

**EXILE IN FRANCOPHONE WOMEN'S AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITING**

**by**

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis examines exile in contemporary autobiographical narratives written in French by women from across the Francophone world. The analysis focuses on work by Nina Bouraoui (Algeria), Gisèle Pineau (Guadeloupe), Véronique Tadjo (Côte d'Ivoire), and Kim Lefèvre (Vietnam), and investigates how the French colonial project has shaped female articulations of mobility and identity in the present. This comparative, cross-cultural, and cross-generational study engages with postcolonial theory, gender theory, and autobiographical theory in order to create a new framework with which to interpret women's experiences and expressions of displacement across the Francosphere.

The thesis posits that existing models of exile do not fully explain the complex situations of the four authors, who do not have a well-defined 'home' and 'host' country. Although marginalised by their gender, they are economically privileged and have chosen to live a rootless existence, which nonetheless renders them alienated and 'out of place'. The thesis thus argues that women's narratives of exile challenge and complicate existing paradigms of exile which have a male, patriarchal focus. By turning our attention to these women and their specific postcolonial gendered narratives, a more nuanced understanding of exile emerges: exile is experienced as a sexual, gendered, racial, and/or linguistic otherness.

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## INTRODUCTION

### BEYOND EXILE AND THE LIMITATIONS OF POSTCOLONIAL PARADIGMS IN FRANCOPHONE WOMEN'S WRITING

This thesis explores the ambiguities and complexities of different models of exile and displacement developed by women writers in the postcolonial context. The focus is on autobiographical narratives published by selected Francophone<sup>1</sup> women writers from four formerly colonised countries, and the analysis pays careful attention to the particularities which arise from the intersection of gender and migration. By examining a range of key works, the thesis tests and refines existing postcolonial definitions and theories of migration, with the aim of demonstrating that the experience of exile is not only a unique and complex

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<sup>1</sup> This thesis uses the term 'Francophone' to refer to authors writing in French from a range of locations across the French-speaking world. It shows awareness of the problems of this term which, while aiming to expand critical analysis to incorporate texts written from beyond metropolitan France, in fact becomes a divisive label which is often synonymous with 'non-white' authors. As Roger Little points out in 'World Literature in French; or, Is Francophonie Frankly Phoney?', *European Review*, 9.4 (2001), 421–36, the situation is particularly problematic in France's overseas departments. He explains that these writers 'politically, [...] are French, but in literature they are Francophone', adding that second-generation writers from the Maghreb who currently live in France do not belong to either category (p. 429). Little suggests the alternative term 'Francographic literature', borrowed from Jean-Claude Blachère, who invented the notion of 'la Francographie' in *Négritures: les écrivains d'Afrique noire et la langue française* (Paris: Éditions L'Harmattan, 1993), p. 8. This thesis retains 'Francophone', the accepted term in French postcolonial literary criticism, but is aware of its problematic colonial undertones.

mode of migration but also a constellation of knowledge which shifts depending on geographical position, social status, gender, age, and ethnicity. In so doing, the study offers a nuanced contextualisation of how the Francophone colonial past relates to the theme of displacement in the present. Furthermore, it questions how contemporary Francophone women writers writing between the late twentieth and the early twenty-first centuries live through and articulate their postcolonial experiences of displacement through the genre of autobiography.

What does exile signify for a set of contemporary women authors from a geographically diverse cross-section of the Francophone world, who span the formerly colonised locations of Algeria, Guadeloupe, Côte d'Ivoire, and Vietnam? Taking into account the diverse historical, geographical, cultural, and linguistic<sup>2</sup> specificities of each location, this study addresses questions of identity, nationality, and cross-cultural transmission in *Le Jour du séisme* (1999), *Garçon manqué* (2000), and *Mes mauvaises pensées* (2005) by Nina Bouraoui;<sup>3</sup> *L'Exil selon Julia* (1996) by Gisèle Pineau;<sup>4</sup> *Loin de mon père* (2010) by Véronique Tadjo;<sup>5</sup> and *Métisse blanche* (1989) and *Retour à la saison des pluies* (1990) by

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<sup>2</sup> The French language has a different status in each location studied throughout this thesis. While French is no longer the official language in Algeria, it is widely used in business, administration, and education. In Côte d'Ivoire, French is the official language, although approximately sixty indigenous languages are spoken across the country. French is also the official language of Guadeloupe because it is administered as part of France. Vietnam is no longer really Francophone, as only 0.5 % of the population speak French as a first or second language, as Nadine Normand-Marconnet explains in 'French Bilingual Classes in Vietnam: Issues and Debates about an Innovative Language Curriculum', *Language and Education*, 27.6 (2013), 566–79 (p. 568). However, there has been a concerted effort in recent years to promote the French language and culture to young people in Vietnam. For instance, as Normand-Marconnet notes, in 1992, France gave Vietnam financial support to establish a bilingual education programme in urban areas, entitled Programme de l'Enseignement Intensif Du/En Français (p. 568).

<sup>3</sup> Nina Bouraoui, *Le Jour du séisme* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 1999) (subsequently referred to as *Le Jour*); *Garçon manqué* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 2000); and *Mes mauvaises pensées* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 2005). All subsequent references to these texts will appear in parentheses in the main body of this chapter.

<sup>4</sup> Gisèle Pineau, *L'Exil selon Julia* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 1996). All subsequent references to this text will appear in parentheses in the main body of this chapter.

<sup>5</sup> Véronique Tadjo, *Loin de mon père* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2010). All subsequent references to this text will appear in parentheses in the main body of this chapter.



Kim Lefèvre.<sup>6</sup> I examine how these four women writers from distinct geographic areas, but who are united by the legacy of French colonialism, depict the experience of migration, paying attention to their position as relatively privileged wealthy individuals. Furthermore, I analyse how the four postcolonial authors use writing in an attempt to resolve the multiple personal conflicts arising from their migration, which each presents as a form of exile.

This thesis brings the four writers together for comparative academic study for the first time. While substantial critical attention has been devoted to Bouraoui and Pineau in particular, existing studies have not considered how exile plays out in their autobiographies in not only its literal but also its metaphorical manifestations. The thesis offers insightful cross-cultural comparisons from across the Francophone world, uniting material on North African and Caribbean literature, areas which are frequently discussed in Francophone literary criticism, with analysis of relatively understudied Ivorian and Vietnamese texts.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, by widening the scope of analysis to examine peripheral locations which are not habitually the subject of academic study, such as Vietnam, this project adheres to Charles Forsdick and David Murphy's appeal that Francophone postcolonial studies as a discipline should address 'the full diversity of the Francophone world'.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Kim Lefèvre, *Métisse blanche, suivi de Retour à la saison des pluies* (Paris: Éditions Phébus, 2008 [1989; 1990]). In the edition used throughout this thesis, the texts are published together; *Retour à la saison des pluies* (subsequently referred to as *Retour*) thus begins on p. 347. All subsequent references to Lefèvre's autobiographies will appear in parentheses in the main body of this chapter.

<sup>7</sup> There has been little critical work carried out on Francophone Vietnamese writing in particular. Jack Yeager was the first critic to define the key characteristics of this literature in 1987, when he published *The Vietnamese Novel in French: A Literary Response to Colonialism* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1987). Since then, several other survey studies have examined the impacts of French colonialism upon Vietnamese writing in French, including Nathalie Huynh Chau Nguyen's *Vietnamese Voices: Gender and Cultural Identity in the Vietnamese Francophone Novel* (DeKalb, IL: Southeast Asia Publications, 2003). A more recent publication is Leslie Barnes's *Vietnam and the Colonial Condition of French Literature* (Lincoln, NE; London: University of Nebraska Press, 2014).

<sup>8</sup> Charles Forsdick and David Murphy, 'Introduction: The Case for Francophone Postcolonial Studies', in *Francophone Postcolonial Studies: A Critical Introduction*, ed. by Charles Forsdick and David Murphy (London: Arnold, 2003), pp. 1–14 (p. 11).

It is my contention that existing models of exile do not always do justice to the complexity of the four authors' situations. The dichotomy between a 'home' and a 'host' country is not valid for them, on the one hand because the boundaries between these two places are constantly being questioned and redefined by their life experiences — and on the other, because of the slippage between colonial past and postcolonial present which shapes and dictates each of their individual trajectories. Sensitive to the positionality of each author, the thesis notes that as privileged, 'cosmopolitan' intellectuals, these women writers have a certain degree of freedom in their ability to travel back and forth between different locations. Their identity, always in flux, is shaped by their mobility. In this respect, they can be considered as representatives of Homi K. Bhabha's model of hybridity. However, rather than experiencing their multiple cultural encounters as enriching and emancipatory, following the model Bhabha proposes in *The Location of Culture* (1994),<sup>9</sup> the four authors studied in this thesis in fact draw attention to the ambiguity of their status as cosmopolitan, hybrid travellers who live a rootless existence and struggle to come to terms with their multiple identities. Drawing on a study by Forsdick which draws parallels between exiled people and travellers,<sup>10</sup> comparisons can thus be made between these authors and exiled individuals who feel 'out of place' when forced to move from their location of origin to a new space. While taking care not to trivialise the very real difficulties faced by those for whom exile is a matter of life and death, this thesis argues that Bouraoui, Pineau, Tadjou, and Lefèvre also experience their hybridity as both a literal exile, and moreover and in multiple ways as a metaphorical exile, if exile is also understood as a sexual, gendered, racial, and linguistic otherness, and a further

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<sup>9</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 2nd edn (Abingdon: Routledge Classics, 2004 [1994]), pp. 1–27.

<sup>10</sup> In 'Travelling Theory, Exiled Theorists', in *Travel and Exile: Postcolonial Perspectives*, ed. by Charles Forsdick (Liverpool: ASCALF Critical Studies in Postcolonial Literature and Culture, 1, 2001), pp. 1–13, Forsdick argues that for both categories of people, movement has become political, and that both groups 'employ the geographical, discursive and ideological aspects of the journey as elements in a process of self-distinction' (p. 1). Forsdick also talks of the 'possible transformation of the exile into the traveller' (p. 4), and he calls for a reevaluation of terminology of displacement which recognises the nuances and complexities of each type of movement.

consequence of their many displacements. The thesis, therefore, develops a new framework for interpretations of Francophone women's literature about exile by exploring the relationship between exile, migration, home, family, and belonging for these four women writers. What is exile, how is it expressed by women writers, and how does their position as individuals marginalised by their gender but privileged in socio-economic terms affect their experiences of estrangement? What factors brought about their exile? Has exile necessarily been a traumatic experience? How does war and violence impact upon this movement? Is exile always a forced displacement from the former colony to the metropole, or can it be a chosen movement occurring within the borders of a country? And after living in exile, can an individual ever return home?

These research questions are examined through a gendered focus, drawing attention to gender 'blind spots' where existing writing on migration and displacement neglects to consider women's experiences adequately. As Kate Averis and Isabel Hollis-Touré observe, 'it is astonishing to note that just as human mobility has become increasingly conventional in life as in literature, women's mobility has remained decidedly marginal in the latter'.<sup>11</sup> The corpus under consideration here responds to this gap, by writing women's experiences of mobility into literature. The thesis is underpinned by Julia Kristeva's threefold theory of exile. In 'Un nouveau type d'intellectuel: le dissident', an important essay published in 1977 in the French literary magazine *Tel Quel*, Kristeva analyses the gendered exile of women writers,

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<sup>11</sup> Kate Averis and Isabel Hollis-Touré, 'Introduction', in *Exiles, Travellers and Vagabonds: Rethinking Mobility in Francophone Women's Writing*, ed. by Kate Averis and Isabel Hollis-Touré (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2016), pp. 1–14 (p. 1). Averis and Hollis-Touré point out that while women's writing does address themes of mobility, historically mobility has been depicted as a masculine trope in travel writing, exile writing, migrant writing, and expatriate writing (p. 1).

arguing that such women are exiled in three ways.<sup>12</sup> Not only are they exiled geographically, having been forced to flee their land of origin due to war, unrest, and poverty, but their gender also exiles them from society. According to Kristeva, a woman is ‘trop prise par les frontières du corps et peut-être aussi de l’espèce’, and consequently ‘se sent toujours *en exil*’ [original emphasis].<sup>13</sup> Thirdly, Kristeva considers the writer’s condition itself as a position of exile. She claims that ‘rien ne s’écrit sans quelque exil’ because, like exile itself, the act of writing uproots writers from reality and draws them into a world of imagination, into another time and space.<sup>14</sup> Working through each author in turn, and comparing between texts where appropriate, the thesis considers how Bouraoui, Pineau, Tadjou, and Lefèvre exemplify and at times challenge this definition of gendered exile in their postcolonial autobiographical narratives, as they offer their own understandings of what it means to be an exiled female writer within the Francosphere.

Each author studied in this thesis has undergone some form of migration from one of France’s former colonies to the metropole, whether by force or by personal choice. Strikingly, however, for each writer, warfare has played a significant role in their displacement. Franco-Algerian Bouraoui was born in Rennes, France, in 1967 to a French mother and Algerian father but spent the first fourteen years of her life in Algiers, where her father was based. As an official for the World Bank, he himself lived an itinerant life between work commitments in Algeria and the United States of America. Regular visits to France during the summer to stay with her maternal grandparents preceded Bouraoui’s permanent exile from Algeria. This permanent exile occurred when tensions towards the French escalated following the Algerian

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<sup>12</sup> Julia Kristeva, ‘Un nouveau type d’intellectuel: le dissident’, *Tel Quel*, 74 (Winter 1977), 3–8. The essay was translated into English as ‘A New Type of Intellectual: The Dissident’ by Séan Hand and was published in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. by Toril Moi (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 292–300. The fact that the essay appeared in this collection, which was edited by a major figure of feminist studies, is an indicator of its significance.

<sup>13</sup> Kristeva, p. 5.

<sup>14</sup> Kristeva, p. 7.

War of Independence, after which the family lived in Switzerland, the United Arab Emirates, and France.<sup>15</sup> Bouraoui repeatedly uses the French term *exil* when she examines these movements in her literature, and as I explore in subsequent chapters, her autobiographical narrators live in a constant state of flux. Coping with a persistent sense of being ‘out of place’ is a recurrent theme throughout her oeuvre of fifteen novels to date.

While Bouraoui has never returned to Algeria, Pineau, who was born in 1956 in Paris to Guadeloupean parents, has travelled constantly between metropolitan France and the French Caribbean. Pineau is the only author studied in this thesis whose parents, relatively privileged like Bouraoui’s parents, both share the same racial background.<sup>16</sup> As a child, she spent brief periods in France, the Caribbean, the Republic of the Congo, and Senegal where her military father was stationed. Pineau moved back to mainland France in 1961, where she lived until her return to the French Caribbean, first to Martinique in 1970 and subsequently to Guadeloupe in 1973. Her life has since been marked by constant displacements between metropolitan France and the Antilles; for instance, she trained to become a psychiatric nurse in Paris, then practised the profession for twenty years in Guadeloupe before returning to Paris.<sup>17</sup> Her mobility is an example of the ‘aller-retour’ structure experienced by many Antilleans who frequently travel between the Antilles and the metropole for work, study, and family commitments, which is both enabled and encouraged by the framework of the *départements et régions d’outre-mer* (DROMs): these former colonies are administered as

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<sup>15</sup> Amaleena Damlé, ‘The Wild Becoming of Childhood: Writing as Monument in Nina Bouraoui’s *Sauvage*’, *Forum for Modern Languages Studies*, 49.2 (2013), 166–74 (p. 166).

<sup>16</sup> Although Pineau’s father was a poor *nègre* from Routhiers in the south-east of Basse-Terre Island, he was able to climb the echelons of society by becoming a soldier, which granted him mobility. Her mother was a wealthier, mixed-race *mulâtresse* from Goyave in the east of the island. See Pineau, pp. 22–23. For more information about the ethnoclass hierarchy which even today governs the racial and social standing of Caribbean people, see Louise Hardwick, ‘Creolizing the Caribbean “Coolie”: A Biopolitical Reading of Indian Indentured Labourers and the Ethnoclass Hierarchy’, *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 17.3–4 (2014), 397–419 (p. 401).

<sup>17</sup> J. Michael Dash, ‘Pineau, Gisèle’, in *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Latin American and Caribbean Cultures, Volume 3: O–Z*, ed. by Daniel Balderston, Mike Gonzalez, and Ana M. López (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 1155.

part of France. According to Édouard Glissant in *Le Discours antillais* (1981), though, this structure offers the islands little progress and in fact reinforces their status as colonies.<sup>18</sup> State-controlled Antillean migration began in 1963 through the creation of the BUMIDOM scheme, or the *Bureau pour le développement des migrations dans les départements d'outre-mer*, bringing over a hundred and sixty thousand Antilleans to work in the metropole. The BUMIDOM is explored at length in Chapter Three.<sup>19</sup>

Tadjo's mobility also began in her earliest infancy. Born in 1955 in Paris to a French mother, who was a painter and sculptor, and an Ivorian father, who was a high-ranking civil servant and Minister of Public Services in Côte d'Ivoire,<sup>20</sup> her family left to settle in Abidjan when Tadjo was approximately five years old.<sup>21</sup> The family also travelled widely across Europe and Africa when Tadjo was a young child, and these early travels catalysed in the author a fascination for moving beyond territorial borders which is reflected in her writing; as an adult she has lived in the United States of America, Mexico, Nigeria, Kenya, Britain, and

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<sup>18</sup> Édouard Glissant's *Le Discours antillais* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1981) is the most politically charged of his theoretical works. In this collection of essays, Glissant explores the cultural and historical complexity of the Francophone Caribbean, specifically Martinique, and examines its relationship with the metropole and the rest of the Caribbean. Glissant argues that departmentalisation has reinforced Martinique's economic dependency on metropolitan France and has led to an erasure of Martinican culture. For Glissant, departmentalisation equates to a continuation of colonial domination: the islands are trapped by 'une des formes les plus pernicieuses de colonisation: celle par quoi on *assimile* une communauté' [original emphasis], p. 15.

<sup>19</sup> M. Lucas, *Rapport du groupe de travail sur l'insertion des ressortissants des DOM en métropole* (Paris: SEDETOM, 1983), p. 1. See Hugues Pagesy, *Kolombie 2: Le BUMIDOM, la vérité!* (Gourbeyre, Guadeloupe: Éditions Nestor, 2017) for an up-to-date account of the consequences of the BUMIDOM scheme on the Antillean population.

<sup>20</sup> Eugène Ébodé, 'Véronique Tadjo: tous métis', *Le Mag*, 9 October 2010, 24 (p. 24).

<sup>21</sup> Although the circumstances of her departure from France are vague, in an interview with the author in 2004, Micheline Rice-Maximin and Koffi Anyinefa state that Tadjo's primary and secondary schooling took place in Abidjan. See Micheline Rice-Maximin and Koffi Anyinefa, 'Entretien avec Véronique Tadjo', *The French Review*, 82.2 (2008), 368–82 (p. 368).

South Africa.<sup>22</sup> Tadjó sits apart from Bouraoui, Pineau, and Lefèvre because while she recognises the emotional difficulty of being continuously uprooted, she also equates migration with travel, which implies a greater degree of choice and control. In an interview with Kanaté Dahouda in 2006, Tadjó declared that ‘j’aime le voyage pour l’enrichissement qu’il m’apporte’, adding that travel ‘aide à avoir une vision double, de l’intérieur et de l’extérieur, qui enrichit nécessairement notre pratique artistique et intellectuelle’.<sup>23</sup> These remarks, although reminiscent of Edward W. Said’s endorsement of exile as a highly productive space for intellectual and creative practice in his seminal 2001 essay ‘Reflections on Exile’,<sup>24</sup> position Tadjó as an elite traveller rather than an exiled subject. Said argues that exile is imposed on individuals by external factors beyond their control; yet Tadjó actively seeks to cross borders for cultural enrichment. Travel grants her both an insider and outsider perspective: she gains an insider’s insight into a new way of life beyond Ivorian borders, but she also remains an outsider. She therefore becomes emotionally detached from her surroundings, and this critical distance becomes a source of inspiration and creativity.

In contrast, exile for Franco-Vietnamese author, actor, and translator Lefèvre is consistently traumatic. Born in the late 1930s to a poor Vietnamese woman and a French colonial army officer, Lefèvre had to bear the triple stigma of being female, of mixed blood,

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<sup>22</sup> After earning her doctorate in African American literature at Sorbonne Paris IV, in 1979 Tadjó returned to Côte d’Ivoire to take up an English teaching post at the Lycée Moderne de Korhogo. In 1983, she enrolled at Howard University, Washington, D.C., on a Fulbright research scholarship. She was then appointed lecturer in English literature at the University of Abidjan until 1993, when she decided to prioritise her writing career. In 2001, she returned to academia, taking up an academic post as Professor of French and Head of the Department of French and Francophone Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. In 2015 she left to continue her literary and artistic career (she illustrates many of her own children’s books), and she currently divides her time between London and Abidjan. See Tadjó’s official website <[http://veroniquetadjo.com/?page\\_id=21](http://veroniquetadjo.com/?page_id=21)> [accessed 6 June 2016].

<sup>23</sup> Véronique Tadjó, “Rendre hommage à la vie”, Entretien avec Véronique Tadjó, écrivaine ivoirienne’, Interview by Kanaté Dahouda, *Nouvelles études francophones*, 22.2 (2007), 179–86 (p. 183).

<sup>24</sup> Edward W. Said, ‘Reflections on Exile’, in *Reflections on Exile: And Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London: Granta Books, 2001), pp. 173–86.

and an illegitimate child.<sup>25</sup> Her early life in Vietnam was plagued by displacement as she moved continuously, with and without her family, against the backdrop of French colonisation and a violent struggle for liberation. She left Vietnam to seek better professional opportunities in France in 1960, after winning a scholarship to train as a teacher in Paris. In 1972, she started working as a theatre actor and only began writing and translating in her later life.<sup>26</sup> While her migration to France is very different to that of those who have been banished from their homes, in her literature she describes her departure as a form of exile and as an estrangement which does little to appease the sentiments of alienation from which she had previously suffered in Vietnam.

