, the connective tissue that constructs the difference between upper and lower, black and white. The hither and thither of the stairwell, the temporal movement and passage that it allows, prevents identities at either end of it from settling into primordial



polarities. This interstitial passage between fixed identifications opens up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy” (Bhabha 4).

Bhabha defines liminality not as a simple boundary but as an active, productive space of passage and negotiation. He uses the powerful metaphor of the stairwell, articulated by artist Renée Green. This description of the stairwell is a direct comparison for the sea in migrant literature. The ocean is not merely the space between the homeland and the host country (the “upper and lower areas”). The maritime journey is this “interstitial passage,” a period of suspension where the migrant is neither fully here nor there, and where new, hybrid identities can begin to form outside of the old colonial “hierarchy.”

The “Third Space” is Bhabha’s term for the discursive condition that makes cultural translation and hybridity possible. It is the space where meaning is constructed, not simply transmitted.

“The intervention of the Third Space of enunciation, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys this mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as an integrated, open, expanding code. Such an intervention quite properly challenges our sense of the historical identity of culture as homogenizing and unifying force, authenticated by the originary past, kept alive in the national tradition of People.” (Bhabha 37).

The sea becomes this “Third Space of enunciation.” It is not a void but an ambiguous site where the signs and symbols of different cultures like the memories of the colonized lose their fixed meanings.

Bhabha further clarifies that this space is not about the content of different cultures but about the process of their articulation:

“It is that Third Space, though unrepresentable in itself, which constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew.” (Bhabha 37).

The maritime journey is the unsettling experience of the migrants. On the boat, characters are compelled to “read anew” their past and their future. The “same signs” of their identity (their accent, their skin colour, their stories) are dislocated from their origin and must be “appropriated” and “translated” for a new hybrid identities. The ocean, therefore, is not just a backdrop for the journey; it is the very psychological and discursive terrain where the story of postcolonial migrant identity unfolds.

Paul Gilroy: Black Atlantic

Gilroy’s central project is to challenge nationalist and ethnically absolutist paradigms in cultural studies.

“the stereophonic, bilingual, or bifocal cultural forms originated by, but no longer the exclusive property of, blacks dispersed within the structures of feeling, producing, communicating, and remembering that I have heuristically called the black Atlantic world” (Gilroy 12).

He proposes that this “black Atlantic world” is not a fixed location but a circulatory system, a network of routes. The primary symbol for this networked, transnational culture is the ship.

“I have settled on the image of ships in motion across the spaces between Europe, America, Africa, and the Caribbean as a central organising symbol for this enterprise [...] The image of the ship—a living, micro-cultural, micro-political system in motion—is especially important for historical and theoretical reasons” (Gilroy 13).

They are the vehicles that created the African diaspora, carrying not only human cargo but also ideas, cultural and political artefacts: tracts, books, gramophone records, and choirs, thereby facilitating a continuous process of cultural exchange and transformation.

This history creates a unique cultural position for black subjects in the West, who exist in a state of “double consciousness.” Gilroy states, “Striving to be both European and black requires some specific forms of double consciousness” (10). This condition arises from being simultaneously inside and outside the West, a product of its Enlightenment but also a victim of racism. When they try to



occupy space or try to demonstrate their continuity, the nationalists or absolutists view them as provocative.

This leads to what Gilroy terms a “counterculture of modernity” (10,14,36), a critical perspective forged from the experience of slavery that stands both within and against the modern Western world. He refers the phenomenon of “changing same” (131) where black people of Diaspora exhibit a powerful continuity across time and space. But this continuity is expressed through constant adaptation and transformation. The cultural products of the Black Atlantic, particularly music, embody this hybrid, “changing same” (110). They are not pure, authentic, or rooted in one nation but are the result of ceaseless borrowing and recombination. Gilroy argues that these forms are “both inside and outside the conventions, assumptions, and aesthetic rules which distinguish and periodise modernity” (82). Their power comes from this very doubleness, this ability to be modern and to critique modernity from a position shaped by the memory of terror.

Edward Said: The Poetics of Exile and Displacement

For Edward Said, exile is not merely a physical state but a fundamental psychological condition that shapes one’s entire existence. According to him, “Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: its essential sadness can never be surmounted.” (173). This “rift” creates a permanent state of dissonance and longing.

“sense of dissonance engendered by estrangement, distance, dispersion, years of lostness and disorientation-and, just as important, the precarious sense of expression by which what “normal” residents find easy and natural to do requires in exile an almost excessive deliberation, effort, expenditure of intellectual energy at restoration, reiteration, and affirmation that are undercut by doubt and irony.” (Said xxxiii).

This condition results in a pervasive sense. The exile lives with a constant awareness of this rupture, which colors their perception of the world. A key consequence of this dissonance is a unique relationship with language and expression. For the exile, communication requires immense effort, unlike the “normal” resident for whom it is “easy and natural.” This struggle infuses their language with a unique way of expressing themselves.

However, this challenging position is not only a burden; it is also a source of critical power. The exile’s peripheral vision allows them to see things those at the normal position cannot. Said argues that the exile’s perspective is inherently skeptical and resistant to easy answers, making it the ideal intellectual stance: “the critical task for the exile in my view is to remain somehow skeptical and always on guard” (Said xxxiii).

Ultimately, the state of exile is a permanent one. There is no true return or closure. The past is remembered, but it is remembered through the ironic lens of present displacement. As Said concludes, “no return to the past is without irony, or without a sense that a full return, or repatriation, is impossible” (Said xxxv). The exile is destined to remain in a liminal space, “at some distance from the solid resting-place that is embodied in repatriation” (Said xxxv), and it is from this unsettled position that their most powerful and critical work emerges.

Analysis of *Le Ventre de l’Atlantique*

The Atlantic as Metaphorical Belly

Fatou Diome’s *Le Ventre de l’Atlantique* situates the sea not merely as a physical barrier but as a symbolic belly. It is a space of both origin and confinement. The title itself, “the belly of the Atlantic,” evokes images of nourishment, but also suffocation. The protagonist, Salie, lives in Strasbourg but remains haunted by the Atlantic that separates her from her Senegalese island of Niodior. The ocean becomes a living entity that ties her fate to her homeland.

“ Là-bas, depuis des siècles, des hommes sont pendus à un bout de terre, l’île de Niodior. Accrochés à la gencive de l’Atlantique, tels des résidus de repas, ils attendent, résignés, que la prochaine vague les emporte ou leur laisse la vie sauve” (Diome 13).

The biological metaphor of the “gencive” or “gum” of the Atlantic is powerful. It transforms the ocean into a living body to which the islanders are attached as leftover scraps waiting to be



swallowed or spared. This perfectly captures the precariousness and passive confinement of their existence within the “belly.”

The verb “pendus” (hanged) evokes an image of suspension between life and death, with the island being hanged from the Atlantic. Hence the sea is a prison where people are in an immobile state. The Sea is an Enclosing, belly-like Space and also as a Psychological and Physical Prison

“Voilà bientôt dix ans que j’ai quitté l’ombre des cocotiers. Heurtant le bitume, mes pieds emprisonnés se souviennent de leur liberté d’antan [...] Les pieds modelés, marqués par la terre africaine, je foule le sol européen. Un pas après l’autre, c’est toujours le même geste effectué par tous les humains, sur toute la planète. Pourtant, je sais que ma marche occidentale n’a rien à voir avec celle qui me faisait découvrir les ruelles, les plages, les sentiers et les champs de ma terre natale.” (Diome 14).

The narrator, Salie’s body itself becomes the site of this conflict. Even as she walks on European soil, she feels herself imprisoned and remembers the freedom of the sand of her Niodor island. Her feet are literally shaped by her homeland, and they carry that imprint onto foreign ground. She carries traces of her culture within her, and her identity remains tethered to it, even in exile. This is a powerful image of how the past and the present, the island and the exile, are forever fused in the migrant’s corporal experience.

From a theoretical perspective, this ambivalence resonates with Paul Gilroy’s notion of the Black Atlantic. Gilroy argues that the Atlantic functions as a space of transnational cultural circulation but also of trauma, rooted in the history of slavery and colonial displacement. Salie’s ambivalent attachment to the sea echoes duality where the sea carries both the memory of forced crossings and the hope of chosen mobility. Although Salie voluntary yet economically forced to journey from Africa to Europe, Salie cannot simply sever ties with her birthplace; the sea remains a perpetual reminder. Even in exile, the Atlantic shapes her diasporic identity.