For the selected corpus of women writers, then, exile is a common thread which unites them and reveals shared experiences, just as it also discloses significant differences between them. Chapter One examines the similarities and differences between the authors more closely, focusing on the reception of their work on exile and the ways in which they each engage with theories of autobiography. In this manner, the thesis innovatively combines approaches from postcolonial theory, gender studies, and autobiographical theory, questioning not only how the four authors' gender influences their experiences of exile, but also how it impacts on their choice of narrative genre. In order to apprehend critically what is at stake in such an analysis, the following section considers the terms and vocabulary of migration in greater detail.

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<sup>25</sup> It is unclear exactly when Lefèvre was born. In *Métisse blanche, suivi de Retour à la saison des pluies*, no exact date is given, but the reader is told she was born 'un jour de printemps, peu avant la Seconde Guerre mondiale' (p. 19). The date of her birth varies in literary criticism about the author. In 'Lefèvre, Kim', in *Dictionnaire littéraire des femmes de langue française: de Marie de France à Marie Ndiaye*, ed. by Christiane P. Makward and Madeleine Cottenet-Hage (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 1997), pp. 369–70, Jack A. Yeager gives the date 1939 alongside the French abbreviation 'n. c.' (which stands for 'née circa') (p. 369). However, in 'The Return of the Native: Cultural Nostalgia and Coercive Mimeticism in the Return Narratives of Kim Lefèvre and Anna Moi', *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 19.2 (2008), 93–124, Lily V. Chiu asserts that Lefèvre left Vietnam in 1960 when she was twenty-five (p. 110); she was therefore born in 1935, according to Chiu.

<sup>26</sup> Kim Lefèvre, 'Traducteurs au travail: Kim Lefèvre', *TransLittérature*, 13 (1997), 16–23 (p. 17).



## **Exile, Diaspora, and Cosmopolitanism: A Question of Terminology**

The current age is one of globalisation and mass migration; in an increasingly globalised world, national borders are being challenged as a growing number of people from diverse countries and social backgrounds are migrating away from their native country, whether voluntarily or involuntarily. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), between January and June 2017, 105,808 migrants and refugees have been driven from Africa and the Middle East across the Mediterranean Sea to Europe, a fact which raises important questions about human rights, border control, and European migration policies.<sup>27</sup> Within the Francophone world, the removal of formal colonial ties with France has not caused movement to cease between the former colonies and the metropole. For instance, in the Maghrebi context, migration to France increased dramatically in the years following independence but slowed down in the 1970s and 80s as the French government, faced with an escalating economic crisis, imposed strict immigration controls. A continued policy of family reunification, however, has encouraged Maghrebi immigrants to settle permanently in France.<sup>28</sup> This proliferation in the number of migrants moving across the world has led to a growth of scholarly work surrounding migration and displacement in the social sciences and the humanities.

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<sup>27</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Desperate Journeys* (2017) <<https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/58838>> [accessed 3 October 2017] (p. 1).

<sup>28</sup> For a comprehensive account of Maghrebi immigration to France in the post-independence period, see Isabel Hollis, 'The Impossible Return: Dreams of Home in Representations of Migration from the Maghreb', in *Coming Home? Volume 2: Conflict and Postcolonial Return Migration in the Context of France and North Africa, 1962–2009*, ed. by Sharif Gemie and Scott Soo (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), pp. 92–109 (pp. 93–96). Hakim Abderrezak, however, offers a different perspective on recent migration patterns of Maghrebi citizens in *Ex-Centric Migrations: Europe and the Maghreb in Mediterranean Cinema, Literature, and Music* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2016). He argues that 'since the 1990s, Maghrebi migrations have become progressively ex-centric' (p. 4), a term he uses to designate movement to other European centers such as Spain, Italy, or the United Kingdom, by methods which deviate from the norm (by fishing boat, truck, or ferry).

A myriad of different labels and tropes have been adopted to define this movement. While terms such as ‘migrant’, ‘immigrant’, and ‘refugee’ can offer disparaging connotations of ‘unreliability and transience’ and often refer to people at the bottom of the social hierarchy, as Azade Seyhan points out,<sup>29</sup> others, including ‘exile’, ‘cosmopolitan’, and ‘traveller’, carry more positive undertones of wealth, privilege, and success. For Seyhan, these descriptors are not only heavily laden with judgement but are also slippery and elusive. She argues that ‘like the mobile character of worldwide displacements of our age, definitions that aim to capture these movements shift and shape thus destabilising any foundational concept’; the meaning of these terms has been so frequently expanded and revisited that they have lost their theoretical specificity.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, for Seyhan, one of the only commonalities among such labels is the fact that they cannot easily be defined, and she therefore calls for the creation of value-free terms which are underpinned by real-life experiences of migration.<sup>31</sup> In contrast, Arjun Appadurai posits that new idioms are required which specifically deal with the interests of ‘translocal solidarities [and] cross-border mobilisations’ in the postnational world of today.<sup>32</sup> It must be acknowledged, though, that this postnational world advocated by Appadurai is far from being a reality, as contemporary articulations and expressions of belonging continue to centre around the notion of a shared national identity.

In the humanities, as Carine M. Mardorossian observes, the trope of exile has been heavily criticised by postcolonial writers, such as Salman Rushdie and V.S. Naipaul, for its emphasis on the binary opposition between ‘here’ and ‘there’, and its subsequent lack of

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<sup>29</sup> Azade Seyhan, ‘The Translated City: Immigrants, Minorities, Diasporans, and Cosmopolitans’, in *The Cambridge Companion to the City in Literature*, ed. by Kevin R. McNamara (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), pp. 216–32 (p. 218).

<sup>30</sup> Seyhan, p. 217.

<sup>31</sup> Seyhan, p. 217.

<sup>32</sup> Arjun Appadurai, ‘Patriotism and its Futures’, *Public Cultures*, 5 (1993), 411–29 (p. 418).

attention to the contemporary world of rootlessness and movement.<sup>33</sup> ‘Exile’ is generally defined as an enforced displacement or banishment from the country of origin to another country, although some theorists offer a much broader definition. For instance, Amy K. Kaminsky, writing on Latin American exiled communities, uses the term to refer to a continuous ‘process of movement and change’,<sup>34</sup> while Hamid Nacify argues that banishment can occur within a country itself. Nacify reads imprisonment, confinement within the family home, and long-term unemployment as forms of exile because they prevent individuals from fully participating in society.<sup>35</sup> While this definition demonstrates that exile can affect all citizens, whether they are in a situation of migration or not, the term also risks losing its critical value if exile is used to refer to any kind of oppression, and its application must therefore be carefully nuanced.

Said’s work, which centres around his own struggles growing up between Palestine, Egypt, and the United States of America, is the cornerstone of theoretical discussions of exile. In ‘Reflections on Exile’, he defines exile as ‘the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place’, arguing that it is a condition which can never be overcome.<sup>36</sup> For Said, exile is a punishment ordered by the authorities because of some form of political activity committed against the state. His definition corresponds to the etymology of the term: the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* notes that the term originates from the Latin *exsilium* and the Old French *exil*, both referring to a condition of banishment, and its first definition underscores the notion of exile as a political punishment: ‘enforced removal from one’s native

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<sup>33</sup> Carine M. Mardorossian, ‘From Literature of Exile to Migrant Literature’, *Modern Language Studies*, 32.2 (2002), 15–33 (p. 16).

<sup>34</sup> Amy K. Kaminsky, *After Exile: Writing the Latin American Diaspora* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. xvi.

<sup>35</sup> Hamid Nacify, ‘Phobic Spaces and Liminal Panics: Independent Transnational Film Genre’, in *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary*, ed. by Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake (Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 119–44 (p. 123).

<sup>36</sup> Said, p. 173.

land according to an edict or sentence; penal expatriation or banishment; the state or condition of being penally banished; enforced residence in some foreign land'.<sup>37</sup> This description, and by extension Said's analysis, suggests that exile inherently involves the crossing of national borders from the country of origin to a 'foreign land', although this is a model which is problematised throughout this thesis. Furthermore, the view that exile constitutes a banishment raises questions of whether migrants will ever be allowed to return to their homeland, or whether they will remain forever exiled in their host country.

Can an individual choose to go into exile? The use of the adjective 'enforced' in the above definition suggests that this movement is always involuntary, an implication which disregards the many people who, under threat of penal banishment or execution, have undergone a self-imposed exile. Although they see no alternative but to flee, exiling themselves before they are forcibly removed from their country, their exile has not been, strictly speaking, enforced upon them. The *OED* proposes a second definition which concedes that exile can be a voluntary act: 'expatriation, prolonged absence from one's native land, endured by compulsion of circumstances or voluntarily undergone for any purpose'.<sup>38</sup> This description acknowledges that exile can be caused by multiple factors, such as war, violence, social instability, and religious persecution. It also recognises that exile does not always involve a forced displacement for political motives but can be the result of personal choice, a fact which often heightens feelings of guilt at having willingly chosen to abandon the homeland and the many others who continue to suffer. This voluntary aspect of exile contradicts Said's rather extreme view that 'exile is not, after all, a matter of choice: you are

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<sup>37</sup> 'Exile', in *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)*, section 1.a  
<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/66231?rskey=H0wAPo&result=1#eid>> [accessed 10 February 2015].

<sup>38</sup> 'Exile', in *OED*, section 1.b.

born into it, or it happens to you'.<sup>39</sup> Although Said's remark evacuates all agency from the exiled communities, which may appear problematic, it is questionable how much choice exiled individuals and groups really do have when faced with persecution and violence in the country of origin.

Averis takes issue with this dichotomy between forced and voluntary exile in *Exile and Nomadism in French and Hispanic Women's Writing* (2014).<sup>40</sup> She argues that relating exile to the exercise of will forces a distinction between 'true' and 'false' exile, whereby "forced" (political or economic) exile constitutes a "true" exile, as distinct from "voluntary" (cultural or intellectual) exile deemed somehow arbitrary, as though a kind of self-immolation rendered meaningless because wilfully induced'.<sup>41</sup> She prefers to consider exile in terms of its causes, distinguishing between 'political' and 'cultural' exile.<sup>42</sup> Yet her model does not adequately reflect the idiosyncrasies of female experiences of exile because, as I argue in this thesis at length, such experiences can fall into both categories.

Much theoretical writing exists, then, discussing whether exile should be, or can be, qualified as an imposed or chosen condition. It must be acknowledged, however, that some authors examined in this thesis have inherently had more choice over when, where, and how they go into exile than others. For instance, Lefèvre was in her early twenties when she left Vietnam for France, so she had much more control over her departure than Pineau, who was a young child at the time of her displacements and so simply accompanied her family wherever they travelled.

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<sup>39</sup> Said, p. 184.

<sup>40</sup> Kate Averis, *Exile and Nomadism in French and Hispanic Women's Writing* (London: Modern Humanities Research Association and Maney Publishing, 2014).

<sup>41</sup> Averis, p. 13.

<sup>42</sup> Averis, p. 16.

Existing definitions of exile are also problematic for their masculine focus. Said completely disregards the enforced banishment, movement, and alienation of women; all the literary figures and intellectuals he analyses are male, and he does not consider how issues of gender might complicate experiences of exile.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, his insistence that exile is a punishment for political and intellectual activity does not pay due attention to other forms of exile which women experience. Women and children may well have been driven into exile from France's former colonies to escape from war, violence, or persecution, but not necessarily due to their own political activism; they may have accompanied male political exiles in their flight and so, although living in exile, might not be considered exiled subjects in their own right. Furthermore, Helen Vassallo argues that exile may be a solution which allows women to escape from a restrictive, male-dominated society, noting how, in Lebanese author and actor Darina Al-Joundi's autobiographical narrative *Le Jour où Nina Simone a cessé de chanter* (2008), the narrator Darina 'turns her "exile" to her advantage' because she is able to break free from her violent past in war-torn Lebanon.<sup>44</sup> The positive consequences of exile, particularly for women, are explored in greater detail throughout this thesis, and I analyse how exile can be a catalyst for sexual, artistic, and linguistic liberation for the four authors and their narrative personae.

Exile as a theoretical category has also drawn criticism for overlooking the forced displacement of the masses because it is implied that exile is only granted for people with some degree of status or recognition, for those who are deemed 'worthy' of exile. Although Said claims to speak for the 'uncountable masses for whom UN agencies have been created',

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<sup>43</sup> For a more detailed critique of the absence of gender considerations in Said's work, see L.H.M. Ling, 'Said's Exile: Strategic Insights for Postcolonial Feminists', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies*, 36.1 (2007), 135–45.

<sup>44</sup> Helen Vassallo, "'I Cried Power': The (Im)Possibility of Female "Freedom" in *Le Jour où Nina Simone a cessé de chanter* (Darina Al-Joundi)', *Nottingham French Studies*, 53.1 (2014), 63–75 (p. 74).

criticising the elite fields of religion and literature for denying ordinary people the chance to voice their suffering,<sup>45</sup> he actually falls into the trap himself because during the rest of his essay he addresses almost exclusively the banishment of distinguished, male canonical Western writers, including Joseph Conrad, Georg Lukács, and James Joyce, a shortcoming noted by Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia.<sup>46</sup> Moreover, Gillian Whitlock points out that Said himself ‘has been regarded as the embodiment of the privileged literary “exile”’,<sup>47</sup> a fact which renders his comments about being a voice both for refugees and for intellectuals as rather hypocritical, since he cannot claim to understand fully experiences which differ so greatly from his own. Despite, therefore, arguing for a greater understanding of the migration of ordinary people, Said fails to do so himself. Instead, his analysis complies with Thomas Pavel’s critical comment that ‘exile is reserved for those who count’.<sup>48</sup> Here, Pavel highlights the inherently privileged status of exile, thus revealing a sense of indifference to large communities of ordinary people who are forced to flee their country of origin because of their religious or political views, but who are not targeted individually for protesting overtly against the state. For Caren Kaplan, Said’s distinction between the literary exilic elite and the refugee masses ‘reduces the refugee to ultimate victim, pinned in lumpen opposition to the recoverable memoirs and fictions of the exiled, bourgeois modernist’.<sup>49</sup> Although Kaplan raises an important point here about the need to value all experiences of exile without discriminating along the lines of social class, it must be acknowledged that the exile of

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<sup>45</sup> Said, p. 175.

<sup>46</sup> In *Edward Said: The Paradox of Identity* (London; New York: Routledge, 1999), Bill Ashcroft and Pal Ahluwalia explain how Said limits his reading of exile to the work of Western canonical writers and intellectuals, rather than focusing ‘his attention on those who have been marginalised by the brutalities of Western imperialism’ (p. 13).

<sup>47</sup> Gillian Whitlock, *Postcolonial Life Narratives: Testimonial Transactions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 177.

<sup>48</sup> Thomas Pavel, ‘Exile as Romance and as Tragedy’, in *Exile and Creativity: Signposts, Travelers, Outsiders, Backward Glances*, ed. by Susan Rubin Suleiman (Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press, 1998), pp. 25–36 (p. 27).

<sup>49</sup> Caren Kaplan, *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement* (Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 121.

literary and intellectual figures is inherently privileged and therefore, in almost every case, in contrast to that of ordinary people. This is certainly the situation for the authors in this corpus; all four have had the education and the opportunity to become writers and voice their experiences, despite differences in their backgrounds and social status (Lefèvre has the most humble social origins, although she has succeeded in rising above her family's socio-economic status). Attention is therefore paid to the ways in which the authors express anxiety about their financial privilege in their narratives, and how social class impacts upon their experiences and depictions of migration, in order to demonstrate the writers' awareness of the privileged social position from which they are speaking.

Said's focus on the intellectual, albeit male, subject does, however, demonstrate an awareness that although exile is not habitually pleasurable, it can be a productive condition because it provides a sense of detachment from the native culture. Said explains that since exiled people have an awareness of two cultures, they understand that life in the host country occurs against the memory of life in their homeland: 'this plurality of vision gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that — to borrow a phrase from music — is *contrapuntal*' [original emphasis].<sup>50</sup> Arguing that exile is a permanent condition which provides intellectuals with a critical perspective from which they can question and interrogate, Said admits that exile has helped him to develop an analytical mind which has been crucial for his academic pursuits. In his autobiographical narrative *Out of Place: A Memoir* (1999), he realises that being 'out of place in nearly every way' has allowed him to 'find [his] territory, not socially but intellectually'.<sup>51</sup> Said's analysis of the intellectual as exile draws on Theodor W. Adorno's fragmented memoir *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*

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<sup>50</sup> Said, 'Reflections on Exile', p. 186.

<sup>51</sup> Edward W. Said, *Out of Place: A Memoir* (London: Granta Books, 1999), p. 231.



(1951).<sup>52</sup> A musician, philosopher, and sociologist, Adorno was greatly affected by exile, although it was partly self-imposed; he moved to Vienna from Frankfurt before being forced to flee the Nazi regime for Oxford and New York because of his intellectual activities and Jewish faith. Adorno argues that intellectuals are defined by their own psychological upheaval which leads them to question all assumptions and prior knowledge, in the same way that exiled people are categorised by their geographic displacement. Exile is thus undoubtedly traumatic for intellectuals, but it also provides them with a space of mental refuge, a space in which to think and reflect, away from the daily concerns of the homeland. Although these interpretations concede that exile is not always a negative experience, their focus is still heavily based on the privileged few who have a certain degree of choice regarding their exile.

The thesis also examines the relationship between the exiled individual and the homeland. John Durham Peters argues that ‘exile locates the home in a homeland that is distant and for the time being unapproachable’, which suggests that exiled subjects desire to return to their country of origin, which they still consider to be home despite being driven out, but that this goal is out of reach.<sup>53</sup> Paolo Bartoloni agrees that exiled people desire to return home, arguing that the greater the time and distance between the country of origin and the country of migration, the greater the exiled person’s sense of loss, and so the desire to return to the homeland grows stronger.<sup>54</sup> Yet Philip Schlesinger offers a contrasting view of the bond between exiled communities and the native land. He states that the break with the homeland for whatever reason might be so traumatic that ‘any desire to return to live once

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<sup>52</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. by E.F.N. Jephcott (London; New York: Verso Books, 2005 [1951]).

<sup>53</sup> John Durham Peters, ‘Exile, Nomadism, and Diaspora: The Stakes of Mobility in the Western Canon’, in *Home, Exile, Homeland: Film, Media, and the Politics of Place*, ed. by Hamid Nacify (New York; London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 17–41 (p. 31).

<sup>54</sup> Paolo Bartoloni, *On the Cultures of Exile, Translation, and Writing* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2008), p. 103.

more in a country that has wronged you might be deemed inconceivable'.<sup>55</sup> For Gerise Herndon, who has analysed the theme of exile in the novels of two of the most internationally-successful female Caribbean authors of the contemporary era, Jamaica Kincaid and Edwidge Danticat, a return to the homeland can be possible, but this return is itself experienced as a form of exile.<sup>56</sup> She argues that a 'return involves a recasting of identity, a double exile', because both the exiled subject and the country of origin have altered so much that the latter is no longer considered to be home.<sup>57</sup> The exiled individual is thus without fixed roots: the country of migration is not yet home, but the country of origin is not either because the memory and nostalgia of the homeland, inevitably, will not reflect the reality. This return to the native land is arguably more painful than the departure away from the homeland. When in exile, migrants are able to cling to an imagined, idealised notion of the homeland, but once returned, they may realise in despair that they have nowhere to call home. Herndon's analysis is applied to discussions about the location of exile in this thesis in order to show that issues of identity and belonging are tied up not only with a departure from the native land but also with a return.

While the term 'exile', then, tends to refer to a movement from one country to another, enforced predominantly on men, by the state, in contrast, the label 'diaspora' suggests greater flexibility and choice over this movement and encompasses all members of a community, including women, because it is not predicated on those political or intellectual activities which, in the global context, remain dominated by men. The term originates from ancient Greek, meaning 'to sew, to scatter', and, as Steven Vertovec explains, it initially referred to

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<sup>55</sup> Philip Schlesinger, 'W.G. Sebald and the Condition of Exile', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 21.2 (2004), 43–67 (p. 46).

<sup>56</sup> Gerise Herndon, 'Returns to Native Lands, Reclaiming the Other's Language: Kincaid and Danticat', *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 3.1 (2001), 54–62.

<sup>57</sup> Herndon, p. 54.

the ‘forced expulsion and dispersal, persecution, a sense of loss, and a vision of return’ of the Israelites from the Kingdom of Israel in the eighth century BCE.<sup>58</sup> Diasporas have been presented in a number of ways: William Safran examines the complex triangular relationships between diasporans, the homeland, and the host country;<sup>59</sup> Robin Cohen categorises diaspora into different forms, namely victim, labour, trade, imperial, and cultural diasporas;<sup>60</sup> and Vertovec distinguishes between diaspora as a social form, diaspora as a type of consciousness, and diaspora as a mode of cultural production.<sup>61</sup> In all these classifications, though, diaspora refers to a group scattered across several locations over a period of time, who, collectively, remember the original homeland.

Like ‘exile’, ‘diaspora’ implies movement from a fixed homeland to a host country; where the two terms differ is in how individuals experience this movement. Scholars of exile tend to emphasise the negative aspects of this movement. For instance, Schlesinger focuses on the practical difficulties of learning a new language and ‘finding a place in the new land’s social and economic structure and adapting to new political circumstances’.<sup>62</sup> In contrast, scholarship often highlights the advantages of diasporic life: Gabriel Sheffer argues that diasporic peoples belong to the same ethno-national group and thus share a sense of solidarity within that community,<sup>63</sup> and Peggy Levitt defines diasporans as ‘transnational community members or isolated individuals who [...] share a sense of a common belonging to a homeland where they are not’.<sup>64</sup> Even though they may not fully identify with their host

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<sup>58</sup> Steven Vertovec, ‘The Political Importance of Diasporas’, *Centre on Migration, Policy and Society Working Paper Number 13* (Oxford: University of Oxford, 2005), p. 1.

<sup>59</sup> William Safran, ‘Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return’, *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, 1.1 (1991), 83–99.

<sup>60</sup> Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (London: UCL Press, 1997).

<sup>61</sup> Steven Vertovec, ‘Three Meanings of “Diaspora”, Exemplified among South Asian Religions’, *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies*, 6.3 (1997), 277–99.

<sup>62</sup> Schlesinger, p. 46.

<sup>63</sup> Gabriel Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 11.

<sup>64</sup> Peggy Levitt, *The Transnational Villagers* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), p. 15.

country and may not necessarily long for the homeland, as Marco Martiniello and Jean-Michel Lafleur point out,<sup>65</sup> they take comfort from the unity and camaraderie that living among other members of their community grants them.

Diasporans also share affinities with other groups from their homeland living across the world, an element which distinguishes this trope from exile, as Nacify observes.<sup>66</sup> He argues that although both terms articulate a scattering of peoples from outside the borders of their country of origin — a movement which is often traumatic — belonging to a diaspora is a collective experience which unites the people both to the original homeland and to other diasporic communities living elsewhere. He describes diasporic consciousness as ‘horizontal and multisited’; exile, in contrast, ‘entails a vertical and primary relationship’ with the homeland.<sup>67</sup> This explains why belonging to a diaspora entails ‘a continuous process of adaptation and alienation and one that is characterised by diversity and hybridity’, as Aviad Rubin and Ofir D. Rubin remark.<sup>68</sup> Diasporic groups are alienated from their host countries but find solace in their own communities and thus encourage each other both to integrate and shape the culture of their new land. For cultural studies scholars such as Stuart Hall, the theoretical discourse of diaspora is superior to that of exile because of its emphasis on interaction and hybridity, and its insistence that cultures and identities are not separate entities. As Hall comments in ‘Ethnicity: Identity and Difference’ (1989), ‘identity emerges as

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<sup>65</sup> Marco Martiniello and Jean-Michel Lafleur, ‘Towards a Transatlantic Dialogue in the Study of Immigrant Political Transnationalism’, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 31.4 (2008), 645–63.

<sup>66</sup> Hamid Nacify, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton, NJ; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001).

<sup>67</sup> Nacify, *An Accented Cinema*, p. 14.

<sup>68</sup> Aviad Rubin and Ofir D. Rubin, ‘Is There a Distinct Israeli Diaspora? Impact of Temporal Sociopolitical Circumstances on the Formation of Diaspora Groups’, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 40.5 (2014), 737–58 (p. 741).

a kind of unsettled space, or an unresolved question in that space, between a number of intersecting discourses'.<sup>69</sup>

The terms have both drawn similar criticisms, however. Like 'exile', the meaning of 'diaspora' has been extended so much that Rogers Brubaker calls it a "'diaspora" diaspora', explaining that this expansion has resulted in 'a dispersion of the meanings of the term in semantic, conceptual and disciplinary space'.<sup>70</sup> As James Clifford observes, 'diaspora' is now used to refer to 'a whole range of phenomena that encourage multi-locale attachments, dwelling and travelling within and across nations'.<sup>71</sup> This much broader understanding which foregrounds hybridity and transcultural exchange brings us closer to the third category of displacement analysed in this thesis: cosmopolitanism.

While both 'exile' and 'diaspora' are used to denote a single movement between two fixed locations, 'cosmopolitanism' suggests a series of displacements between different sites and spaces. Susanne Lachenicht and Kirsten Heinsohn define cosmopolitans as 'diasporas without a homeland',<sup>72</sup> implying that cosmopolitans have no place to call home, whereas diasporic communities do have some affinities with both the place in which they currently reside and the place which they have left. However, Lachenicht and Heinsohn neglect to consider that cosmopolitanism forces us to redefine the very concept of home. One commonality is the positive connotations denoted by these terms: cosmopolitanism, like diaspora, is perceived as being enriching, both for those who travel to new places and for those already living in these locations. For Hall, cosmopolitanism is 'the ability to stand

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<sup>69</sup> Stuart Hall, 'Ethnicity: Identity and Difference', in *Becoming National: A Reader*, ed. by Geoff Eley and Ronald Grigor Suny (New York; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 339–49 (p. 339).

<sup>70</sup> Rogers Brubaker, 'The "Diaspora" Diaspora', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 28.1 (2005), 1–19 (p. 1).

<sup>71</sup> James Clifford, 'Diasporas', in *The Ethnicity Reader: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Migration*, 2nd edn, ed. by Montserrat Guibernau and John Rex (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010 [1997]), pp. 321–27 (p. 323).

<sup>72</sup> Susanne Lachenicht and Kirsten Heinsohn, 'Diaspora Identities: Exile, Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism in Past and Present: An Introduction', in *Diaspora Identities: Exile, Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism in Past and Present*, ed. by Susanne Lachenicht and Kirsten Heinsohn (Frankfurt; New York: Campus Verlag, 2009), pp. 7–15 (p. 13).

outside of having one's life written and scripted by any one community, whether that is a faith or tradition or religion or culture — whatever it might be — and to draw selectively on a variety of discursive meanings'.<sup>73</sup> It enables individuals to have multiple allegiances and identities; however, this overwhelmingly positive understanding omits to discuss the difficulties of travelling from place to place, never putting down any roots.

As Vertovec and Cohen demonstrate, cosmopolitanism has been theorised in different ways in recent decades: as a socio-cultural condition of hybridity and transnational identity; a philosophical outlook; a political project involving transnational institutions, such as the European Union; a global citizenship; an attitude; and a form of behaviour.<sup>74</sup> Vertovec and Cohen also challenge the common stereotype that cosmopolitanism 'is only available to an elite', to those who can afford to travel and explore new countries and cultures,<sup>75</sup> parallels can be drawn here with exile which has also been criticised for its elitism. They argue that while historically cosmopolitans were the bourgeois few, nowadays the world has been opened up by cheap air travel, easy access to global communication, and a desire for cross-cultural contact, and therefore increasingly more people are able to adopt a cosmopolitan lifestyle.<sup>76</sup> They distinguish between these new cosmopolitans and those who John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge term 'cosmocrats', an elite group who 'attend business-school weddings around the world, fill up the business-class lounges at international airports, [...], and through their collective efforts, probably do more than anyone else to make the world seem smaller'.<sup>77</sup> While it is true that for many people, a cosmopolitan lifestyle is a financially viable and

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<sup>73</sup> Stuart Hall, 'Political Belonging in a World of Multiple Identities', in *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism*, ed. by Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 25–31 (p. 26).

<sup>74</sup> Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen, 'Introduction: Conceiving Cosmopolitanism', in *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism*, ed. by Steven Vertovec and Robin Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 1–22 (pp. 8–14).

<sup>75</sup> Vertovec and Cohen, p. 5.

<sup>76</sup> Vertovec and Cohen, p. 6.

<sup>77</sup> John Micklethwait and Adrian Wooldridge, *A Future Perfect: The Challenge and Hidden Promise of Globalization* (London: Times Books, 2000), p. 229.

desirable option, it is also true that for even more, a life of repeated travel and displacement is not the result of a cosmopolitan desire to belong to a global community, but rather, a necessity to escape from persecution, violence, and precarity. Cosmopolitanism, like exile, thus remains associated with the top strata of society.

The three models of displacement differ most notably in the degrees of choice which they imply. Whereas exile is typically defined as a displacement brought about by the state, granting no choice to the individual,<sup>78</sup> and diaspora is the result of a choice taken across a community to migrate to another land, cosmopolitanism is defined as a ‘deliberate refusal to belong to a single nation’, according to Pamela Cheek.<sup>79</sup> A cosmopolitan has the freedom to decide whether to participate actively in a nation-state or not, further emphasising the inherent privilege of this group.

Through this discussion of terminology, it becomes clear that contemporary forms of migration cannot all be analysed under the umbrella term of ‘exile’. Michael Hanne has warned of the problems of conflating exile with every form of geographic displacement, such as economic migration, asylum, and expatriation. Hanne argues that ‘such diversity of human experience cannot readily be conveyed by a single term, such as “exiles”’, because this term overlooks the motives that drive people to migrate to another country and implies that such diverse forms of migration affect people in the same way.<sup>80</sup> Bouraoui, Pineau, Tadjou, and Lefèvre all push the boundaries of existing definitions of exile in their work. They discuss

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<sup>78</sup> For a discussion of the role of the state in forced displacements across the world, see Catherine Wihtol de Wenden, *Le Droit d’émigrer* (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2013), pp. 47–48. Wihtol de Wenden argues that the state has intervened in matters of migration for a variety of political, religious, economic, and ethnic reasons. Her examples of state-forced displacement include the trafficking of slaves from Africa to the Caribbean between the fifteenth and the nineteenth centuries; the deportation of refugees from Eastern Europe in the twentieth century; and ethnic cleansing in former Yugoslavia in the 1990s.

<sup>79</sup> Pamela Cheek, ‘The Space of British Exile in Frances Burney’s *The Wanderer* and Germaine de Staël’s *Corinne*’, in *Gender and Space in British Literature, 1660–1820*, ed. by Mona Narain and Karen Gevirtz (Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2014), pp. 85–100 (p. 85).

<sup>80</sup> Michael Hanne, ‘Creativity and Exile: An Introduction’, in *Creativity in Exile*, ed. by Michael Hanne (Amsterdam, New York: Éditions Rodopi, 2004), pp. 1–12 (p. 4).

what it means to have an unstable understanding of origin, as several of the narrators migrated when they were very young and so inevitably do not remember much about their place of birth. Yet their adult status as cosmopolitans does not prevent them from feeling lost, confused, and alienated, which suggests that they experience their cosmopolitanism as a form of exile and estrangement, rather than as an empowering, enriching condition. Moreover, their work is an exploration of how women from minority communities express exile as an attempt to resist patriarchal and racial discrimination within metropolitan France. It is this complexity that this thesis seeks to address.

### **Postcolonial Theories of Exile and Diaspora**

Postcolonial strategies of resistance and resilience are both used and challenged by the authors in this corpus in order to shed light on the intersections between gender, exile, and diaspora. As Susan Strehle argues, critics within the field of postcolonial studies, such as Bhabha and Said, have traditionally focused on the ‘potential for cosmopolitan liberation’ of the paradigm of diaspora, overlooking the trauma which diasporic communities often encounter.<sup>81</sup> Such accounts have also often neglected to analyse how women’s identity is shaped by living in the diaspora. While postcolonial feminists have explored female experiences of exile and diaspora in more detail, they still primarily limit themselves to questions of female agency and political empowerment, overlooking the challenges that mobility brings to women.

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<sup>81</sup> Susan Strehle, ‘Producing Exile: Diasporic Vision in Adichie’s *Half of a Yellow Sun*’, *Modern Fiction Studies*, 57.4 (2011), 650–72 (p. 651). Strehle argues that ‘without forgetting that destabilizations and border-crossings can be transformative, or that our global age requires alternative approaches to community beyond the reductive patriotism of nation states’, we must not forget the very real tragedies of those who leave their homeland, who are often underprivileged subalterns rather than intellectuals, particularly in developing countries. According to Strehle, these people are more likely to experience the diaspora as alienating rather than enriching (pp. 651–52).



Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak focuses predominantly on the Indian diaspora. In her most famous essay, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (1988), she interrogates the extent to which women, as the subaltern, can retrieve their voices from oppression.<sup>82</sup> Defining the subaltern as a group lacking access to social mobility, she argues that any attempt to represent the subaltern is fraught with the ideological concerns of the dominant party, and so any agency the subaltern is granted is automatically received through this authoritative system of representation. In 'Diasporas Old and New: Women in the Transnational World', published in 1997, Spivak considers the role of women in theories of diaspora, introducing a new type of diaspora which 'is shrinking the possibility of an operative civil society in developing nations'.<sup>83</sup> For her, the term has been transformed by a new transnational capitalist model, in which workers from developing countries are forced to migrate to Europe to participate in a global economy. Factors such as religious oppression, slavery, and war, which previously contributed to the spread of diasporic peoples, are no longer the sole causes of migration; Spivak explains that in contemporary society, the imperialistic process of globalisation and the emergence of a transnational economy also force people to cross borders, yet she questions how fundamentally different these diasporas truly are. In her opinion, the only significant difference is that women play a crucial role in this new diaspora because they make up a significant part of the workforce of transnational corporations. Although she recognises that these women are disenfranchised because they are trapped within transnational capitalism and are therefore forced to work for extremely low wages in very poor conditions, she is optimistic that women as a collective will gain agency once they are given access to

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<sup>82</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana, IL; Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), pp. 271–313. The essay was first published in 1985 in the journal *Wedge* as 'Can the Subaltern Speak? Speculations on Widow Sacrifice'.

<sup>83</sup> Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Diasporas Old and New: Women in the Transnational World', in *Class Issues: Pedagogy, Cultural Studies, and the Public Sphere*, ed. by Amitava Kumar (New York; London: New York University Press, 1997), pp. 87–116 (pp. 90–91).

higher education. She therefore asks women to ‘think of themselves collectively, not as victims below but agents above, resisting the consequences of globalisation as well as redressing the cultural vicissitudes of migrancy’.<sup>84</sup>

Graham Huggan challenges Spivak’s line of argument in *Australian Literature: Postcolonialism, Racism, Transnationalism* (2007) by exploring the relationship between racism and globalisation.<sup>85</sup> He states that racial discrimination must be understood as ‘an effect of the complex transnational network of capitalist-inspired social relations that structures our contemporary world’, arguing that new manifestations of racism have evolved because of the erasure of national borders and the flow of capital and migrants between nations.<sup>86</sup> Huggan, therefore, considers transnationalism to be primarily a negative legacy of the colonial world and does not share Spivak’s optimism that, given fairer access to higher education, women will, in time, be able to rid their ‘mind of the burden of transnationality’.<sup>87</sup> The two do concur, though, that transnationalism reveals the global discrepancies in social and economic equality. In addition, Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih have also critiqued traditional theories of globalisation and transnationalism, arguing that insistence upon ‘transnationalism from above’ and ‘transnationalism from below’ excludes minority subjects.<sup>88</sup> Instead, they call for an analysis of ‘minor transnationalism’, which allows ‘the minor and the major [to] participate in one shared transnational moment and space structured

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<sup>84</sup> Spivak, ‘Diasporas Old and New’, p. 94.

<sup>85</sup> Graham Huggan, *Australian Literature: Postcolonialism, Racism, Transnationalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>86</sup> Huggan, p. vi.

<sup>87</sup> Spivak, ‘Diasporas Old and New’, p. 94.

<sup>88</sup> Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih, ‘Introduction: Thinking Through the Minor, Transnationally’, in *Minor Transnationalism*, ed. by Françoise Lionnet and Shu-mei Shih (Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press, 2005), pp. 1–23 (p. 6). Lionnet and Shih define ‘transnationalism from above’ as being associated with ‘the utopic views of globalisation, which celebrate the overcoming of national and other boundaries for the constitution of a liberal global market, the hybridisation of cultures, and the expansion of democracies and universal human rights’; ‘transnationalism from below’, in contrast, refers to the daily acts of resistance carried out by individuals who refuse to belong to one single country (p. 6).

by uneven power relations'.<sup>89</sup> Contrasting, then, with Huggan's focus on the detrimental consequences of transnationalism, Lionnet and Shih's examination reveals how working horizontally to unite minority subjects across nations frees these peoples from oppression and allows them to be accepted within the dominant culture. They suggest that a new model of transnationalism between minor cultures, which they term 'cultural transversalism', is required to achieve Spivak's aim of resistance;<sup>90</sup> yet their framework must also take into account the many ways that people across the world have been minoritised.

Spivak's provocative essays have raised questions about the validity of widening current understandings of diaspora to include those communities involved in a transnational global economy who are not necessarily migrants. She has been criticised for generalising female experiences and using 'the actions of women who resist and reject being incorporated in their system as standing for all women'.<sup>91</sup> Despite these critiques, her analysis is a groundbreaking application of feminist criticism within the postcolonial context, which allows women's voices to be heard at last.

Carole Boyce Davies is another pioneer of postcolonial feminist theory, helping to fill the gap left by male postcolonial theorists who have neglected to consider the ways in which women's experiences of alienation differ to those of men. In *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (1994), Boyce Davies discusses the migratory nature of black women's subjectivities, arguing that identity is not fixed or static but in constant motion, and that similarly, black women's writing crosses multiple boundaries of time and

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<sup>89</sup> Lionnet and Shih, p. 7.

<sup>90</sup> Lionnet and Shih, p. 8.

<sup>91</sup> Sandra Regina Goulart Almeida, 'Home and Abroad: Diasporic Women in English Canada', in *Canada from the Outside In: New Trends in Canadian Studies/Le Canada vu d'ailleurs: nouvelles approches en études canadiennes*, ed. by Pierre Anctil and Zilá Bernd (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2006), pp. 61–72 (p. 66).

space.<sup>92</sup> She argues that a diasporic existence can be particularly enriching for women as it allows them to reclaim the agency they have previously been denied, and so they are able to assert a new identity, free from oppression and subjugation. She claims that ‘black female subjectivity asserts agency as it crosses the borders, journeys, migrates and so re-claims as it re-asserts’.<sup>93</sup> In an argument reminiscent of Said’s discussion of exile, she contends that diasporic communities can be productive spaces, or ‘desired location[s] out of which they can create’, because they give diasporic people a sense of detachment from their homeland and enable them to be critical about the culture they have left behind.<sup>94</sup>

Elleke Boehmer’s engagement with issues of colonisation, migration, and diaspora through a feminist lens has also shaped contemporary postcolonial discourse. The central thesis of her work is that more needs to be done to raise awareness of the issues faced by women living in the diaspora to avoid gender being treated ‘in a tokenistic way, or as subsidiary to the category of race’.<sup>95</sup> For Boehmer, writing in 2005, this remains a critical blind spot of contemporary postcolonial theory, and in response, she attempts to recover the role of women in the construction of the nation. Her first monograph, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literatures: Migrant Metaphors* (1995), offers an overview of Anglophone literature from around the world from the 1800s to the present day.<sup>96</sup> She argues that black women’s fictional and autobiographical writing ‘demand[s] a different complexity of response than [...] the writing of Western women or once-colonised men’ because of their

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<sup>92</sup> Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>93</sup> Boyce Davies, p. 37.

<sup>94</sup> Boyce Davies, p. 114.

<sup>95</sup> Elleke Boehmer, *Stories of Women: Gender and Narrative in the Postcolonial Nation* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 7.

<sup>96</sup> Elleke Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literatures: Migrant Metaphors* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

racial, ethnic, and religious difference.<sup>97</sup> Her more recent work analyses postcolonial migration in terms of border-crossings. In ‘How to Feel Global: The Modern, The Global and The World’ (2012), she writes that intercultural exchange between diasporic communities should focus on ‘the interaction between peripheries and margins, where “centres” are re-visited as nodal points of inter-periphery connection’.<sup>98</sup>

Bhabha’s contributions to the field of diaspora studies are also a focal point for this thesis, even though he has been criticised by postcolonial scholars such as Aijaz Ahmad for producing work which is ‘remarkably free of gender, class, [and] identifiable political location’.<sup>99</sup> Despite omitting to study how differences in gender and social class complicate the experience of living in the diaspora, Bhabha has produced new ways of considering culture and identity within the diasporic context. In *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha introduces the concepts of ambivalence, mimicry, and hybridity, with which formerly colonised peoples, including those living in the diaspora, are able to displace colonial authority and gain agency. According to Bhabha, national identity is not a pure, fixed concept but is fluid and changeable, formed at the boundary of cultures which he terms the ‘interstitial space’. He argues that ‘it is in the emergence of the interstices — the overlap and displacement of domains of difference — that the intersubjective and collective experiences of *nationness*, community interest, or cultural value are negotiated’ [original emphasis].<sup>100</sup> These interstices are spaces of both convergence and displacement, bringing cultures which are perpetually transforming into contact with one another. For Bhabha, then, cultures are

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<sup>97</sup> Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literatures*, p. 226.

<sup>98</sup> Elleke Boehmer, ‘How to Feel Global: The Modern, The Global and The World’, *Literature Compass*, 9.9 (2012), 599–606 (p. 604).

<sup>99</sup> Aijaz Ahmad, ‘The Politics of Literary Postcoloniality’, *Race and Class*, 36.3 (1995), 1–20 (p. 13).

<sup>100</sup> Bhabha, p. 2.

always inherently hybrid, and he claims that this hybridity empowers people living in the diaspora, giving them a sense of solidarity and community.<sup>101</sup>

In his essay 'New Ethnicities' (1996), however, Hall warns against producing the kind of generalising images of diasporic identity that Bhabha has done.<sup>102</sup> Here, Hall distinguishes between two phases in the cultural representation of the black diaspora. Whereas initially black writers and artists living in the diaspora use positive images of the black community to combat racial stereotypes, eventually this homogeneous, unifying system of representation becomes contested as tensions arise between the different groups within the black diaspora, and so the sense of community is weakened. As Hall explains, 'the shift is best thought of in terms of a change from a struggle over the relations of representation to a politics of representation itself'.<sup>103</sup> John McLeod argues that Hall thus 'calls attention to the ways in which the generalising images of a diaspora community or typical subject may not be representative of all those who would consider themselves as living in a diaspora'.<sup>104</sup> Paul Gilroy, Hall's onetime colleague at the University of Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, is another cultural studies scholar who addresses the different ways in which black diasporic communities identify themselves in his influential book, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (1993).<sup>105</sup> Gilroy challenges the concept of nationalism by demonstrating how black people from Africa, the Caribbean, North America, and Britain are connected through the act of migration and argues that the West has never been racially homogeneous. Although Hall and Gilroy have contributed to widening current conceptions of

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<sup>101</sup> Bhabha, p. 4.

<sup>102</sup> Stuart Hall, 'New Ethnicities', in *Stuart Hall: Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*, ed. by David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen (London; New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 442–51.

<sup>103</sup> Hall, 'New Ethnicities', p. 444.

<sup>104</sup> John McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, 2nd edn (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2010 [2000]), p. 240.

<sup>105</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (London; New York: Verso Books, 1993).

diasporic identity, their predominantly masculine focus on the black Anglophone diaspora means that their work is less relevant for this thesis than the other postcolonial thinkers discussed above.