The Sea as a Contested Frontier

For the youth of Niodior, the sea represents the threshold to Europe. Their dreams of mobility crystallize in images of football stardom and economic success abroad. Salie’s brother, Madicke, embodies this hope. He idolizes European footballers and sees the crossing of the Atlantic as the path to a new identity.

However, Salie warns Madicke that the crossing the sea is not just a passage leading to liberation but often a descent into exploitation and exclusion. Salie and Mr. Ndétare tell an entire narrative of Moussa to Madické, younger brother of Salie who wants to cross the sea to arrive in France. This story serves as the collapse of the deceptive hope.

“Méfiez-vous, petits... n’écoutez pas les sornettes que vous raconte cet hurluberlu. La France, ce n’est pas le paradis. Ne vous laissez pas prendre dans les filets de l’émigration. Rappelez-vous, Moussa était un des vôtres et vous savez aussi bien que moi comment il en est sorti...” (Diome 132).

The metaphor of “filets” (nets) is key. It directly opposes the idea of the sea as a pathway to freedom, recasting it instead as a fishing ground where migrants are “caught” and trapped.

Salie directly articulates the mirage of France to her brother, Madické, contrasting his dreams with the harsh reality of immigration.

“Les étrangers sont acceptés, aimés et mêmes revendiqués seulement quand, dans leur domaine, ils sont parmi les meilleurs... Ce n’est qu’une poudre de rêve qu’on nous jette aux yeux pour nous cacher de dures réalités.” (Diome 204-205)

The term “poudre de rêve” (dream powder) is a perfect encapsulation of the mirage. It suggests something deceptive. Salie argues that the visible success stories (like famous footballers) are used to obscure the “dures réalités” (harsh realities) of racism, exploitation, and exclusion faced by the majority of immigrants, deconstructing the dream that motivates the dangerous crossing.

Here, the Atlantic takes on the role of liminal space. According to Homi Babha, it is the in-between zone where identities are suspended, where migrants leave behind one status but have not yet



been integrated into another. The crossing is less a triumphant initiation than a prolonged state of marginality.

“L’Atlantique ne les engloutit que par pitié.” (Diome 215)

The ocean is personified as a conscious, almost moral entity. It acts out of “pitié” (pity), swallowing those whose lives are so miserable that death is a mercy. This transforms the sea from a simple barrier into a grim, final destination for those fleeing desperation. This is reinforced by stories of migrants who perish at sea or return disillusioned. The Atlantic is described as a devourer. The ocean thus becomes both a literal grave and a metaphorical reminder of the precariousness of migrant dreams.

Exile, Nostalgia, and the Psychological Cost

Salie’s life in France illustrates the impossibility of fully “crossing.” Physically, she has succeeded where others have failed: she left the island and built a life in Europe. Psychologically, however, she remains tethered to the Atlantic. The sea embodies her nostalgia, her guilt, and her fractured identity.

“Je suis une féministe modérée, mais là, ç’en est vraiment trop. La déprime me guette. Je m’allonge sur le canapé et entame un dialogue avec mes hormones” (Diome 47).

This quote reveals the internal suffering. Salie’s reflects on her fractured and divide self identity. She identifies with a modern, feminist Western identity (“féministe modérée”), but is constantly pulled back into the traditional expectations and pressures from the island (symbolized by the hormonal, bodily reaction to her family’s demands). This shows the psychological toll of existing between two worlds. The migrant subject is split between cultures, never fully belonging to either. The Atlantic amplifies this wound, functioning as a constant reminder of what has been lost and what cannot be regained.

“Je suis chez moi là où l’Afrique et l’Europe perdent leur orgueil et se contentent de s’additionner : sur une page, pleine de l’alliage qu’elles m’ont légué.” (Diome 210)

This quote perfectly captures the fragmented, hybrid identity of the diasporic subject. Her only “home” is not a physical place but the metaphorical space of a written page—the “alliage” (alloy) of her two cultures. This supports your point about the psychological cost: she exists in a third, liminal space, shaped by both continents but belonging entirely to neither, a direct result of crossing the Atlantic.