*Métissage*, an important strategy of identity formation, will be used in this thesis to shed light on Lefèvre's colonial and postcolonial experiences of exile. The concept was developed by Glissant in *Poétique de la Relation* (1990), a philosophical essay which draws on the cultural particularities of the Francophone Caribbean in order to construct a notion of identity based on total relation.<sup>106</sup> In 'The Politics and Aesthetics of Métissage' (1998), Lionnet constructs *métissage* as a layered reading practice, based on the term *métis(se)* which, she claims, arose during the French colonial period.<sup>107</sup> Françoise Vergès analyses the emergence of *métissage* in cultural production from her native island of Réunion in *Monsters and Revolutionaries: Colonial Family Romance and Métissage* (1999), arguing that colonised Reunionese peoples appropriated the term *métis* as a tool of resistance.<sup>108</sup> Yet as this thesis will demonstrate, *métissage* is problematic in the postcolonial context. As Roger Toumson posits in *Mythologie du métissage* (1998), the concept is directly influenced by colonial thought;<sup>109</sup> a critical reading of *métissage*, which foregrounds its historical implications, is thus required. These scholars are examined at length in Chapter Five.

The thesis builds on these existing theories of exile and postcolonial identity to develop a more complex and nuanced understanding of female identity politics. This study, therefore, challenges existing interpretations of exile and diaspora as positive phenomena,

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<sup>106</sup> Édouard Glissant, *Poétique de la Relation* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1990).

<sup>107</sup> Françoise Lionnet, 'The Politics and Aesthetics of Métissage', in *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Madison, WI; London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), pp. 325–36 (p. 327).

<sup>108</sup> Françoise Vergès, *Monsters and Revolutionaries: Colonial Family Romance and Métissage* (Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press, 1999), p. 9.

<sup>109</sup> Roger Toumson, *Mythologie du métissage* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998).

while also calling into question the conventional understanding of exile as a movement across territorial borders. In order to do this, I advance a metaphorical understanding of exile, which expands the framework of exile to create a more complete understanding of female experiences, drawing on David Bevan who argues that ‘exile, viscerally, is difference, otherness’.<sup>110</sup> Yet I also remain sensitive to the risk of ‘abus[ing] the “exile” concept’, in Neal Sokol’s words, and overlooking the situation of geographically exiled subjects who are forced to abandon their homes and families and settle in a country which is often alien to them.<sup>111</sup>

### **Metaphorical Exile**

As Vytautas Kavolis explains in his comparison of exile as constructed by male and female writers, there has been a contemporary departure in the use of the term ‘exile’, which deviates from its political associations to encompass ‘all conceivable forms of alienation’.<sup>112</sup> I posit that this form of exile can be understood as a metaphor, which indicates a sense of otherness, in which issues of race, language, gender, sexuality, class, religious affiliation, and generational differences contribute to segregating the exiled subject from the rest of society. Here, exile is a feeling of not belonging to, or not participating in, a particular community; it therefore does not automatically require a geographic displacement, either within or outside the national borders of a country. A person can feel exiled in multiple ways without ever leaving their home.

This thesis demonstrates the ways in which metaphorical exile has added to the oppression of women living in the diaspora, and to their representation as ‘le singulier du

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<sup>110</sup> David Bevan, ‘Introduction’, in *Literature and Exile*, ed. by David Bevan (Amsterdam; Atlanta, GA: Éditions Rodopi, 1990), pp. 3–4 (p. 3).

<sup>111</sup> Neal Sokol, *Ilan Stavans: Eight Conversations* (Madison, WI; London: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004), p. 62.

<sup>112</sup> Vytautas Kavolis, ‘Women Writers in Exile’, *World Literature Today*, 66.1 (1992), 43–46 (p. 43).



singulier’, as Kristeva asserts.<sup>113</sup> The aim is to move towards a more inclusive interpretation of exile because metaphorical exile focuses on all experiences of exile, while paying particular attention to the plight of those women who undergo multiple forms of alienation without necessarily leaving their homeland. As Kavolis argues, ‘in this sense, exile becomes central to the experience of most women writers’ because they are set apart from other writers due to their gender and are isolated from the rest of society as a consequence of their literary profession.<sup>114</sup> Women migrants are in fact twice exiled: in addition to being isolated for being migrants, they are also excluded by their gender which, particularly in ‘Third World’ countries across the world, restricts their access to education, professional activities, and social mobility, and removes the possibility of self-governance. Their double exile, caused by both gender-based subordination and their migratory status, inevitably accentuates feelings of alienation and exclusion.

Helpful in this analysis of metaphorical exile is the concept of inner exile, as theorised by Paul Ilie. Defining inner exile as ‘isolation endured by distinct groups vis-à-vis each other with respect to an entire culture’, Ilie demonstrates how exile can manifest itself as a psychological suffering amongst those left behind.<sup>115</sup> He argues that exile does not necessarily involve an internal or transnational geographic movement because those left behind internalise the émigré’s sentiments of alienation and exclusion, contributing to an exile which is experienced almost nationwide. Ilie’s examination of exile removes the barriers which previously excluded some experiences of exile, and although he does not explicitly analyse the migration of women, his theoretical framework is certainly more open to gendered analyses of exile than that of other scholars because of its acknowledgement that those who

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<sup>113</sup> Kristeva, p. 5.

<sup>114</sup> Kavolis, p. 43.

<sup>115</sup> Paul Ilie, *Literature and Inner Exile: Authoritarian Spain, 1939–1975* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), p. 47.

stay behind in the home country — who are often women — can also be exiled. Furthermore, his analysis is applicable to people of all class and race because it does not focus exclusively on the privileged few. However, John W. Kronik points out that problems arise in Ilie's theoretical arguments because his theory 'is impossible without reference to a preexisting standard of territorial displacement'.<sup>116</sup> In other words, despite Ilie's insistence that those who are not forced from their homeland can still suffer exile, his notion of inner exile is nevertheless dependent on the territorial movement of others, which triggers the internalisation of exile and results in an extreme feeling of alienation.

Phyllis Zatlin's literary analysis is useful for the discussion of gendered exile in this thesis. Zatlin moves away from the notion of territorial displacement as a focal point for inner exile, instead exploring how exile could be applied to 'nonconformist women within a traditional, male-dominated society'.<sup>117</sup> Analysing women writers in post-war Spain, she argues that these women are not only excluded from the freedom enjoyed by men but are also ostracised from accepted norms of femininity by their intellectual activity, leading to a doubling of their withdrawal from society. This metaphorical understanding of exile allows for a consideration of how different forms of exclusion affects women psychologically in diverse ways, depending on parameters such as race, class, and gender. Nacify's comment that 'all displaced people do not experience exile equally or uniformly' is certainly relevant for the four authors studied in this thesis.<sup>118</sup> The particularities of their exile are not only caused by cultural and racial differences but also by their distinct relationships with French, the language of the former coloniser.

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<sup>116</sup> John W. Kronik, 'Review of *Literature and Exile: Authoritarian Spain, 1939–1975* by Paul Ilie', *Modern Language Notes*, 97.2 (1982), 437–42 (p. 441).

<sup>117</sup> Phyllis Zatlin, 'Passivity and Immobility: Patterns of Inner Exile in Postwar Spanish Novels Written by Women', *Letras Femeninas*, 14.1–2 (1988), 3–9 (p. 3).

<sup>118</sup> Hamid Nacify, 'Introduction: Framing Exile: From Homeland to Homepage', in *Home, Exile, Homeland: Film, Media, and the Politics of Place*, ed. by Hamid Nacify (New York; London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 1–16 (p. 4).

Not only are exiled people compelled to leave the familiarity of their country of origin and settle in a new, strange land, but they are often also forced to speak a new language and learn the different cultural codes which accompany this linguistic discourse. While becoming bilingual — or even multilingual — can be enriching, the initial sentiment of being cut off from society because of language can also be isolating and can render complete integration difficult. Bouraoui, Pineau, Tadjou, and Lefèvre and their literary counterparts all have a complex relationship with language. Although their exile occurs within the wider boundaries of the Francophone world and does not automatically force them to learn a new language, the French that they use is peppered with references to their respective indigenous cultures. As postcolonial women writers, the French they produce with native proficiency is itself a hybrid, inflected by knowledge of other languages, even before the moment of their departure. As their transnational trajectories take shape, language is a site of anxiety, and it consistently others them from the ‘mainstream’ society in which they find themselves, be it in metropolitan France or elsewhere.

Kristeva’s theory of the threefold nature of exile addresses this link between language and exile. For Kristeva, both reading and writing are inherently exilic because they pull the reader and writer into a different world, a world of imagination ‘en s’exilant de son pays, sa langue, son sexe, son identité’.<sup>119</sup> She stresses that writing, like exile, can be both traumatic and liberating: traumatic because it isolates the writer from the rest of society, but liberating because it gives a voice to the exile who ‘ne crie pas’.<sup>120</sup> Kristeva’s analysis echoes and is echoed by other intellectuals; from Maurice Blanchot’s famous quotation, ‘qui écrit est en exil de l’écriture’,<sup>121</sup> to Kaminsky’s statement that ‘language takes on particular resonance in

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<sup>119</sup> Kristeva, p. 7.

<sup>120</sup> Kristeva, p. 7.

<sup>121</sup> Maurice Blanchot, *L’Écriture du désastre* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1980), p. 105.

exile’,<sup>122</sup> many theorists have drawn parallels between exile and the act of writing literature. This abundance of theoretical work demonstrates how the psychological effects of being uprooted from the home play out linguistically upon the exiled subject.

This thesis engages in particular with Kristeva’s theory of the intersection between gendered and linguistic exile, exploring how it resonates in the autobiographies of all four authors. However, some of the critiques of her arguments must be acknowledged here. Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan draws attention to the danger of trivialising exile if its metaphorical comparison to writing is overused. She asserts that ‘if we are all in exile, there is no such thing as home. If we are all homeless, no one is an exile’.<sup>123</sup> Erdinast-Vulcan thus issues a warning that abusing the metaphorical significance of exile by stating that it is intrinsic to the condition of writing risks rendering this term meaningless. Moreover, Kristeva’s argument that all writers are in exile, like John Lie’s claim that ‘we moderns are [...] all exiles’,<sup>124</sup> risks undermining the real struggles of those who suffer extreme material and psychological hardships during their exile. In order to avoid similar criticisms, the geographic displacements of Bouraoui, Pineau, Tadjou, and Lefèvre are analysed alongside the specific metaphorical manifestations of exile they each experience.

Madelaine Hron explores the intrinsic connection between language and exile further by analysing exile within the framework of translation. She argues that both exile and translation involve a process of modification and adaptation; exiled subjects are forced to translate themselves, ‘transform[ing] their images of home, their idealised notions of the new country, their former values, customs, and, above all, their culture, into the context of the

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<sup>122</sup> Kaminsky, p. 68.

<sup>123</sup> Daphna Erdinast-Vulcan, ‘Language, Identity, and Exile’, *Policy Futures in Education*, 8.3 (2010), 440–45 (p. 440).

<sup>124</sup> John Lie, ‘Narratives of Exile and the Search for Homeland in Contemporary Korean Japanese Writings’, in *Constructing Nationhood in Modern East Asia*, ed. by Kai-wing Chow, Kevin M. Doak, and Poshek Fu (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2001), pp. 343–58 (p. 353).

target host country'.<sup>125</sup> This notion of translating exile assumes another meaning in fiction, as authors in exile must translate their experiences into prose to fit the norms of the target culture for their work to circulate within the target market.<sup>126</sup> Writers in exile not only cross linguistic borders but must also negotiate new values and expectations of the target audience, adapting their work to fit a new culture while simultaneously transforming themselves to integrate into their new society. In addition, Hron examines how the paradigm of translation exposes texts as market commodities, just as migrants are also considered in terms of their economic value, and she studies the translation of the pain of exile into language through Roman Jakobson's lens of intersemiotic translation.<sup>127</sup> Jakobson's theory posits that translation can occur between different semiotic codes, and so he argues that the source language can be interpreted through nonverbal systems and translated into art, music, dance, and drama. Hron inverts this concept in her study of the pain of exile, demonstrating how the nonverbal language of pain can be translated into writing. Eva C. Karpinski draws further comparisons between exile and translation, arguing that translation itself is 'a migratory practice that transfers meaning from one signifying context to another'.<sup>128</sup>

Jacques Derrida adds a more personal dimension to linguistic exile. In his reflective essay *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre: ou la prothèse d'origine* (1996), he explains how, as a monolingual French speaker, he has 'qu'une langue, ce n'est pas la [s]ienne'.<sup>129</sup> French is the only language he speaks, yet he feels alienated from it because it is not really his: he was raised in Algeria, and, as a Jew, he had his French citizenship removed in October 1940.<sup>130</sup> He

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<sup>125</sup> Madelaine Hron, *Translating Pain: Immigrant Suffering in Literature and Culture* (Toronto; Buffalo, NY; London: University of Toronto Press, 2009), pp. xv–xvi.

<sup>126</sup> Hron, p. xvi.

<sup>127</sup> Hron, p. 40.

<sup>128</sup> Eva C. Karpinski, *Borrowed Tongues: Life Writing, Migration, and Translation* (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012), p. 1.

<sup>129</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Monolinguisme de l'autre: ou la prothèse d'origine* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1996), p. 13.

<sup>130</sup> Derrida, p. 33.

then discusses how French was imposed on him through the education system. Arabic and Berber, which were the native languages of a large part of the Algerian population, were only allowed to be studied as an optional foreign language, a paradox which seems absurd to Derrida.<sup>131</sup> He himself now feels ‘perdu hors du français’, as though this language does not belong to him.<sup>132</sup>

These analyses demonstrate that language is more than simply a linguistic code; it is also a way of being and of seeing the world. For each of the four authors, and for their narrative personae, being forced to speak standard metropolitan French contributes to their othering. It isolates them from their indigenous communities and brings about a transformation in their identity. Displacement throughout the Francophone world also forces the writers to encounter a new culture. In her book on the cultural exile of female Chilean and Chicana writers, Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs charts the usage of the term ‘cultural exile’.<sup>133</sup> She reveals that it was the Argentinian novelist and essayist Julio Cortázar who first coined the phrase, which he used ‘to denote his exclusion from his country by the institutional banning of his books’ during the 1960s in Argentina because of the revolutionary nature of his writing in a period which was politically turbulent.<sup>134</sup> Cortázar first defines himself as a cultural exile in ‘América Latina: exilio y literatura’ (1978), in which he describes how he felt banished by his fellow Argentinians due to the censorship of his literature.<sup>135</sup> Gutiérrez y Muhs adopts this term, also employed by the Chilean and Chicana writers themselves, to refer to a form of internal exile, an exclusion from mainstream culture. She emphasises the multiple parameters of marginalisation, including the ‘linguistic, religious, institutional, ideological

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<sup>131</sup> Derrida, p. 67.

<sup>132</sup> Derrida, p. 98.

<sup>133</sup> Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs, *Communal Feminisms: Chicanas, Chilenas, and Cultural Exile: Theorizing the Space of Exile, Class, and Identity* (Lanham, MD; Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2007).

<sup>134</sup> Gutiérrez y Muhs, p. xxxii.

<sup>135</sup> Julio Cortázar, ‘América Latina: exilio y literatura’, *Eco*, 205 (1978), 59–66.

and socio-cultural' elements',<sup>136</sup> also describing them as 'cultural trappings'.<sup>137</sup> Central to the narratives examined in this thesis is the notion that 'cultural trappings' cause the protagonists to withdraw into a state of alienation. Even though the characters migrate within the framework of the Francophone world, the cultural differences between their different locations, which stem from France's colonial project, are significant and thus cause a cultural exile.

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The first chapter of this thesis explores theories of autobiography and their significance for my corpus. I argue that Serge Doubrovsky's term 'autofiction',<sup>138</sup> a genre which enables an author to manipulate factual reality, is a more suitable framework with which to read their exile narratives than traditional autobiographical models. The four authors are able to regain control of their difficult situation by erasing or fictionalising particularly painful elements. Moreover, reflecting psychoanalytically upon their personal stories enables them to examine the many effects that migration has had on their multiple identities.

Chapter Two, 'The Four Problems of Nina Bouraoui', examines three of Bouraoui's autofictional narratives: *Le Jour*, *Garçon manqué*, and *Mes mauvaises pensées*. While a considerable amount of scholarship has been devoted to *Garçon manqué*, the focus has been directed at how the narrator-protagonist embodies Algeria's traumatic colonial history through her mixed-race identity, rather than an explicit analysis of the theme of exile in the text.<sup>139</sup> Although Sara Leek addresses this research gap by comparing the trauma and

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<sup>136</sup> Gutiérrez y Muhs, p. xxxii.

<sup>137</sup> Gutiérrez y Muhs, p. 31.

<sup>138</sup> Serge Doubrovsky, *Fils* (Paris: Galilée, 1977), back cover.

<sup>139</sup> See Helen Vassallo, *The Body Besieged: The Embodiment of Historical Memory in Nina Bouraoui and Leïla Sebbar* (Lanham, MD; Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2012); and Amaleena Damlé, *The Becoming of the Body: Contemporary Women's Writing in French* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), pp. 154–76.

suffering of exile with bodily wounds in *Mes mauvaises pensées*, she limits her investigation to geographic rather than metaphorical exile.<sup>140</sup> Few critical analyses have been produced on *Le Jour* to date: Marjorie Attignol Salvodon explores the textual remembering of Bouraoui's violent childhood in her study *Fictions of Childhood: The Roots of Identity in Contemporary French Narratives* (2008),<sup>141</sup> while Laura Loth questions how Bouraoui uses natural disasters to reflect on memory, trauma, and the role of women in contemporary Algerian society.<sup>142</sup>

In a departure from previous scholarship, this chapter explores the layering of exile in several ways in the three texts. Nina, Bouraoui's narrative persona, undergoes two geographic displacements, moving from France to Algeria when she was only two months old and returning at fourteen, and she also represents the union of two exiled people as her parents were both forced to leave their country of origin. In the narratives, exile is portrayed as liberating: Bouraoui's heroine realises that exile provides safety from war and natural disasters and allows her to begin a new life, where she has greater freedom to explore her sexuality and artistic creativity. Yet by exploring exile through the lens of Bhabha's notion of hybridity, the chapter reveals that exile is simultaneously a source of trauma. Nina inhabits the interstitial space between French and Algerian culture, yet she defies Bhabha's claim that hybridity is empowering. For her, it is traumatic because she feels she must always prioritise one culture over the other.

Chapter Three, 'Exile as a "Forced Choice": War and Migration in Gisèle Pineau's *L'Exil selon Julia*', focuses on the motives for the family's migration from Guadeloupe to metropolitan France in Pineau's autofiction. Although research regarding the theme of exile in

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<sup>140</sup> Sara Leek, "'L'Écriture qui saigne": Exile and Wounding in the Narratives of Nina Bouraoui and Linda Lê', *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 15.2 (2012), 237–55.

<sup>141</sup> Marjorie Attignol Salvodon, *Fictions of Childhood: The Roots of Identity in Contemporary French Narratives* (Lanham, MD; Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2008), pp. 39–58.

<sup>142</sup> Laura Loth, 'Traumatic Landscapes: Earthquakes and Identity in Franco-Algerian Fiction by Maïssa Bey and Nina Bouraoui', *Research in African Literatures*, 47.1 (2016), 21–38.



Pineau's oeuvre has been carried out by scholars including Sam Haigh, who examines the text through Kristeva's notion of 'national depression' to draw attention to the difficulties faced by French Caribbean migrants arriving in the metropole,<sup>143</sup> and Louise Hardwick, who explores the child's alienation through her relationship with the lost land of Guadeloupe,<sup>144</sup> to date no study has been written on the driving forces behind their migration, or the impacts that war has had upon their lives.

Analysing three generations of women within the family, this chapter argues that warfare formed the impetus for their migration, through the active military participation of their male family members. Careful associations can thus be made between the family's diasporic existence and the exile of those who are forced to leave their homes due to warfare. While never suggesting that the two experiences are the same, the chapter demonstrates that for the Pineau women, living in metropolitan France has shaped their experiences of exile and alienation. Linguistic otherness is particularly prominent in the text, with the eponymous Julia (the narrator's grandmother) struggling to cope in a society where French is spoken, rather than Creole, her native language. Her situation is analysed through Hron's theoretical approach of reading exile as translation in order to interpret the challenges and difficulties she faces, I argue, because she refuses to translate herself; this would be a betrayal of her native Guadeloupe. The chapter also investigates the degree of choice in the family's migration, questioning whether exile is necessarily a forced displacement or whether some people have more choice about their departure.

Chapter Four, 'Return as Exile in Véronique Tadjo's *Loin de mon père*', advances the idea that a return to the homeland, after living in the diaspora, does not always equate to a

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<sup>143</sup> Sam Haigh, 'Migration and Melancholia: From Kristeva's "Dépression nationale" to Pineau's "Maladie de l'Exil"', *French Studies*, 60.2 (2006), 232–50.

<sup>144</sup> Louise Hardwick, *Childhood, Autobiography and the Francophone Caribbean* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), pp. 141–57.

return home; rather, it can be experienced as a manifestation of exile. This is the case for Nina, Tadjó's protagonist, who is returning to Abidjan from Paris to bury her father. The chapter engages with Herndon, who considers the return home to be a form of 'double exile', and with Bartoloni, who analyses the difficulties of returning to the land of origin. Existing studies of *Loin de mon père* by Amy Baram Reid and Anna-Leena Toivanen point out that Nina has chosen to live in the Ivorian diaspora in Paris for professional reasons and has not been forced to leave Abidjan because of warfare or political instability.<sup>145</sup> However, Nina's sentiments of exile upon returning to Côte d'Ivoire are no less acute. She finds herself emotionally estranged because she is grieving for her father; she is culturally isolated from Côte d'Ivoire following her long absence; and she feels cut off from the realities of Abidjan which has been torn apart by the violent civil war, fought between the Muslim north and the Christian south between 2002 and 2007. Her cultural exile, which is analysed through Peter Adler's five-stage process of culture shock,<sup>146</sup> is aggravated by gender issues, and by the fact that she constantly views the way of life in Abidjan from a Western colonial perspective, criticising local traditions as 'backwards' and 'primitive' in relation to 'modern', 'sophisticated' French life. The chapter offers a gendered critique of postcolonial theories of displacement which reinforce the power imbalances between France and her former African colonies.

Chapter Five, 'Exile, *Métissage*, and Family Estrangement in Kim Lefèvre's Autobiographical Narratives', analyses the multiple effects of exile on family relationships in

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<sup>145</sup> See Amy Baram Reid, 'A Daughter No More: (National) Identity and the Adult Orphan in *Loin de mon père* by Véronique Tadjó', in *Women's Lives in Contemporary French and Francophone Literature*, ed. by Florence Ramond Jurney and Karen McPherson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 121–34; and Anna-Leena Toivanen, 'Diasporic Romances Gone Bad: Impossible Returns to Africa in Myriam Warner-Vieyra's *Juletane*, Buchi Emecheta's *Kehinde* and Véronique Tadjó's *Loin de mon père*', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 49.4 (2013), 432–44.

<sup>146</sup> Peter Adler, 'The Transitional Experience: An Alternative View of Culture Shock', *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 15.4 (1975), 13–23.

*Métisse blanche* and her sequel *Retour*.<sup>147</sup> Particular attention is paid to the *métissage*, or mixed-race identity, of the narrator. For postcolonial thinkers, *métissage* is a dynamic process of opposition against static markers of identity. This chapter, however, posits that *métissage* is a problematic, disruptive state which causes the narrator Kim's geographic and metaphorical exile. This holds true for Kim both as a child in Vietnam, and as an adult in France, where she cuts herself off entirely from her Vietnamese family. This final case study acts as something of a counter-balance, as the texts under consideration here consider the colonial era, meaning that while they were written in the postcolonial moment, they remain largely uninfluenced by postcolonial thinking. Rather, Lefèvre's autobiographies reproduce Orientalist paradigms which, as Said posits in *Orientalism* (1978), began during European colonial expansion.<sup>148</sup> Investigating the close links between exile and gender, the analysis offers a critique of postcolonial strategies of identity formation which, problematically, share the same colonial values as constructions of identity which were developed during France's colonial era. Moreover, it responds to a critical gap in analyses of Lefèvre's writing by, for the first time, examining her exile across her two autobiographical narratives, which offers a more comprehensive understanding of Lefèvre's experiences of colonial and postcolonial exile. Engaging with theories of exile by Hron, Said, and Nacify, the chapter strengthens my conviction that exile can occur within the homeland in literal and metaphorical ways. Kim undergoes a series of internal displacements within Vietnam, a country plagued by poverty, war, and violence during the 1940s and 50s. These displacements are as alienating to Kim as

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<sup>147</sup> At the time of submission, an edited and abbreviated version of this chapter has just been published in *Bulletin of Francophone Postcolonial Studies*. See Antonia Wimbush, 'Métissage and Exile in Kim Lefèvre's Autobiographical Narratives', *Bulletin of Francophone Postcolonial Studies*, 8.2 (2017), 13–20.

<sup>148</sup> Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), p. 4. Said defines the relationship between the Occident and the Orient as one of 'power, of domination, of varying degrees of a complex hegemony' (p. 5). He argues that while the Orient as a geographical region with a complex set of beliefs and traditions does exist, the reality of the Orient does not match Western political and aesthetic depictions of it which are static and fixed in time.

her permanent exile to France in 1960 because her homeland becomes a location of pain and suffering.

As the analysis moves through different authors situated in different areas of the globe, and whose works cross space and generations, it demonstrates the urgent need for more nuanced understandings of gender and exile to emerge in Francophone postcolonial scholarship. Focusing on the intersectional issues of gender, race, class, and language, this thesis argues for a reconsideration of the very concepts of exile, home, origin, and identity within the Francophone postcolonial world.

## CHAPTER ONE

### EXILE, AUTOFICTION, AND WOMEN'S WRITING

In their autobiographical narratives, Nina Bouraoui, Gisèle Pineau, Véronique Tadjo, and Kim Lefèvre raise urgent questions about identity and belonging as they narrate their experiences of living in exile. Their racialised and gendered memories illustrate how the autobiographical genre provides an effective framework for women writers in exile to find their own voice and claim ownership of their life story. This chapter demonstrates how the autobiographical writing of the four authors acts as a process of self-discovery and becomes their mechanism for coping with their exile.

As Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson observe, autobiographical fiction is particularly relevant in the postcolonial context, since it has ‘served as a tactic of intervention in colonial repression’; it allows the voice of the dominated culture to be heard and enables barriers between the coloniser and the colonised to be broken down.<sup>1</sup> Although the imitation of this

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<sup>1</sup> Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives*, 2nd edn (Minneapolis, MN; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2010 [2001]), p. 59.

Western narrative genre which celebrates the life of the individual could be perceived as a threat to the collective, oral culture of the formerly colonised, Smith and Watson suggest that the postcolonial rewriting of autobiography has ‘both engaged and challenged the Western tradition of individualist life narrative’,<sup>2</sup> by destabilising traditional forms of autobiography and incorporating collective responses into the processes of memory and identity formation, creating a style of writing Caren Kaplan has called ‘out-law genres’.<sup>3</sup> Kaplan draws on Jacques Derrida’s essay ‘La loi du genre’, published in 1980.<sup>4</sup> In this essay, Derrida argues that literary genres are simultaneously delimited and infinite; Kaplan uses Derrida’s arguments to propose ‘out-law genres’ as a new term for hybrid feminist autobiographical texts which combine purely textual approaches with photography, film, music, and textiles in order to ‘rework and challenge conventional notions of critic and author’ and act as a form of resistance writing, granting agency to female postcolonial writers.<sup>5</sup> Despite articulating their support for these new forms of autobiography, Smith and Watson also warn that gaining agency through autobiographical writing is complex because the European languages in which these postcolonial texts are written, their structure, and even their publication and dissemination strategies, are bound up with the coloniser’s domination.<sup>6</sup> These narratives adhere to Western autobiography theory and are often published by European publishing houses, deemed to be more prestigious and financially stable than local publishers.<sup>7</sup> However,

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<sup>2</sup> Smith and Watson, pp. 59–60.

<sup>3</sup> Caren Kaplan, ‘Resisting Autobiography: Out-Law Genres and Transnational Feminist Subjects’, in *De/Colonising the Subject: Politics and Gender in Women’s Autobiographical Practice*, ed. by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), pp. 115–38.

<sup>4</sup> Jacques Derrida, ‘La Loi du Genre/The Law of Genre’, trans. by Avital Ronell, *Glyph*, 7 (1980), 176–232. Derrida’s original French text (pp. 176–201) is published alongside Ronell’s translation (pp. 202–32).

<sup>5</sup> Kaplan, p. 119.

<sup>6</sup> Smith and Watson, p. 60.

<sup>7</sup> For instance, Francophone African literature is published predominantly in Paris by French publishing houses, rather than by local African publishers. As Ruth Bush observes in *Publishing Africa in French: Literary Institutions and Decolonization, 1945–1967* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2016), only a quarter of the sixty-five books which won the prestigious Grand Prix d’Afrique noire between 1961 and 2012 were published in Africa; the rest were published in France (p. 112).

such a proviso undermines the progress which has been made to counter Western hegemony through textual practices, such as manipulating the dominant European languages by incorporating indigenous vocabulary and syntax. Autobiographical literature, then, is a genre with which subjects historically marginalised by the literary canon because of their gendered and ethnic minority status can use personal accounts to activate historical memories of exile which have too often been ignored. As Françoise Lionnet notes, autobiography is a particularly useful genre for women, allowing them to reappropriate the past and ‘confront the images and stereotypes that have limited their choices’.<sup>8</sup>

The genre, however, is not clearly defined and has been interpreted in numerous ways. In the French-speaking world, Philippe Lejeune, co-founder of L’Association pour l’autobiographie et le patrimoine autobiographique in 1992, which aims to encourage ‘la collecte, la conservation [et] la valorisation de textes autobiographiques inédits’, has played a key role in theorising autobiography.<sup>9</sup> His famous autobiographical pact, in which ‘il faut qu’il y ait identité de *l’auteur*, du *narrateur* et du *personnage*’ [original emphasis], has greatly influenced contemporary autobiography theory.<sup>10</sup> He defines the relationship between author and reader as a form of contract bound by mutual trust and states that in autobiography, the author, narrator, and protagonist must be one and the same person. Among other scholars, Claire Boyle critiques Lejeune’s narrative bond in her monograph *Consuming Autobiographies: Reading and Writing the Self in Post-War France* (2007), questioning the authority which Lejeune’s pact grants the autobiographer.<sup>11</sup> She argues that it is the reader who seals this pact and determines that the text is autobiographical, rather than the author. In

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<sup>8</sup> Françoise Lionnet, *Autobiographical Voices: Race, Gender, Self-Portraiture* (Ithaca, NY; London: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 94.

<sup>9</sup> L’Association pour l’autobiographie et le patrimoine autobiographique <<http://autobiographie.sitapa.org/spip.php?>> [accessed 31 August 2016].

<sup>10</sup> Philippe Lejeune, *Le Pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1975), p. 15.

<sup>11</sup> Claire Boyle, *Consuming Autobiographies: Reading and Writing the Self in Post-War France* (London: Modern Humanities Research Association and Maney Publishing, 2007).

fact, as Boyle asserts, the reader projects an identity onto the author through images gained from the text which may or may not be accurate.<sup>12</sup> For Boyle, then, autobiography unexpectedly ‘appears as a place where the autobiographer experiences a loss of sovereignty over the self’, challenging the notion that the author has complete control over his or her identity.<sup>13</sup>

Lejeune’s work has also been criticised within the postcolonial feminist context. Louise Hardwick argues that his primary focus on the self overlooks the many wider social, historical, and political issues which are often emphasised in postcolonial autobiographies,<sup>14</sup> while Natalie Edwards notes that Lejeune focuses almost exclusively on male-authored autobiographies, a further indicator that his model is inappropriate for the texts under consideration here.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, Leigh Gilmore wonders whether this Eurocentric taxonomy of autobiography is truly appropriate for the discussion of postcolonial trauma.<sup>16</sup> She argues that the autobiographical project presumes a legalistic definition of truth which carries with it a risk of judgement by the reader, who could accuse the author of lying or manipulating the truth; these judgements ‘may be too similar to forms in which trauma was experienced’, and so the project breaks down.<sup>17</sup> Gilmore attests that instead of giving those who had been denied a voice the chance to speak and eventually come to terms with their trauma, the autobiographical project can, in fact, contribute to the silencing of the traumatic experience.

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<sup>12</sup> Boyle, p. 7.

<sup>13</sup> Boyle, p. 8.

<sup>14</sup> Louise Hardwick, *Childhood, Autobiography and the Francophone Caribbean* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> Natalie Edwards, *Shifting Subjects: Plural Subjectivity in Contemporary Francophone Women’s Autobiography* (Newark, NJ: Delaware University Press, 2011), p. 16. Edwards remarks that Lejeune ‘included only one female-authored text, *Histoire de ma vie (Story of my Life)* by George Sand’ (p. 16).

<sup>16</sup> Leigh Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony* (Ithaca, NY; London: Cornell University Press, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> Gilmore, p. 3.



Other definitions of autobiographical fiction are therefore required for postcolonial narratives, in which exile and trauma are often a focal point of the narrator-protagonist's experiences. Gilmore herself recognises the need to engage more critically with contemporary autobiography theory as writers deviate from traditional autobiographical practices in order to write their trauma.<sup>18</sup> Although not specific to postcolonial exilic narratives, Smith and Watson's preferred model of 'life narrative', which engages with questions of memory, experience, identity, space, embodiment, and agency, seems more applicable for postcolonial literature than Lejeune's taxonomy. This label is inclusive, does not pass judgement on a particular text, and encompasses any writing about a person's life, whether that be 'biographical, novelistic, historical, or explicitly self-referential and therefore autobiographical'.<sup>19</sup> On the one hand, this label alters the perspective of the genre because it includes texts in which the biographical subject and the author are not necessarily the same person; on the other, though, it acknowledges that this mode of writing is not always strictly truthful or accurate, enabling a degree of distancing between the author and his or her traumatic experiences.

Serge Doubrovsky's term of 'autofiction', which first appeared in the blurb on the back cover of his novel *Fils* in 1977 to contradict Lejeune's claim that a work whose narrator and author had the same name could not be a work of fiction,<sup>20</sup> presents a more suitable methodology with which to analyse representations of exile and displacement in the corpus of this thesis. Initially invented to define this specific text rather than to outline the parameters of a new genre, autofiction, for Doubrovsky, at first represented a 'fiction d'évènements et de faits strictement réels', written by ordinary individuals, not by the 'importants de ce monde au

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<sup>18</sup> Gilmore, p. 12.

<sup>19</sup> Smith and Watson, p. 4.

<sup>20</sup> Serge Doubrovsky, *Fils* (Paris: Galilée, 1977).

soir de leur vie'.<sup>21</sup> In 'Autobiographie/vérité/psychanalyse' (1980), Doubrovsky defines autofiction as 'la fiction que j'ai décidé, en tant qu'écrivain, de me donner de moi-même, en y incorporant, au sens plein du terme, l'expérience de l'analyse, non point seulement dans la thématique mais dans la production du texte'.<sup>22</sup> For Doubrovsky, autofiction gives space for a psychoanalytic examination of the self. He then began to apply his term to texts by other authors writing solely in French.<sup>23</sup> In 1984, in an article entitled 'Un fils russe: l'autofiction d'Alain Bosquet', he posits that Alain Bosquet's *Une mère russe* (1978) is autofictional, even though it does not bear the subtitle 'roman', and its narrator does not have the same name as the author, two critical elements of Doubrovsky's 1980 definition.<sup>24</sup> Yet he also notes that the narrative is as disjointed and fragmented as memory itself,<sup>25</sup> a characteristic which becomes the hallmark of his later conceptualisations of autofiction during the 1980s. His more recent definitions of the genre are rather vague and encompass 'tout le champ de l'écriture du moi contemporaine', according to Philippe Gasparini,<sup>26</sup> although they must still fulfil a number of strict criteria, as Gasparini himself points out in a publication from 2008, such as 'l'identité onomastique de l'auteur et du héros-narrateur', 'la recherche d'une forme originale' and 'la reconfiguration du temps linéaire'.<sup>27</sup> Doubrovsky, like Lejeune, continues to place importance on the names of the author, narrator, and protagonist, which must all match; in a departure from Lejeune's framework, though, autofiction enables writers to be much more creative in terms of narrative form.

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<sup>21</sup> Doubrovsky, back cover.

<sup>22</sup> Serge Doubrovsky, 'Autobiographie/vérité/psychanalyse', *L'Esprit Créateur*, 20.3 (1980), 87–97 (p. 96).

<sup>23</sup> An autofictional reading of texts by authors writing in languages other than French was carried out for the first time in 2006, with the publication of Manuel Alberca's *El pacto ambiguo: de la novela autobiográfica a la autoficción* (Madrid: Biblioteca Nueva, 2006). In his study, Alberca analyses Hispanic texts within the framework of autofiction.

<sup>24</sup> Serge Doubrovsky, 'Un fils russe: l'autofiction d'Alain Bosquet', *Sud*, 53–4 (1984), 75–92.

<sup>25</sup> Doubrovsky, p. 82.

<sup>26</sup> Philippe Gasparini, 'De quoi l'autofiction est-elle le nom?', *Autofiction Conférence*, Université de Lausanne (9 October 2009) <<http://www.autofiction.org/index.php?post/2010/01/02/De-quoi-l-autofiction-est-elle-le-nom-Par-Philippe-Gasparini>> [accessed 1 September 2016] (para. 23 of 64).

<sup>27</sup> Philippe Gasparini, *Autofiction: une aventure du langage* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2008), p. 209.

Dobrovsky's concept can be criticised for blurring the boundary between fact and fiction in life narratives, raising the question of whether a text can greatly manipulate the truth and yet still be categorised as a form of life writing. Nevertheless, all life narratives, whether autofictional or not, arguably incorporate some degree of fictionality. As Burton Pike remarks pithily, 'not all fiction is autobiographical, but on this deeper level, all autobiography is fiction' because the writing of the memory of a past event inherently involves a reinterpretation and fictionalisation of that past.<sup>28</sup> The genre has been manipulated by theorists over the years, demonstrating its continued relevance for contemporary literature written in French. In a chapter ominously entitled 'L'Autofiction: un mauvais genre?' (1992), Jacques Lecarme adopts two of Dobrovsky's key characteristics of autofiction — the subtitle 'roman' and the onomastic identity of author and narrator — and applies them to a variety of texts which Dobrovsky would not necessarily have qualified as autofictional, such as *Enfance* (1983) by Nathalie Sarraute.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, in a doctoral thesis by Vincent Colonna, autofiction appears to designate a fictional account of an author's life.<sup>30</sup> In the monograph *Autofictions et autres mythomanies littéraires* (2004), Colonna distinguishes between *l'autofiction biographique*, a category very close to the *roman autobiographique* and which, in his opinion, adds nothing new to the debate on autobiography, and *l'autofiction fantastique*, in which 'l'écrivain [...] transfigure son existence et son identité, dans une histoire irréaliste, indifférente à la vraisemblance'.<sup>31</sup> He then creates the neologism *autofabulation* for texts belonging to the latter category which narrate fantastical, unbelievable events which have

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<sup>28</sup> Burton Pike, 'Time in Autobiography', *Comparative Literature*, 28.4 (1976), 326–42 (p. 337).

<sup>29</sup> Jacques Lecarme, 'L'Autofiction: un mauvais genre?', in *Autofictions et Cie*, ed. by Serge Dobrovsky, Jacques Lecarme, and Philippe Lejeune (Paris: Cahiers RITM, 1992), pp. 227–49 (p. 227). Sarraute's first-person narrator is often interrupted by another voice, who questions the accuracy of the narrator's memory.

<sup>30</sup> Vincent Colonna, 'L'Autofiction, essai sur la fictionnalisation de soi en littérature' (unpublished doctoral thesis, École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, Paris, 1989). Colonna's doctoral thesis was supervised by the influential literary theorist Gérard Genette.

<sup>31</sup> Vincent Colonna, *Autofiction et autres mythomanies littéraires* (Auch: Éditions Tristram, 2004), p. 75.

never happened to the author.<sup>32</sup> Arnaud Schmitt is another critic who proposes a different term which he believes corresponds better to Doubrovsky's concept. While he sees merit in Doubrovsky's definition of autofiction because he agrees that the self is intrinsically bound up with the imagination, he argues that the term itself is flawed because 'as a substantive [it] lays stress on the non-referential part of the personal discourse, whereas Doubrovsky's textual practice went rather in the opposite direction'.<sup>33</sup> For Schmitt, then, the term does not successfully capture the definition, and he suggests that the English 'self-narration' is a more appropriate label.

The multiplicity of these terms to designate similar generic structures is echoed by the current popularity of autofiction, as contemporary French-language writers such as Paul Nizon, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Marie Darrieussecq, and Chloé Delaume all appropriate this label in their own way.<sup>34</sup> As Gasparini points out, "'autofiction" est maintenant le nom de toutes sortes de textes en première personne'.<sup>35</sup> While this could be considered problematic, subsuming the complexities of Doubrovsky's theory into a single, catch-all phrase, it has undeniably raised the profile of autobiographical writing and has increased the number of critical debates about the function and aesthetics of literature in both scholarly and public spheres. French-language scholarship on the theory and practice of autofiction by academics including Arnaud Genon and Isabelle Grell continues to flourish,<sup>36</sup> and Grell's website is a

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<sup>32</sup> Colonna, *Autofiction et autres mythomanies littéraires*, p. 77.

<sup>33</sup> Arnaud Schmitt, 'Making the Case for Self-narration against Autofiction', *a/b: Auto/Biography Studies*, 25.1 (2010), 122–37 (p. 126).

<sup>34</sup> Paul Nizon claims he created the term in 1983, while Alain Robbe-Grillet uses it to describe a process of writing rather than a specific genre. Marie Darrieussecq has written extensively on autofiction in her critical work, although her literary texts are predominantly fictional. Chloé Delaume assigns a political function to the genre. See Gasparini, 'De quoi l'autofiction est-elle le nom?', paras. 50–55 of 64.

<sup>35</sup> Gasparini, 'De quoi l'autofiction est-elle le nom?', para. 57 of 64.

<sup>36</sup> See Arnaud Genon, *Autofiction: pratiques et théories: articles* (Paris: Mon Petit Éditeur, 2013); and Isabelle Grell, *L'Autofiction* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2014). Moreover, in the introduction to a recent collection of essays edited by the two scholars, entitled *Lisières de l'autofiction: enjeux géographiques, artistiques et politiques* (Lyon: Presses universitaires de Lyon, 2016), pp. 5–13, Grell observes that this genre no longer only applies to

useful resource to inform the general public about the latest developments in autofictional writing.<sup>37</sup>

Doubrovsky's understanding of autofiction, then, specifically his 1984 definition, categorises effectively the life writing of the four authors studied in this thesis. This chapter argues that their representations of exile and estrangement expose the limits of traditional models of autobiography and instead call for a reimagining of the genre, in which the truth is distorted to enable them to step away from their trauma. The ability to manipulate reality, distort the chronology of experiences, and create a fragmented, layered text allows Bouraoui, Pineau, Tadjou, and Lefèvre to gain control of their exile, suppressing or fictionalising particularly painful elements. The internal commentary that they provide on the veracity of their experiences through the framework of autofiction signifies that they are in control of non-critical readers, giving them hints about what might or might not have happened to them. In this way, the authors finally gain agency over their lives; this freedom had previously been denied to them by the locations which they had left. While not necessarily banished from their homes, they felt that to lead a more stable, financially prosperous life, they had no choice but to leave. Moreover, just as Doubrovsky places importance on the role of psychoanalysis in his theoretical writing, the four authors are able to reflect upon the multiple consequences of exile in their narratives and attempt to come to terms with their condition, rather than becoming overly concerned with the factual circumstances of their migration. This is particularly advantageous for the authors of this corpus, given that as women, they have not always had sufficient opportunity to analyse their migration critically because their voices have often

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literature but also to 'tous les arts qui en forment et dessinent les lisières: le cinéma, la photographie, la bande dessinée, la sculpture, la peinture, Internet...' (p. 5).