She also describes the specific pain of returning to her homeland only to feel out of place:

“Je vais chez moi comme on va à l’étranger, car je suis devenue l’autre pour ceux que je continue à appeler les miens.” (Diome 190)

This is a common expression of the people in diaspora. The Atlantic has irrevocably changed her. The crossing is not a round trip; it’s a one-way journey into a new state of being. Upon return, she is an outsider (“l’autre”), and her home has become “l’étranger” (a foreign country). The ocean has therefore created a permanent, uncrossable psychic distance between her and her origins.

In *Le Ventre de l’Atlantique*, the narrator Salie’s persistently oscillates between a nostalgic longing for her Senegalese homeland and her fraught desire to integrate into French society. The Atlantic Ocean becomes the physical manifestation of this psychological “Third Space,” a transitional threshold embodying what Bhabha terms the “unhomely”. It is the post-colonial condition of being caught between worlds and fully at home in neither (Bhabha 13).

Analysis of *Eldorado*

The Mediterranean as a Space of Trial and Mass Grave

In *Eldorado*, the Mediterranean is depicted not merely as a geographical obstacle but as a symbolic frontier between despair and hope, life and death. Soleiman and his brother Jamal wanted to cross the Mediterranean Sea for better opportunities in Europe. For Soleiman and Jamal, the sea represents both the ultimate test for reaching the other side. The narrative lingers on the unbearable moments of departure, when migrants push fragile boats into the water under the cover of night, risking everything in exchange for the promise of arrival.

“Un combat entre lui et la mer. Rien d’autre. Reprendre les hommes à la mort. Les extirper de la gueule de l’océan. Le reste, tout le reste, les procédures d’arrestation, les



centres de détention, les tampons sur les papiers, tout cela, à cet instant, était dérisoire et laid.” (Gaudé 77-78)

Gaudé describes the Mediterranean as a devouring force, “jaws of the ocean” that swallows the nameless dead whose bodies are later washed ashore. If they got caught by the coastal guards, they are either retained or arrested. This recurring image exposes the sea as a mass grave, a site of collective trauma.

The Mediterranean in *Eldorado* is more claustrophobic.

“Toujours ces foules hagardes de fatigue qui n’ont ni joie ni terreur lorsqu’on les intercepte. Des hommes sans sacs. Ni argent. Au regard grand ouvert sur la nuit et qui ont soif, au plus profond d’eux-mêmes, de terre ferme. Toujours des cadavres, aussi.” (Gaudé 20-21).

According to Paul Gilroy in *Eldorado*, the Mediterranean is a new, deadly frontier where human bodies are again used as commodity, risked, and lost due to persistent global inequalities. The sea becomes a contemporary repository of memory and erasure.

The Sea as a Liminal and Sacrificial Space

Following Homi Bhabha’s concept of liminality, the Mediterranean in *Eldorado* functions as a rite of passage where African migrants are suspended between their former identities and potential new ones. Hence, they are suspended in a dangerous in-between state. The sea voyage becomes both initiation and ordeal, demanding sacrifice before any new beginning is possible. This is exemplified by the countless deaths that haunt the novel. The sea is a place of anonymous sacrifice and where bodies are thrown into the sea.

“Les hommes décidèrent qu’il fallait jeter les morts à la mer. Pour faire de la place et éviter tout risque d’épidémie. Bientôt, ces corps plongés à l’eau furent de plus en plus nombreux. Ils passaient par-dessus bord les uns après les autres et chacun se demandait s’il ne serait pas le prochain.” (Gaudé 26-27)

Only through the willingness to risk, this death can change to survival and the dream of a better life can be imagined. Thus, the maritime journey becomes a critical stage for human suffering and for the continuous renegotiation of identity.