<sup>37</sup> See <[www.autofiction.org](http://www.autofiction.org)> [accessed 1 September 2016].

been suppressed in a male-dominated society. The following sections examine in greater detail how the four authors use autofiction to write their stories of exile.

### **Autobiography: An Identity Quest**

Autobiography occupies a distinct place in each author's oeuvre. For Bouraoui, Pineau, and Lefèvre, the genre has become a fundamental writing strategy, albeit in different ways, for them to discuss their difficult postcolonial past. Tadjó stands apart from these three authors. She is a politically committed writer and engages particularly with issues of polygamy, war, and gender oppression which affect the African continent in texts such as her travelogue *L'Ombre d'Imana: voyages jusqu'au bout du Rwanda* (2000), which arose from the 1998 'Écrire par devoir de mémoire' project to commemorate and bear witness to the Rwandan genocide of 1994,<sup>38</sup> and her most recent work, *En compagnie des hommes* (2017), which narrates the devastating effects of the Ebola virus in West Africa.<sup>39</sup> Her only explicitly autobiographical text, however, is *Loin de mon père* (2010).<sup>40</sup> In addition to her six works of prose fiction, Tadjó has written two poetry collections: *Latérite*,<sup>41</sup> the text which began her writing career in 1984, the title of which refers to the red earth used to make roads in Africa,

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<sup>38</sup> Véronique Tadjó, *L'Ombre d'Imana: voyages jusqu'au bout du Rwanda* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2000). As Nicki Hitchcott comments in 'Travels in Inhumanity: Véronique Tadjó's Tourism in Rwanda', *French Cultural Studies*, 20.2 (2009), 149–64, Tadjó's constant emphasis on the humanity of those she meets allows her to portray genocide 'as a human, rather than an African phenomenon, suggesting that what happened in Rwanda could have happened anywhere in the world' (p. 161). In this way, Tadjó writes against the Western vision of Africa as a violent, savage, and war-torn continent.

<sup>39</sup> Véronique Tadjó, *En compagnie des hommes* (Paris: Don Quichotte Éditions, 2017). The text adopts different voices to narrate the long-lasting consequences of the Ebola epidemic across Africa. Chapters are told from the view-point of doctors and nurses, patients and families, health officials, and even the Ebola virus itself. Tadjó thus continues to emphasise the multiplicity of voices and perspectives within a given situation, as she does in previous works.

<sup>40</sup> Véronique Tadjó, *Loin de mon père* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2010). All subsequent references to this text will appear in parentheses in the main body of this chapter.

<sup>41</sup> Véronique Tadjó, *Latérite* (Paris: Éditions Hatier, 1984). A bilingual French/English edition of this collection was published as *Latérite/Red Earth*, trans. by Peter S. Thompson in 2006 (Spokane, WA: Eastern Washington University Press, 2006).

and *À mi-chemin* (2000).<sup>42</sup> Both these texts are deeply rooted in Ivorian customs, traditions, and landscapes.

Tadjo continues this engagement with Africa in her eleven books for children, written in both French and English. Her texts celebrate Africa, and the author confesses that she is ‘happy to contribute wherever [she] find[s] [her]self, but especially if it’s Africa’.<sup>43</sup> Like most of her adult fiction, Tadjo’s children’s books are not autobiographical or personal, but factual or fantastical. She has written biographies for children about Nelson Mandela and Léopold Sédar Senghor to educate young people about the important political leaders and intellectuals who have helped to shape African history.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, she has published stories about African legends, such as *Mamy Wata et le monstre* (1993), a retelling of the legend of the water spirit Mami Wata who is revered in Western and Central Africa.<sup>45</sup> For Tadjo, then, celebrating the richness and diversity of Africa through her poetic, simple, and accessible language, which is reminiscent of the oral style of traditional African literature she greatly admires,<sup>46</sup> is more important than telling her own story.

Bouraoui’s literary oeuvre stands in sharp contrast, as many of her texts, although not all, are autobiographical. In an interview in 2004, the author commented that writing is, for her, ‘une forme de quête identitaire’ in which she reveals intimate details about her life to her

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<sup>42</sup> Véronique Tadjo, *À mi-chemin* (Paris: Éditions L’Harmattan, 2000).

<sup>43</sup> Véronique Tadjo, ‘Véronique Tadjo Speaks with Stephen Gray’, Interview by Stephen Gray, *Research in African Literatures*, 34.3 (2003), 142–47 (p. 143).

<sup>44</sup> Véronique Tadjo, *Nelson Mandela: “Non à l’apartheid”* (Arles: Actes Sud Junior, 2010); and *Léopold Sédar Senghor: le poète des paroles qui durent* (Paris: Ricochet jeunes, 2014).

<sup>45</sup> Véronique Tadjo, *Mamy Wata et le monstre* (Abidjan: Nouvelles éditions ivoiriennes, 1993).

<sup>46</sup> In an interview with Kanaté Dahouda, Tadjo explicitly cited oral literature as a great source of inspiration for her writing, both in terms of the images it helps to create, and the intimacy it offers between the author and the reader. See Véronique Tadjo, “‘Rendre hommage à la vie’”, Entretien avec Véronique Tadjo, écrivaine ivoirienne’, Interview by Kanaté Dahouda, *Nouvelles études francophones*, 22.2 (2007), 179–86 (p. 184).

reader.<sup>47</sup> Autobiography gives Bouraoui the opportunity to begin to resolve her identitarian issues. Her autobiographical writing can be split into two categories: her earlier work, from the 1998 novel *L'Âge blessé* to the diary-like *Poupée Bella* (2004), focuses on personal feelings of shame and guilt about her transnational background, her struggles with her sexuality, and her exile from Algeria,<sup>48</sup> whereas later texts published from 2005 explore themes of love and desire in a more optimistic tone. She has also written fiction which is not directly personal: her first three texts, *La Voyeuse interdite* (1991), *Poing mort* (1992), and *Le Bal des murènes* (1996), are not autobiographical, and neither are her latest three texts, *Sauvage* (2011), *Standard* (2014), and *Beaux rivages* (2016).<sup>49</sup> As I argue in Chapter Two, the fact that after a cycle of autobiographical texts, which incorporates *L'Âge blessé*, *Le Jour du séisme* (1999), *Garçon manqué* (2000), *La Vie heureuse* (2002), *Poupée Bella*, and *Mes mauvaises pensées* (2005), Bouraoui returns to writing fiction, inventing different characters and treating themes which transcend her own experiences, suggests that she has achieved some sort of reconciliation with her difficult past.<sup>50</sup>

Autobiography also plays a fundamental role in Pineau's oeuvre. Her texts for adults address concerns of marginalisation, gender oppression, and constant displacement between mainland France and the Caribbean, issues she has been forced to confront during her life. While *L'Exil selon Julia* (1996) is her most personal narrative,<sup>51</sup> her récit *Mes quatre femmes*

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<sup>47</sup> Nina Bouraoui, 'Écrire, c'est retrouver ses fantômes', Interview by Dominique Simonnet, *L'Express culture* (31 May 2004) <[http://www.lexpress.fr/culture/livre/ecrire-c-est-retrouver-ses-fantomes\\_819681.html](http://www.lexpress.fr/culture/livre/ecrire-c-est-retrouver-ses-fantomes_819681.html)> [accessed 9 October 2014] (para. 1 of 18).

<sup>48</sup> Nina Bouraoui, *L'Âge blessé* (Paris: Éditions Fayard, 1998); and *Poupée Bella* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 2004).

<sup>49</sup> Nina Bouraoui, *La Voyeuse interdite* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1991); *Poing mort* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1992); *Le Bal des Murènes* (Paris: Éditions Fayard, 1996); *Sauvage* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 2011); *Standard* (Paris: Éditions Flammarion, 2014); and *Beaux rivages* (Paris: Éditions JC Lattès, 2016).

<sup>50</sup> Nina Bouraoui, *Le Jour du séisme* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 1999); *Garçon manqué* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 2000); *La Vie heureuse* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 2002); and *Mes mauvaises pensées* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 2005). *Le Jour du séisme* will be referred to subsequently as *Le Jour*. All subsequent references to these texts will appear in parentheses in the main body of this chapter.

<sup>51</sup> Gisèle Pineau, *L'Exil selon Julia* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 1996). All subsequent references to this text will appear in parentheses in the main body of this chapter.



(2007), in which she documents the lives of her ancestor Angélique, her grandmother Julia, her aunt Gisèle, and her mother Daisy from a more detached viewpoint, sheds more light on the complex relationships within her family.<sup>52</sup> Furthermore, the testimonial narrative she co-wrote in 1998 with journalist and literary critic Marie Abraham, *Femmes des Antilles: traces et voix cent cinquante ans après l'abolition de l'esclavage* (1998), is a text which combines historical accounts of the experiences of female slaves in the Caribbean with contemporary reflections by their descendants on the horrors of slavery in an innovative literary style.<sup>53</sup> While not strictly autobiographical, the text highlights the plight of contemporary Antillean women who, like Pineau and her family, struggle to gain acceptance in metropolitan France. Pineau has also written eleven short stories and seven works of young adult fiction to date,<sup>54</sup> and she therefore invites comparisons with Tadjó; in contrast, Bouraoui and Lefèvre only write for adults. Whereas Tadjó's texts for children are purely imaginative, Pineau's are largely inspired by her own experiences. Novels such as *Un papillon dans la cité* (1992) are not autobiographies as such because Pineau introduces different characters as narrator/protagonist, which break Lejeune's autobiographical pact, but they do explore the difficulties the author encountered growing up, torn between French and Creole cultures.<sup>55</sup>

Lefèvre also privileges the autobiographical genre for her creative writing. Her first two texts, *Métisse blanche* (1989) and *Retour à la saison des pluies* (1990), narrate her life

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<sup>52</sup> Gisèle Pineau, *Mes quatre femmes* (Paris: Philippe Rey, 2007).

<sup>53</sup> Gisèle Pineau and Marie Abraham, *Femmes des Antilles: traces et voix cent cinquante ans après l'abolition de l'esclavage* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 1998).

<sup>54</sup> Her short stories address similar issues as her novels: Caribbean identity, oral traditions, memory, and migration. Moreover, her stories are heavily influenced by her work as a psychiatric nurse. For instance, in 'Ta Mission, Marny', in *Nouvelles de Guadeloupe*, ed. by Pierre Astier (Paris: Éditions Magellan & Cie, 2009), pp. 11–30, Pineau tells the story of a young Guadeloupean woman who becomes anorexic when studying medicine in mainland France, and begins to hear strange voices inside her head.

<sup>55</sup> Gisèle Pineau, *Un papillon dans la cité* (Paris: Éditions Sélia, 1992).

story of displacement both within and beyond the borders of Vietnam.<sup>56</sup> Her third narrative, *Moi, Marina la Malinche* (1994), a first-person biography of the indigenous female Mexican slave Malintzin Tenepal who worked as a translator for Hernán Cortés before bearing his child, is marketed as a novel through its subtitle ‘roman’, inadvertently placing the text within Doubrovsky’s parameters of autofiction.<sup>57</sup> However, Michael F. O’Riley suggests that this text is both a biography about the slave Tenepal and an autobiography because ‘the work embeds an auto/biographical narrative — of the lives of both Lefèvre and her mother — through the writing of Malintzin's life’.<sup>58</sup> This blurring of genres demonstrates Lefèvre’s thorough engagement with the autobiographical genre, even in texts which are seemingly factual. Her latest book, *Les Eaux mortes du Mékong* (2006), once again is not strictly autobiographical but is clearly inspired by her past life in Vietnam.<sup>59</sup> She echoes Pineau and Tadjo in drawing on her own personal experiences to create a fictional text.

Comparisons can also be drawn regarding the reception of their work. All four authors are well-established and have enjoyed commercial and critical success, although Lefèvre is the least well-known. Unlike the other three, she has not won any major literary prizes. In 2006, *Les Eaux mortes du Mékong* was selected as the ‘livre vedette’ by Le Grand Livre du mois, a prize awarded by readers and critics who are members of Le Club de l’Actualité littéraire,<sup>60</sup> but she has not won any prestigious awards for her writing. Despite this, the fact that each edition of *Métisse blanche* is prefaced by the writer and academic Michèle Sarde,

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<sup>56</sup> Kim Lefèvre, *Métisse blanche, suivi de Retour à la saison des pluies* (Paris: Éditions Phébus, 2008 [1989; 1990]). *Retour à la saison des pluies* will be referred to as *Retour*. All subsequent references to these texts will appear in parentheses in the main body of this chapter.

<sup>57</sup> Kim Lefèvre, *Moi, Marina La Malinche* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 1994).

<sup>58</sup> Michael F. O’Riley, “‘Métissage’ and Autobiography in Kim Lefèvre’s *Moi, Marina La Malinche*”, *The French Review*, 78.5 (2005), 933–46 (p. 934).

<sup>59</sup> Kim Lefèvre, *Les Eaux mortes du Mékong* (Paris: Éditions Flammarion, 2006).

<sup>60</sup> Van Quang Pham, *L’Institution de la littérature vietnamienne francophone* (Paris: Éditions Publibook, 2013), p. 44.

‘Chevalier’ of the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres and ‘Chevalier’ des Palmes Académiques, endorses her text and grants it greater cultural capital than ordinarily it would have enjoyed.

In contrast, Bouraoui has earned a place at the forefront of contemporary Francophone women’s literature, thanks to her unique writing style and her thorough exploration of contemporary themes of love, sexuality, and identity. Her first novel, *La Voyeuse interdite*, won the Prix du Livre Inter in 1991, and she was also awarded the prestigious Prix Renaudot in 2005 for *Mes mauvaises pensées*. Moreover, she has worked as a song writer for high-profile French-speaking artists such as Céline Dion, Chimène Badi, and Garou.<sup>61</sup> She has enjoyed considerable success in France: in January 2006, she was awarded the title of ‘Chevalier’ of the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres in recognition of her contribution to literature, and her work has been well received by French readers.<sup>62</sup> This status is compounded by her regular presence at literary festivals in France, on social media platforms, and in traditional media in mainland France.<sup>63</sup> Although opinions in the Algerian press are more ambiguous, with some critics praising her work while others criticise her condemnation of restrictive,

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<sup>61</sup> Karen Ferreira-Meyers, *L’Autofiction d’Amélie Nothomb, Calixthe Beyala et Nina Bouraoui: de la théorie à la pratique de l’autofiction* (Saarbrücken, Germany: Éditions universitaires européennes, 2012), p. 382. For Céline Dion, Bouraoui wrote ‘Immensité’ and ‘Paradis’, in *D’elles* (Toronto: Sony BMG Music, 2007) and ‘Celle qui m’a tout appris’, in *Sans attendre* (Toronto: Sony BMG Music, 2012). For Chimène Badi she co-wrote (with Jacques Veneruso) ‘Les cinq doigts de la main’, *Le Grand Show de Céline Dion*, France 2, 24 November 2012. For Garou, she wrote ‘Un nouveau monde’, in *Version intégrale* (Montreal: Wolfgang Entertainment, 2010).

<sup>62</sup> See <<http://www.culture.gouv.fr/culture/artsetlettres/janvier2006.html>> [accessed 10 September 2015].

<sup>63</sup> For instance, Bouraoui attended the prestigious Paris book fair, Livre Paris, in March 2017, where she held a book signing for *Beaux rivages* (2016). She was included in the section on French, rather than Francophone literature, indicative of how she positions herself within the French literary sphere (Tadjo, in contrast, contributed to the ‘Pavillon des Lettres de l’Afrique’, which demonstrates her engagement with Francophone African literature). Bouraoui is also active on Facebook and Twitter. See <<https://www.facebook.com/nina.bouraoui>> [accessed 11 August 2017] and <<https://twitter.com/NinaBouraoui>> [accessed 11 August 2017]. Moreover, in June 2017, she interviewed French actress Léa Seydoux for that month’s French edition of *Marie Claire*. See Fabrice Gagnault, ‘3 actrices françaises aimées...racontées par 3 écrivaines’, *Marie Claire* (2 May 2017) <<http://www.marieclaire.fr/3-actrices-francaises-aimees-racontees-par-3-ecrivaines.1135735.asp>> [accessed 8 June 2017] (para. 5 of 7).

patriarchal, and violent Algeria,<sup>64</sup> for the most part her texts have received critical acclaim in both France and Algeria.

Like Bouraoui, Pineau has been awarded several accolades for her writing, although it is noticeable that she has not received the more prestigious Francophone literary prizes chosen by writers, publishers, and critics which Bouraoui has won. Despite winning the Prix Carbet de la Caraïbe et du Tout-Monde for *La Grande Drive des esprits* (1993) in 1994,<sup>65</sup> an important prize awarded to a work from the Caribbean and the Americas and presided over by Guadeloupean writer and poet Ernest Pépin, her other literary prizes have been awarded by non-elite institutions from within mainland France, such as the Prix Terre de France in 1996 and the Prix Rotary in 1997, both for *L'Exil selon Julia*. Yet this metropolitan, popular approval of her writing is offset by the fact that in July 2006 she was made 'Officier' of the Ordre des Arts et des Lettres, a higher status than Bouraoui.<sup>66</sup> It seems, then, that like Bouraoui, Pineau is beginning to enter the literary canon in metropolitan France.

Tadjo's work is celebrated in France too, but she has also won awards across Africa. While her first poetry collection *Latérite* won the 1983 Agence de Coopération Culturelle et Technique literary prize in France, her children's book *Mamy Wata et le monstre* was awarded the UNICEF Prize in 1993. This text was one of only four children's books selected as Africa's one hundred best books of the twentieth century, compiled by the Zimbabwe International Book Fair, in association with the African Publishers Network and the Pan-

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<sup>64</sup> For example, the right-wing daily Algerian French-language newspaper *El Watan* (which means 'the homeland' in Arabic) has frequently published negative reviews of Bouraoui's books, denouncing *La Voyeuse interdite* for cultivating 'volontiers la provocation'. See M.F.I., 'Nina Bouraoui: *La Voyeuse interdite*', *El Watan*, 26 September 1991, n. p.

<sup>65</sup> Gisèle Pineau, *La Grande Drive des esprits* (Paris: Le Serpent à plumes, 1993).

<sup>66</sup> See <<http://www.culture.gouv.fr/culture/artsetlettres/juillet2006.html>> [accessed 14 December 2015].

African Booksellers Association.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, her fourth text, *Reine Pokou: concerto pour un sacrifice* (2005), won the Grand prix littéraire de l’Afrique noire in 2005.<sup>68</sup> In May 2016, Tadjó won the inaugural award of the Grand prix national Bernard Dadié de littérature for her young adult biography of Nelson Mandela, and for her literary oeuvre more generally.<sup>69</sup>

Despite gaining recognition in France and across Africa, Tadjó has not enjoyed a similar degree of critical success in Anglophone countries, even though many of her texts have been written in or translated into English. Indeed, Tadjó is the most translated author in the corpus of this thesis. Her novels have been translated into many languages, including English, German, Arabic, Italian, Portuguese, Urdu, and Mandarin Chinese, enabling her work on African legends to spread far beyond Francophone and Anglophone borders. She is fascinated by the translation process and actively participates in the translation of her work into English.<sup>70</sup> Pineau has also extended her literary fame beyond the metropole through translation. Although her work focuses predominantly on the Antilles, her emphasis on issues of language, identity, and belonging allows her novels to cross linguistic and cultural borders and speak to other communities and nationalities. At present, five of her texts have been translated into English by highly respected academics and translators: *The Drifting of Spirits* (1999), *Macadam Dreams* (2003), *Exile According to Julia* (2003), *Devil’s Dance* (2006), and

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<sup>67</sup> See <[http://library.columbia.edu/locations/global/virtual-libraries/african\\_studies/books.html#list](http://library.columbia.edu/locations/global/virtual-libraries/african_studies/books.html#list)> [accessed 6 June 2016].

<sup>68</sup> Véronique Tadjó, *Reine Pokou: concerto pour un sacrifice* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2005).

<sup>69</sup> Fiozzi Chris, ‘8e édition du Salon international du Livre d’Abidjan (SILA 2016): Véronique Tadjó remporte le “Grand Prix Bernard Dadié de littérature”’, *Ivoire Times* (27 May 2016) <<http://ivoiretimes.com/culture/8e-edition-du-salon-international-du-livre-dabidjan-sila-2016-veronique-tadjo-remporte-le-grand-prix-bernard-dadie-de-la-litterature-2016/>> [accessed 16 June 2016].

<sup>70</sup> In an interview with Kathryn Batchelor, Tadjó explained that she always has an input into the way her work is translated into English, adding that ‘we debate, I feel involved, and I think that it is wonderful. Sometimes it makes me discover the original in a different way’. Véronique Tadjó, ‘Translation: Spreading the Wings of Literature’, Interview by Kathryn Batchelor, in *Intimate Enemies: Translation in Francophone Contexts*, ed. by Kathryn Batchelor and Claire Bisdorff (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), pp. 98–108 (pp. 105–6).

*A Taste of Eternity* (2014).<sup>71</sup> This makes her one of the most translated Francophone Caribbean authors, with more published translations than other successful writers such as Patrick Chamoiseau, Simone Schwarz-Bart, Raphaël Confiant, and Daniel Maximin. Only those authors with a much larger corpus of fictional and theoretical works have had more texts translated into English, such as Maryse Condé, Édouard Glissant, and Aimé Césaire.<sup>72</sup> The fact that three different translators have rendered Pineau's writing into English indicates that her work on gender, race, and hybrid identities resonates with contemporary readers from across the world (and with scholars too — one of her translators is renowned critic, J. Michael Dash).