Human Smugglers and the Economics of Hope

Gaudé does not shy away from portraying the exploitative networks that thrive on migrant desperation. Human smugglers, like the “Reine d’Al-Zuwarah,” who boasts of running the largest network in the region, epitomize the cruel economics of mobility (Gaudé 175). They control the liminal space of departure, dictating the terms on which migrants may enter the sea. For Soleiman and Jamal, raising the exorbitant sums for the crossing is as perilous as the journey itself; the sea thus emerges as both a financial and physical abyss. This system reduces human life to a transaction, a theme underscored when the Queen tells Piracci.

“C’est pour cela qu’ils me respectent et me servent. Je me parfume aux dollars. Je suis énorme de tout l’argent que j’ai déjà englouti et, crois-moi, j’ai encore un appétit d’ogre.” (Gaudé 177).

In Gaudé’s novel, Edward Said’s ideas illuminate the profound plight of the migrants who, even while physically at sea, already embody the existential condition of exile. They are displaced from their homes yet unable to claim a new one. For Captain Piracci, a different form of exile unfolds. He even has a moral confrontation where he met the human traffickers who take the advantage of the desperate situation of immigrants and use them for their own benefit. Thus we see the multifaceted sufferings of people in distress who wants to start a new life but also suffering the pain of exile.

Comparative Discussion

According to Fatou Diome, the **Atlantic** is not just a setting but a **protagonist** shaping memory, longing, and impossibility of return while according to Laurent Gaudé, the **Mediterranean** emerges as a **stage where people face** physical suffering and political conflict.



Le Ventre de l'Atlantique is less about the physical journey and more about the **psychic condition** of being “between shores” and suffering from nostalgia. It exposes the **myth of Europe** as an idealized land of success, showing instead how it fosters alienation, exclusion, and diasporic wounds. On the other hand, *Eldorado* depicts the Mediterranean crisis and how migrants are struggling to cross the sea **for survival**.

Both the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea function as a **metaphor of obstruction**, a boundary that cannot be crossed without cost. Both are **deadly geopolitical frontier** where there is impossibility of return. They are also passage between life and death, hope and despair.

Diome highlights **feminine identity**, particularly how women migrants negotiate memory, roots, and diaspora. While Gaudé focuses more on **journeys** of risk and confrontation, emphasizing the physical and political dimensions of the crossing.

With the help of the theories of Paul Gilroy, Homi Bhabha and Edward Said, we can understand that Fatou Diome and Laurent Gaudé show that the sea is never empty space. It is the **most decisive frontier of our time**: for Diome, it symbolizes **memory and impossibility**; for Gaudé, **immediacy and survival**.

Conclusion

The comparative analysis of Fatou Diome's *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* and Laurent Gaudé's *Eldorado* demonstrates that the sea; whether the Atlantic or the Mediterranean, is far more than a backdrop for migration narratives. For Diome, the Atlantic embodies the weight of diasporic longing, the impossibility of return, and the persistence of colonial people's desire for better life and opportunities in Europe. For Gaudé, the Mediterranean demonstrated the migrants suffering while crossing the sea, laying bare Europe's moral failures and the violence inherent in its border regimes.

The integration of Homi Bhabha's notion of the Third Space underscores how migrants exist in a state of liminality, suspended between cultural worlds. Paul Gilroy's concept of the Black Atlantic helps us recognize the sea as an archive of displacement and memory, a site where the legacies of colonialism resurface in contemporary migration. Edward Said's reflections on exile highlight exile as a trauma. It estranges individuals from their homelands. The migrants suffers the condition of “being out of place” and caught in the dilemma of belonging and exile.

The sea is a foreground of connection and separation, hope and despair, memory and erasure. It is in this paradoxical space that the migrant's journey unfolds, a journey marked by suffering but also by the possibility of forging new, hybrid identities. By juxtaposing Diome and Gaudé, we see that the Atlantic and the Mediterranean are not only geographical waters but symbolic oceans of hybridity, displacement, and contested belonging.

Works Cited

- 1) Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. Routledge, 1994.
- 2) Diome, Fatou. *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique*. Éditions Anne Carrière, 2003.
- 3) Gaudé, Laurent. *Eldorado*. Actes Sud, 2006.
- 4) Gilroy, Paul. *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Harvard University Press, 1993.
- 5) Said, Edward W. *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays*. Harvard University Press, 2000.