Contrary to this, although Lefèvre is a trained translator, none of her texts have been translated into English or any other language, limiting her readership to a Francophone audience. This reluctance to translate her work reveals just how greatly Lefèvre has been influenced by French colonial thinking, as she seems to privilege French over other languages. Moreover, remarkably only two of Bouraoui's narratives have been translated into English: *Forbidden Vision* in 1995 and *Tomboy* in 2007.<sup>73</sup> The lack of interest in Bouraoui's work beyond Francophone borders is surprising, given her status as an important woman writer who attracts considerable media attention, but perhaps it is a reflection of the

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<sup>71</sup> Gisèle Pineau, *The Drifting of Sprits*, trans. by J. Michael Dash (London: Quartet Books, 1999 [1993]); *Macadam Dreams*, trans. by C. Dickson (Lincoln, NE; London: University of Nebraska Press, 2003 [1995]); *Exile According to Julia*, trans. by Betty Wilson (Charlottesville, VA; London: University of Virginia Press, 2003 [1996]); *Devil's Dance*, trans. by C. Dickson (Lincoln, NE; London: University of Nebraska Press, 2006 [2002]); and *A Taste of Eternity: A Novel*, trans. by C. Dickson (Lubbock, TX: Texas Tech University Press, 2014 [1998]).

<sup>72</sup> At the time of writing, thirteen of Condé's novels have been translated into English by her husband Richard Philcox, eleven of Glissant's texts, and nine of Césaire's texts. In contrast, only three of Chamoiseau's works have been published in English, two of Schwarz-Bart's works, two of Confiant's novels, and one of Maximin's. As Michael Syrotinski comments, translators have tended to shy away from Francophone Caribbean literature because of its cultural and linguistic intricacy. See Michael Syrotinski, 'Francophone Writing outside France', in *The Oxford Guide to Literature in English*, ed. by Peter France (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 300–03 (p. 303).

<sup>73</sup> Nina Bouraoui, *Forbidden Vision*, trans. by Melissa Marcus (Barrytown, NY: Station Hill Press, 1995); and *Tomboy*, trans. by Marjorie Attignol Salvodon and Jehanne-Marie Gavarini (Lincoln, NE; London: University of Nebraska Press, 2007).

complexity and specificity of her work which is so deeply embedded in the entangled relationship between France and Algeria. The under-translation of Bouraoui and Lefèvre is a real gap in women's writing and hinders a translinguistic approach to their gendered accounts of exile and estrangement.

An analysis of Pineau's relationship with the literary movement of *créolité* offers a more nuanced reading of her position and reveals that she is not completely accepted by all literary spheres either. Although she has experienced notable success in France, she still considers herself to be at the margins of the Francophone Caribbean literary scene. In 1989 Martinican writers Jean Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant published the literary manifesto *Éloge de la Créolité*, creating a model of Caribbean identity which, unlike the previous philosophies of *négritude* and *antillanité*, placed great importance on the role of Creole languages in defining a common Caribbean consciousness.<sup>74</sup> The manifesto has been criticised by Derek Walcott for not being published in Creole, the very language it claims to celebrate,<sup>75</sup> and by Sally Price for not engaging with non-Francophone cultural production from the Caribbean.<sup>76</sup> Furthermore, its nostalgic stance neglects to discuss how major contemporary issues, such as unemployment, come to bear on Creole identity.<sup>77</sup> Despite these criticisms, *Éloge de la Créolité* has undoubtedly raised the profile of the Creole language and has led to a reconceptualisation of what Creoleness means to Antilleans today.

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<sup>74</sup> Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant, *Éloge de la Créolité/In Praise of Creoleness*, trans. by Mohamed B. Taleb-Khyar (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1993 [1989]).

<sup>75</sup> In his review of Chamoiseau's *Texaco* in *The New York Review of Books*, Saint Lucian poet and Nobel prize winner Derek Walcott highlighted the inherent contradiction at work in the manifesto which supports a minority language through French, the language of the former coloniser. See Derek Walcott, 'A Letter to Chamoiseau', *New York Review of Books*, 14 August 1997, 45–48 (p. 47).

<sup>76</sup> In 'Beyond Francophonie: Contextualising *Éloge de la Créolité*', *Small Axe*, 21.1 52 (2017), 199–210, Sally Price argues that Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant were not the first to engage in issues of Caribbean identity. She suggests that 'non-French-language attempts to negotiate the same intellectual/identitarian mangrove could also have helped the *élogistes* situate their own manifesto in the context of others before them' [original emphasis] (p. 200).

<sup>77</sup> Hardwick, p. 13.

Pineau began her writing career in the wake of the *créolité* movement, and her work resonates clearly with the objectives of *Éloge de la Créolité* in the celebration of Creole identity. The manifesto openly advocates the creation of a diverse, hybrid society through the promotion of Creole, declaring Creoleness to be ‘une annihilation de la fausse universalité, du monolinguisime et de la pureté’.<sup>78</sup> Pineau also desires to raise the status of Creole language and culture: untranslated Creole dialogue appears in many of her texts, and references to traditional Creole dishes, such as *boudin*, abound in *L’Exil selon Julia*. Indeed, Sylvie Durmelat claims her to be ‘one of the first contemporary women authors to explore these new Creole areas’.<sup>79</sup>

However, Pineau herself does not identify with this movement completely, implying that to a certain extent, she remains marginalised by Francophone Caribbean literary production which favours a narrow understanding of Creoleness and is ‘dominated by a limited number of strong male voices’, as Laura Loth argues.<sup>80</sup> In an interview with Nadège Veldwachter in 2004, Pineau outlined her ambiguous stance towards *créolité*, explaining that although this movement has enabled her to use the Creole language freely in her texts, adhering to it unequivocally would limit her artistic creativity and restrict her to a nostalgic remembering of the past; in contrast to the *créolistes*, she prefers to write about contemporary Antillean identity.<sup>81</sup> She then discussed the key differences between herself and Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant, who all grew up immersed in Creole culture: ‘in my childhood, I

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<sup>78</sup> Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant, p. 28.

<sup>79</sup> Sylvie Durmelat, ‘Narrative of a “Return to the Non-Native Land”’: Gardens and Migration in *L’Exil selon Julia* by Gisèle Pineau’, *Journal of Caribbean Literatures*, 4.2 (2006), 109–18 (p. 110).

<sup>80</sup> Laura Loth, ‘Rethinking Caribbean Communities: The Dynamics of Natural Disasters in the Works of Gisèle Pineau’, in *Caribbean Dynamics: Re-configuring Caribbean Culture*, ed. by Béatrice Boufoy-Bastick and Savrina Chinien (Kingston, Jamaica; Miami, FL: Ian Randle Publishers, 2015), pp. 36–53 (p. 37). Loth examines the trope of the natural disaster in Pineau’s writing. She makes a parallel between Pineau, who is dominated by male Caribbean authors, and the Francophone Caribbean, which has been controlled politically by France and geographically by geological weaknesses in the area (p. 37).

<sup>81</sup> Gisèle Pineau, ‘An Interview with Gisèle Pineau’, Interview by Nadège Veldwachter, *Research in African Literatures*, 35.1 (2004), 180–86 (p. 184).



was a Black on a continent full of Whites, so I did not have the same experiences as the writers of the Creolity movement'.<sup>82</sup> She claims to identify more with black African-American writers, such as Richard Wright and Maya Angelou, because of her own diasporic experiences which cause her to belong to a minority group within a white society.<sup>83</sup> She therefore feels that she occupies a different position in the Francophone Caribbean literary sphere.

Tadjo does not fully subscribe to Francophone African literary movements either, and neither does she fit in with other contemporary women writers from Francophone Africa. Despite her intense gaze on the African continent, as outlined earlier in the chapter, she is also keen to extend her focus and explore issues which affect contemporary society all over the world, not only in Africa. Tadjo argues that 'quand on rencontre des gens, on s'aperçoit que, finalement, il y a des problèmes qui sont très semblables d'un pays à l'autre'.<sup>84</sup> She regards inequalities of class, race, and gender as those which transcend continents and which can only be resolved by working together as a unified global force towards a common goal.<sup>85</sup> Her line of argument thus stands in contrast to the essence of the influential artistic and political movement of *négritude*, established during the 1930s in Paris by Martinican Césaire, Senegalese Senghor, and Guyanese Léon-Gontran Damas. *Négritude* aimed to unite black African peoples around the world to create a universal notion of black experience, raise awareness of African heritage and traditions, and fight for cultural liberation from the European colonisers by emphasising the contribution of black culture to global history.<sup>86</sup> Although it must be stressed that Tadjo is writing in a very different historical context to the

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<sup>82</sup> Pineau, 'An Interview with Gisèle Pineau', p. 185.

<sup>83</sup> Pineau, 'An Interview with Gisèle Pineau', p. 185.

<sup>84</sup> Tadjo, 'Entretien avec Véronique Tadjo', p. 371.

<sup>85</sup> Tadjo, 'Entretien avec Véronique Tadjo', p. 371.

<sup>86</sup> Shireen K. Lewis, *Race, Culture, and Identity: Francophone West African and Caribbean Literature and Theory from Négritude to Créolité* (Lanham, MD; Oxford: Lexington Books, 2006), pp. 23–54.

*négritude* writers, who were protesting against French colonial rule, her standpoint here directly contradicts their ideology.<sup>87</sup> Tadjó argues that all peoples across the world should come together to tackle issues of racial, cultural, and economic domination, regardless of their skin colour, because in reality, as Tadjó declares, ‘il n’y a pas de frontières’.<sup>88</sup> In her writing, she focuses on similarities among people across the globe rather than their differences in order to target a wider, global readership, while also appealing to a local African audience with her work on African culture and traditions. Tadjó’s desire to raise global issues is unusual compared to other important Francophone African women writers, such as Calixthe Beyala, Werewere Liking, and Mariama Bâ,<sup>89</sup> whose political commitment is primarily limited to either the African continent or the African diaspora living in France.<sup>90</sup>

Despite their continued commercial and critical success, then, Pineau and Tadjó do not simply ‘belong’ to the prevailing literary movements of the French Caribbean and Francophone Africa respectively. This helps to explain their success, though: they offer their reader an innovative experience. The same can be argued about Bouraoui to a certain extent. Her texts are situated within recent Algerian cultural production which, as historian James McDougall explains, ‘is often self-consciously preoccupied with the themes of separation,

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<sup>87</sup> Many Francophone African writers are ambivalent about *négritude* for its passive depiction of women and its inherent elitism but nonetheless recognise the extent to which the movement underpins contemporary black Francophone literature. See Stephanie Newell, *West African Literatures: Ways of Reading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), pp. 192–200.

<sup>88</sup> Tadjó, ‘Entretien avec Véronique Tadjó’, p. 371.

<sup>89</sup> Novelist Calixthe Beyala was born in 1961 in Cameroon but left for France in 1978. She won the Grand prix littéraire de l’Afrique noire in 1994 for *Maman a un amant* (1993) and the Grand prix du roman de l’Académie française in 2006 for *Les Honneurs perdus* (1996). Writer, playwright, and performer Werewere Liking, born in 1950, is also from Cameroon but has lived most of her professional life in Côte d’Ivoire. She won the Noma Award in 2005 for *La Mémoire amputée* (2004). Mariama Bâ was born in 1929 in Senegal and died in 1981, winning the first Noma Award for Publishing in Africa in 1980 for *Une si longue lettre* (1979). For a more detailed discussion of these authors, see Nicki Hitchcott, *Women Writers in Francophone Africa* (Oxford; New York: Berg Publishers, 2000).

<sup>90</sup> Odile Cazenave and Patricia Célérier explore the political commitment of contemporary Francophone African writers in *Contemporary Francophone African Writers and the Burden of Commitment* (Charlottesville, VA; London: University of Virginia Press, 2011). They demonstrate how most Francophone African writers have reacted to specifically African issues and realities in the wake of wars and conflicts across the African continent during the 1990s. Cazenave and Célérier explain these authors’ commitment to Africa and the diaspora by the fact that they ‘see political commitment as a matter of personal involvement’ (p. 184).

distance, and exile, both as contemporary realities grounded in a long history of African and Mediterranean patterns of mobility, and as idioms for reflection on the relation of past to present'.<sup>91</sup> At the same time, however, her texts explore such personal issues that inevitably, she offers a different outlook on Franco-Algerian relations to authors such as Malika Mokeddem and Maïssa Bey who have had more contact with Algeria in their later lives. Equally, though there are some similarities of theme and genre between Lefèvre and other Francophone Vietnamese authors, such as Linda Lê and Anna Moï, Lefèvre's work seems more explicitly autobiographical. While much of Lê's writing is rooted in autobiography, her texts are not marketed as autobiographical. Lefèvre, in contrast, openly reveals a great deal of herself in her writing. Yet she is also fully conscious of speaking for other Vietnamese women who have been displaced who have not had the opportunity to tell their story.

The originality of the four authors also means that they do not operate within metropolitan frameworks of women's writing, despite the fact that most of them have developed their writing careers in mainland France and have published their work with prestigious Parisian publishing houses. *L'écriture féminine* is the prevailing feminist approach to women's writing within metropolitan France and has influenced many important contemporary French female writers, such as Christine Angot, Annie Ernaux, and Annie Leclerc. *L'écriture féminine* was conceived of by French feminist writer and philosopher Hélène Cixous in 'Le Rire de la méduse' (1975).<sup>92</sup> In this article, Cixous calls other women to write and create a body of feminine writing in order to avoid being trapped by a patriarchal language which does not fully represent them: 'je parlerai de l'écriture féminine: de ce qu'elle fera. Il faut que la femme s'écrive: que la femme écrive de la femme et fasse venir les femmes

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<sup>91</sup> James McDougall, 'Social Memories "in the Flesh": War and Exile in Algerian Self-Writing', *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, 30 (2010), 34–56 (p. 40).

<sup>92</sup> Hélène Cixous, 'Le Rire de la Méduse', *L'Arc*, 61 (1975), 39–54.

à l'écriture' [original emphasis].<sup>93</sup> Belgian-born French feminist philosopher and psychoanalyst Luce Irigaray has also been influential in the development of *l'écriture féminine*. In *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (1977), she adopts the term *parler-femme* to denote a specifically feminine form of speaking and writing which undermines phallogocentric discourse, but which women only dare to speak among themselves because 'le langage dominant [masculin] est si puissant'.<sup>94</sup> As Rosi Braidotti explains, the movement is best described as a 'quest for a poetics of female writing by some very diverse French female authors' which 'undermine[s] phallogocentrism with an aesthetic style of writing based on the specificity and positivity of the female libido'.<sup>95</sup>

Yet for the authors analysed in this thesis, *l'écriture féminine* is a Western, Eurocentric model, and its unmediated application would disrupt their intention of foregrounding the intersecting gendered and racial obstacles faced by women in the Francophone postcolonial world. Although in a 2003 interview with Christiane Makward, Pineau affirmed her position as a feminist,<sup>96</sup> in this interview she also admitted not being able to write in standard French because the language 'ne correspondait pas à ce qu'[elle] avai[t] à dire';<sup>97</sup> it would therefore be incongruous for her to adopt a metropolitan French model of women's writing with which to express her femininity. In contrast, Tadjó explicitly rejects Western feminist theory, explaining that the Eurocentric terminology is irrelevant for African women: 'I don't really buy into much of what is commonly thought of as orthodox feminism,

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<sup>93</sup> Cixous, p. 39.

<sup>94</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Ce sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1977), p. 133.

<sup>95</sup> Rosi Braidotti, 'In the Footsteps of Anna and Dora: Feminism and Psychoanalysis', in *Women's Studies and Culture: A Feminist Introduction*, ed. by Rosemarie Buikema and Anneke Smelik (London; Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Zed Books, 1995), pp. 162–78 (p. 175).

<sup>96</sup> Gisèle Pineau, 'Entretien avec Gisèle Pineau', Interview by Christiane Makward, *The French Review*, 76.6 (2003), 1202–1215 (p. 1207).

<sup>97</sup> Pineau, 'Entretien avec Gisèle Pineau', p. 1209.

the theory and the movement, outside Africa'.<sup>98</sup> Lefèvre does not appear to subscribe to feminism either, most likely because her use of the French language has been informed by the French colonial project, rather than by radical French feminist thought. Bouraoui is possibly the only author examined in this study to begin to tap into the model of writing femininity offered by French feminism via *l'écriture féminine*. In texts such as *La Vie heureuse* and *Poupée Bella*, she focuses almost exclusively on female sexuality and representations of the female body, creating her own fragmented style of language to discuss these gendered issues. Her position towards *l'écriture féminine* is a further indication of how she aligns herself increasingly with the metropolitan French, rather than Francophone, literary system.

### **Genre: Blurring the Boundaries**

Although it seems that all four authors express their exile through conventional autobiographical models, since their texts are recounted in the first person (except Tadjó's *Loin de mon père*) and all appear to relate the authors' life story, on closer inspection it becomes clear that Lejeune's framework is inappropriate for these postcolonial texts. Literary critics disagree, however, on the specific sub-genre of autobiography to which each text belongs, and the reasons why these four authors might have chosen this particular genre to write their stories of exile.

Bouraoui's self-writing is both personal and political: she expresses her own identitarian issues as well as illustrating the acuity of suffering within the wider Algerian context of exile and mass displacement. In this regard, she upholds Debra Kelly's argument that while postcolonial narratives should be valued for their aesthetic qualities, they also

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<sup>98</sup> Tadjó, 'Véronique Tadjó Speaks with Stephen Gray', p. 145.

‘privilege a political agenda as well as a personal one’.<sup>99</sup> Out of Bouraoui’s three texts studied in this thesis, *Garçon manqué* is the most faithful to Lejeune’s definition of autobiography, while also making an important political statement about the large-scale movement of people between France and Algeria in the aftermath of the Algerian War of Independence. In this text, the narrator-protagonist is given the name ‘Nina’, echoing the identity of the author (although it is important, as in all autobiographical literature, to distinguish with caution between the author and her literary surrogate, the narrator). The narrator is a child version of Bouraoui: the text recounts her childhood in a mostly chronological order, opening with her time in Algeria as a young girl and concluding with her departure to France as an adolescent.

The other two texts, though, depart from this autobiographical model. Although *Le Jour* is a first-person narrative, the identity of the ‘je’ is never disclosed to the reader, thus breaking Lejeune’s autobiographical pact. Yet my close reading of the narrative alongside *Garçon manqué* and *Mes mauvaises pensées* argues that the narrative persona of all three texts is the same person. While *Garçon manqué* and *Mes mauvaises pensées* are more explicitly based on the author’s life, the latter makes several references to her experiences of the earthquake (the principal focus of *Le Jour*), thereby implying that the narrator of *Le Jour* has undergone the same experiences as the narrators of the other two texts. Although *Le Jour* is clearly based on a true-life event, since it centres around the devastating earthquake which shook northern Algeria on 10 October 1980, there are very few factual details about the natural disaster or the narrator’s actions to contextualise the event. Rather, the text foregrounds the narrator’s emotions upon witnessing the destruction of her beloved Algeria. *Mes mauvaises pensées* is also a first-person narrative, recounted by an unnamed narrator, but unlike *Le Jour*, this text is not based on one specific event. *Mes mauvaises pensées* depicts a

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<sup>99</sup> Debra Kelly, *Autobiography and Independence: Selfhood and Creativity in North African Postcolonial Writing in French* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2005), p. 7.

woman's ongoing psychotherapy sessions in Paris and is inspired by the psychotherapy treatment which Bouraoui herself underwent in 2001 in Paris, as Karen Ferreira-Meyers explains.<sup>100</sup>

Literary critics studying Bouraoui's work agree that the Eurocentric, French framework of autobiography is an inappropriate label with which to define her texts because it neglects to take into account the challenges of writing about such a difficult subject matter from the position of France's former Algerian colony. Helen Vassallo adopts Smith and Watson's term 'life narrative' to define Bouraoui's writing.<sup>101</sup> Yet this term is not entirely accurate in Bouraoui's case because it does not acknowledge the intentional distancing effect used which separates author from narrator, a narrative ploy to manipulate and reimagine traumatic episodes in her life.

In contrast, Ferreira-Meyers argues that Bouraoui's texts are autofictional, giving examples of fictional elements in her work to counter the definition of her writing as strictly autobiographical: 'le *je* dépourvu de tout sens référentiel, l'ambiguïté générique, l'anti-représentation du réel, le processus de dépersonnalisation' [original emphasis].<sup>102</sup> Although Bouraoui herself rejected the term 'autofiction' in a 2011 interview, admitting that 'c'est un mot qui me révulse un peu car je ne le comprends pas', she does acknowledge in this interview that her writing mixes real-life elements with fictional events, implying that her work is in fact more autofictional than autobiographical.<sup>103</sup> This blurring between genres is a

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<sup>100</sup> Ferreira-Meyers, p. 434. According to Ferreira-Meyers, Bouraoui underwent this treatment to address her troubled childhood, her sexuality, and her ambiguous national identity.

<sup>101</sup> Helen Vassallo, 'Wounded Storyteller: Illness as Life Narrative in Nina Bouraoui's *Garçon manqué*', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 43.1 (2007), 46–56 (p. 47).

<sup>102</sup> Ferreira-Meyers, p. 377.

<sup>103</sup> Nina Bouraoui, 'Nina Bouraoui et Sara Stridsberg: "L'Écrivain est un marginal"', Interview by Adeline Journet, *L'Express culture* (9 May 2011) <[http://www.lexpress.fr/culture/livre/nina-bouraoui-et-sara-stridsberg-l-ecrivain-est-un-marginal\\_990537.html](http://www.lexpress.fr/culture/livre/nina-bouraoui-et-sara-stridsberg-l-ecrivain-est-un-marginal_990537.html)> [accessed 9 October 2014] (para. 6 of 10).

further example of how the author refuses to be labelled and categorised, and this refusal is mirrored in the treatment of gender, sexuality, and national identity in her narratives.

*Mes mauvaises pensées* is the most explicitly autofictional of the three narratives. Doubrovsky notes that in autofictional writing, linear time is reconfigured because events are narrated in non-chronological order as they are remembered; indeed, flashbacks pervade Bouraoui's text as the narrator's multiple and opposing identities surface, and she relives her experiences as she recounts them, in no apparent order. The opening pages set up this constant intertwining of the past and the present. The text begins in the present, in Paris, as the narrator explains her motives for seeing her therapist, but she soon transports the reader back to her difficult past in Algeria. Bouraoui's writing is repetitious and cyclical: she frequently returns to key episodes in her life, predominantly her departure from Algeria, and her inability to belong within her family because of her lesbianism.

This reconstruction of linear time represents, on the one hand, the narrator's ongoing struggle with her identity, as the jumbled, disorganised tangle of her past and present, of her memories and imagination, reveals the difficulty she faces when trying to organise and write her thoughts about her exilic experiences. Yet on the other hand, the ability to control, fragment, and reorder her memories that this autofictional genre provides could be seen to grant Bouraoui's narrator greater control over her trauma, control which the author lost when forced to leave her country following the Algerian War. Writing her trauma in this chaotic, disorganised manner, no matter how painful it may be, could be an attempt to overcome it. According to Rosie MacLachlan, Bouraoui's autofictional project also has a wider significance: it acts as a form of therapy for the reader too. She posits that Bouraoui's texts



provide ‘a role model for readers struggling with their own identity problems, and potentially prov[e] more broadly transformative for the social world in which her texts are published’.<sup>104</sup>

*Le Jour* also resonates with the autofictional genre. The text is based on true events in Bouraoui’s life, as she did experience the earthquake in North Algeria, as explained in *Mes mauvaises pensées*, but the strange episodes experienced by fictional characters Arslan and Maliha render the text mystical and supernatural in parts. This mixing of fact and fiction highlights ‘l’aspect fragmentaire’ of the narrator’s identity and memory, according to Ferreira-Meyers; the fictional elements woven into the factual text reveal that the narrator’s exile is so traumatic that it distorts her memory of the event, while also indicating that her identity becomes fractured by exile.<sup>105</sup> Through the genre of autofiction, then, the theme of exile in Bouraoui’s texts becomes more poignant because of its personal, truthful, but also artificial nature.

Pineau’s *L’Exil selon Julia* is equally moving: like Bouraoui’s three texts, it draws on her early experiences of racism and exclusion, revealing how displacement and exile have been deeply entrenched in her life since childhood. The narrative mirrors Bouraoui’s *Le Jour* and *Mes mauvaises pensées* in the fact that the narrator, here a child, is unnamed. Yet, as in Bouraoui’s case, textual details about the narrator’s migratory childhood correspond to bibliographical information Pineau provides in interviews, and so the reader can deduce that the narrator is an imagined version of the author herself. Even if Pineau has now resolved the identitarian issues that afflicted her as a child, stating in an interview that she has now ‘régulé cette histoire d’appartenance à une terre’,<sup>106</sup> she certainly shared the narrator’s feelings of

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<sup>104</sup> Rosie MacLachlan, *Nina Bouraoui, Autofiction and the Search for Selfhood* (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2016), p. 160.

<sup>105</sup> Ferreira-Meyers, p. 460.

<sup>106</sup> Gisèle Pineau, ‘Les Femmes des Antilles chuchotent beaucoup dans les cuisines’, Interview by Chantal Anglade (2003) <[http://remue.net/cont/Pineau\\_01entretien.html](http://remue.net/cont/Pineau_01entretien.html)> [accessed 16 November 2015] (para. 10 of 26).

being ‘out of place’ throughout her childhood; in interviews, she describes her younger self as ‘always a misfit’, both in France and in the Antilles.<sup>107</sup>

Despite these similarities between the life of the author and narrator, critics agree that *L’Exil selon Julia* is not purely autobiographical. The prepositional phrase in the title suggests that it is Julia’s exile, rather than the narrator’s, which is at the heart of the narrative. Indeed, Beverley Ormerod Noakes describes the book as ‘a tribute to [Pineau’s] grandmother’ rather than a factual account of the author’s life.<sup>108</sup> However, the text has been given various labels in the substantial literary criticism devoted to it to date. Hardwick argues that the genre of this homodiegetic narrative lies between the novel, the autobiography, and the *récit d’enfance*, a form of autobiography prevalent in turn-of-the-century Francophone Caribbean literature, in which the author’s childhood, schooling, and adolescence takes centre stage, and reads Pineau’s text as one in a line of childhood memoirs produced from 1990 by French Antillean authors.<sup>109</sup> Debra Popkin defines the text as a ‘semi-autobiographical memoir’ but does not explain her use of this terminology,<sup>110</sup> while Karen Marie Henne, in a close study of Pineau and the Lebanese-born French author Amin Maalouf, suggests and develops the term *roman familial*, drawing on Mikhail Bakhtin’s work.<sup>111</sup> Henne defines this genre as ‘un terme susceptible de refléter la place essentielle qu’occupe la famille dans la recherche identitaire dans ces textes’.<sup>112</sup> For Henne, *L’Exil selon Julia* lies at the intersection of the

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<sup>107</sup> Gisèle Pineau, ‘“Devoured by Writing”: An Interview with Gisèle Pineau’, Interview by Valérie Loichot, *Callaloo*, 30.1 (2007), 328–37 (p. 335).

<sup>108</sup> Beverley Ormerod Noakes, ‘The Parent-Child Relationship in Gisèle Pineau’s Work’, in *The Francophone Caribbean Today: Literature, Language, Culture*, ed. by Gertrud Aub-Buscher and Beverley Ormerod Noakes (Kingston, Jamaica: The University of the West Indies Press, 2003), pp. 137–50 (p. 138).

<sup>109</sup> Hardwick, p. 141.

<sup>110</sup> Debra Popkin, ‘Growing Up with Julia: Gisèle Pineau and her Grandmother, a Caribbean Girl’s Journey to Self-Discovery’, in *Francophone Women Coming of Age: Memoirs of Childhood and Adolescence from France, Africa, Quebec and the Caribbean*, ed. by Debra Popkin (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), pp. 34–50 (p. 35).

<sup>111</sup> Karen Marie Henne, *Le Pacte généalogique dans le projet autobiographique: une étude de “L’Exil selon Julia” de Gisèle Pineau et d’“Origines” d’Amin Maalouf* (Saarbrücken, Germany: Éditions universitaires européennes, 2010).

<sup>112</sup> Henne, p. 5.

autobiographical, biographical, and novel genres, with the author, narrator, reader, and addressee united by a genealogical pact, reminiscent of Lejeune's autobiographical pact. Henne argues that in the second section of the text, 'Les cinq ministères de Man Ya', Pineau develops this genealogical pact to link her own identitarian issues to the migratory experiences of her grandmother and ancestors.<sup>113</sup>

While these analytical frameworks are undoubtedly valid because they underscore the prominence of family relations in the text, they do not appear to place sufficient emphasis upon the fact that Pineau's autobiography is not strictly factual or chronological. They overlook the fact that the text is narrated from the perspective of different characters, meaning that at times it is not always clear who is speaking, and that the narrator provides details which she could not possibly have known about her parents' emotions about their life before she was born. Hardwick, however, does observe that the autobiographical pact is not as apparent here as in other Francophone Caribbean autobiographies, due to a degree of distancing between the author on the one hand, and the narrator-protagonist on the other.<sup>114</sup>

I am arguing that Doubrovsky's concept of autofiction, then, is a more appropriate model with which to analyse this text because it takes into account that memories do not surface in a linear manner and are not necessarily entirely accurate. While Renée Larrier has also described *L'Exil selon Julia* as autofictional in *Autofiction and Advocacy in the Francophone Caribbean* (2006), her engagement with the genre is limited to a discussion of how the narrative 'accommodate[s] more than one perspective',<sup>115</sup> and she neglects to explore the incessant blurring of fact and fiction, a crucial narrative strategy in *L'Exil selon Julia*.

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<sup>113</sup> Henne, p. 7.

<sup>114</sup> Hardwick, p. 141.

<sup>115</sup> Renée Larrier, *Autofiction and Advocacy in the Francophone Caribbean* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006), p. 22.

Although Pineau does not fully engage with the term ‘autofiction’ herself — but does not reject it outright, like Bouraoui — she does admit in interviews that her texts are fictionalised or translated accounts of true events which have shaped her life but which are not restricted by factual accuracy: ‘mon univers romanesque est la traduction de ma propre expérience et de mes espérances’.<sup>116</sup> In *L’Exil selon Julia*, the child narrator gives a retrospective account of her family history, exploring how the memory of her family’s displacements has important resonances for her own exile. Yet the author is only too aware of the constant slippage between fact and fiction in her memories of exile and warns the reader of the active role of emotion in the remembering of her exilic experiences in the epigraph:

Hasards de la mémoire, inventions?  
Tout est vrai et faux, émotions.  
Ici, l’essentiel voisine les souvenirs adventices.  
Il n’y a ni héros ni figurants.  
Ni bons ni méchants.  
Seulement l’espérance en de meilleurs demains. (p. 9)

Here, Pineau recognises that the boundaries between fact and fiction are vague and flexible by describing her memories as ‘adventitious’. Hardwick points out that this unusual botanical metaphor recalls ‘memories growing at random in the spaces and cracks between more fundamental episodes’.<sup>117</sup> This imagery anticipates how Pineau intersperses her distant childhood memories with factual details of her family history, while also exposing her engagement with the Antillean environment. The juxtaposition of the opposing adjectives ‘vrai’ and ‘faux’ reveals the ambiguity at play between memory and imagination as she briefly informs the reader that while her narrative is based on true facts in her life, it inevitably contains ‘inventions’ due to the passing of time. The tone at the conclusion of the epigraph is one of hope and optimism: Pineau is convinced that through the fictionalisation of

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<sup>116</sup> Gisèle Pineau, ‘Entre ombre et lumière, l’écriture engagée de Gisèle Pineau’, Interview by Geneviève Belugue, *Notre Librairie*, 138–39 (September 1999–March 2000), 84–90 (p. 89).

<sup>117</sup> Hardwick, p. 144.

her life story she will experience a better, more tolerant future. Pineau's stance in the epigraph mirrors Doubrovsky's 1984 definition of autofiction, in which he states that the author has the liberty to alter and manipulate the factual truth of his or her life in order to carry out an internal identity quest.<sup>118</sup> For Pineau, then, autofiction creates a degree of detachment between herself and her exile as she fictionalises and exaggerates certain elements of her experiences, enabling her to reflect at length on the multiple and often traumatic effects of her exilic condition upon her life. Furthermore, this 'in-between' genre, neither entirely factual nor fictional, represents the narrator's status as 'in-between' French and Antillean culture, a position reminiscent of Homi K. Bhabha's 'in-between spaces' which 'provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood — singular or communal — that initiate new signs of identity'.<sup>119</sup> She is neither entirely 'ici' in France or 'là' in Guadeloupe because of her continuous physical and psychological displacements between the two locations and her inability to integrate fully into either society. I discuss the concept of 'ici-là' further in Chapter Three.

In contrast, through autofiction, Tadjó creates a fictionalised account of exile, which is less intimate than the other writing projects analysed in this thesis and which demonstrates the universal nature of being uprooted. The distance Tadjó creates between her fiction and her own personal reality enables her to consider her own experience more objectively and relate it to the stories of all those across the world who have been displaced, whether through choice or not.

*Loin de mon père* is the only text of my corpus which is written in the third person, posing even more of a challenge in terms of genre than the others. The many similarities

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<sup>118</sup> Doubrovsky, 'Un fils russe', p. 79.

<sup>119</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 2nd edn (Abingdon: Routledge Classics, 2004 [1994]), p. 2.

between Nina, the protagonist, and Tadjó, the author, suggest that the text is autobiographical: like Tadjó, Nina was born in France to a French mother and Ivorian father (p. 88); she left Côte d'Ivoire as a young woman to settle in France for professional reasons (p. 118); and she enjoys a creative career: she is a successful professional photographer who has exhibited her work all over the world (p. 90). Furthermore, like Tadjó, Nina is fascinated by art, and the protagonist talks about the necessity of preserving contemporary art works when she is with her artist friends, lamenting the fact that the government is only interested in protecting the cultural heritage of the past. She describes Ivorians as being 'amnésiques' towards contemporary cultural production (p. 156). Tadjó used the adjective 'amnésiques' herself in an interview for the literary supplement of *Les Dépêches de Brazzaville* in 2010 to describe her concern for Côte d'Ivoire's cultural legacy which is 'en train de disparaître', reinforcing the link between the author and her protagonist.<sup>120</sup> Drawing attention to these parallels between Nina and Tadjó, Patrick Kabeya Mwepu describes the text as 'un roman personnel', through which 'le lecteur découvre des aspects représentatifs de la vie de l'auteure', and he concludes that the narrative is a straightforward autobiographical account of Tadjó's life.<sup>121</sup>

In his analysis of *Loin de mon père*, however, Mwepu fails to consider how the text subverts autobiographical norms. In Tadjó's narrative, the author, narrator, and protagonist are not one and the same person: the protagonist, Nina, is given a name which clearly distinguishes her from the author. The name 'Nina' is neither traditionally French nor typically Baoulé, the mother tongue of her father's family, which perhaps symbolises the universality of her plight, as the identitarian crisis she undergoes is replicated across the globe and is not constrained by French or Ivorian borders, despite the specificities of the Ivorian

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<sup>120</sup> Véronique Tadjó, 'Funérailles, questionnement et retrouvailles', Interview by Vincente Clergeau, *Les Dépêches de Brazzaville*, 13 (June 2010), 4 (p. 4).

<sup>121</sup> Patrick Kabeya Mwepu, 'Entre vacuité et plénitude: *Loin de mon père* de Véronique Tadjó', *The French Review*, 88.4 (2015), 33–46 (p. 33).

conflict against which the text is set. The text does not meet Lejeune's requirements regarding the identity of the narrator either. At times, the narrator is omniscient and provides an insight into the emotions of each family member. For instance, in the second chapter of book one (book one relates Nina's arrival in Abidjan, while book two narrates the funeral arrangements in more detail), the reader is confronted with the family elders' reactions to the death of Nina's father, Dr Kouadio Yao, in addition to Nina's own emotions (pp. 25–35). Yet other chapters are related exclusively from the viewpoint of one particular character. This internal focalisation is evident in chapter eleven of book one, when the text gives us a flashback of Nina's father replaying an argument he had had with his wife Hélène a few years beforehand about his reckless spending (pp. 81–82). Other chapters also present the narrative through his experiences, but this focus is complicated by the fact that they are Nina's imaginings of her father's emotions and so are unlikely to be entirely accurate.

A commonality among all texts studied in this thesis, then, is that they do not fit within the conventional parameters of autobiography, and *Loin de mon père* is no exception. While Amy Baram Reid declares that 'this is most definitely a novel, not an autobiography' because of the interplay of truth and fiction throughout and the fact that the text bears the subtitle of 'roman' or novel,<sup>122</sup> Tadjó prefers the term 'autofiction', admitting in personal email correspondence that 'je pense que le terme d'autofiction est bon'.<sup>123</sup> The first epigraph to the text underscores the ways in which the text is inspired by Tadjó's own personal story but also blurs the lines between fact and fiction. She states that while 'cette histoire est vraie, parce qu'elle est ancrée dans la réalité', it is also imagined because 'elle est l'objet d'un travail littéraire où ce qui compte, ce n'est pas tant la véracité des faits, mais l'intention

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<sup>122</sup> Amy Baram Reid, 'Afterword: Near or Far: Places of Translation in *Far from my Father*', in Véronique Tadjó, *Far from my Father: A Novel*, trans. by Amy Baram Reid (Charlottesville, VA; London: University of Virginia Press, 2014 [2010]), pp. 133–48 (p. 136).

<sup>123</sup> Véronique Tadjó, Email to Antonia Wimbush, 6 June 2016. See Appendix, p. 294.

derrière l'écriture' (p. 9). Moreover, she emphasised the fictionality of the text in a public interview with Nicki Hitchcott in 2016 at the British Library, when she admitted that it would be impossible to determine which parts of *Loin de mon père* correspond to particular events which took place during her life.<sup>124</sup> The fragmented form of *Loin de mon père* is further evidence of the playful interaction between fact and fiction at work here and contributes to the argument that Tadjó's text is autofictional, rather than strictly autobiographical. The narrative voice is frequently interrupted by extracts from emails from Nina's sister Gabrielle, excerpts from her father's diary, and quotations from books she finds in her father's bedroom. While this factual information anchors the family's life against an accurate social and political backdrop, the multiple textual perspectives are disorientating for the reader. According to Éloïse Brezault, the textual collage offers 'un ultime brouillage entre fiction, falsification et réalité', as it is unclear which part of the text is imagined and which events in fact took place.<sup>125</sup> Moreover, the hybrid form provides a nod to the fusion of fact and fiction in autofiction, and also to Nina's own racial hybridity. Tadjó thus expresses the universality of exile and displacement through her autofiction. The similarities between the author and narrator remind the reader that these themes are very personal to Tadjó, while the fictional plot reveals just how familiar these feelings of non-belonging are for many people across the world.

In contrast, Lefèvre's *Métisse blanche* and *Retour* offer detailed, factual portrayals of the author's life and merge fact and fiction less explicitly than Tadjó's *Loin de mon père*. Indeed, Lefèvre's self-writing adheres the most closely to pure autobiography out of all the

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<sup>124</sup> Véronique Tadjó, 'Véronique Tadjó: A Reading and Conversation with Nicki Hitchcott', *West African Literature and Thought in French: Translating Cultures*, British Library, 22 January 2016.

<sup>125</sup> Éloïse Brezault, 'Identité réelle et fantasmée dans *Loin de mon père* de Véronique Tadjó: l'écrivain entre filiation et déterritorialisation', in *The Contemporary Francophone African Intellectual*, ed. by Christopher Hogarth and Natalie Edwards (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), pp. 119–34 (p. 125).



writers examined here, although she does intentionally manipulate the truth to a certain degree for a particular aesthetic effect.

On a textual level, *Métisse blanche* appears to fulfil autobiographical norms. The text is a first-person narrative, in which the narrator-protagonist seems to correspond to the identity of the author: she is named as ‘la petite Kim’ in the blurb on the back cover of the book. In the text, however, there is only one reference to the name ‘Kim’, which is in fact her middle name, when she receives a birth certificate. She takes her Chinese stepfather’s family name ‘Lam’, becoming a legal Vietnamese citizen named Lam Kim Thu (p. 173).<sup>126</sup> She is called ‘ma petite fille’ by her mother (p. 39), ‘Éliane’ at the orphanage (p. 50), and ‘Thérèse’ at her Catholic boarding school (p. 257) as she takes on multiple French identities. Yet an association can be made between author and narrator because events Lefèvre discusses in interviews with academics also appear in the text, such as her many displacements within Vietnam.<sup>127</sup> A further textual ambiguity is the origin of her French surname ‘Lefèvre’. This is only confirmed in an article by Nathalie Nguyen, who notes that the surname ‘Lefèvre’ was acquired when the author married a Frenchman in 1962.<sup>128</sup> The text is marketed as autobiographical by its publishers: on the back cover of each edition (the text was first

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<sup>126</sup> As Nghia M. Vo explains in *Saigon: A History* (Jefferson, NC; London: McFarland and Company, 2011), Chinese and Vietnamese names begin with the family name, and are then followed by the middle name and given name (p. 6). Kim’s stepfather is called Lam Khe; Lam is the family name which he passes down to his stepdaughter.

<sup>127</sup> See Kim Lefèvre, ‘*Métisse blanche*: entretien avec Kim Lefèvre’, Interview by Nathalie Huynh Chau Nguyen, *Intersections: Gender, History and Culture in the Asian Context*, 5 (2001) <[http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue5/nguyen\\_interview.html](http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue5/nguyen_interview.html)> [accessed 6 September 2016].

<sup>128</sup> Nathalie Huynh Chau Nguyen, ‘Writing and Memory in Kim Lefèvre’s Autobiographical Narratives’, *Intersections: Gender, History and Culture in the Asian Context*, 5 (2001) <<http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue5/nathalie.html#n21>> [accessed 14 July 2017] (para. 3 of 13).

published in 1989, and then again in 1990 and 2003),<sup>129</sup> it is given the subtitle ‘autobiographie’, and the blurb on the back cover of the second edition, published alongside *Retour* in 2008 by Éditions Phébus, states that the text ‘retrace avec force les vingt premières années de l’existence de l’auteur au Vietnam’ (back cover), thereby explicitly conflating the author with the narrator. The text is a chronological account of the author’s childhood in Vietnam, beginning with her birth in Hanoi just before the outbreak of the Second World War and concluding with her departure to France in 1960. There are few flashbacks, although at times the narrative looks forward to her later life in France, and language is not playfully manipulated. Rather, events are depicted in a realistic, detailed manner.

*Retour* does not seem to correspond to Doubrovsky’s concept of autofiction either. It is written in the first person, suggesting that this text too forms part of her autobiographical project. Furthermore, from the very first chapter Lefèvre comments on the influence of the publication of *Métisse blanche* in her desire to return to Vietnam (p. 357), reinforcing connections between the two texts, which were initially published as individual books only a year apart.<sup>130</sup> Other factual events which help to situate the narrative within the author’s own life story are also mentioned, such as her appearance on the French literary television programme *Apostrophes* on 7 April 1989 (p. 357).<sup>131</sup> It is thus evident that *Retour* is a continuation of Lefèvre’s autobiography and that events discussed in the narrative are not fictional but did, in fact, occur.

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<sup>129</sup> *Métisse blanche* was first published by Barrault Éditions in 1989. In 1990, it was republished by Éditions Flammarion, and in 2003 Éditions de l’Aube produced an edition. In 2008, it was published by Éditions Phébus alongside *Retour*. The multiple editions of the text are evidence of the public interest it received at the time. As Isabelle Thuy Pelaud comments in ‘*Métisse blanche*: Kim Lefèvre and Transnational Space’, in *Mixed Race Literature*, ed. by Jonathan Brennan (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 122–36, the text was commercially successful because ‘nostalgia for the former colonies was rife among the French populace’ in the early 1990s and “‘exotic” Indochinese cultural production was in vogue’ (p. 123).

<sup>130</sup> *Retour* was first published by Barrault Éditions in 1990. It was republished by Éditions de l’Aube in 1995, before Éditions Phébus combined the text with *Métisse blanche*.

<sup>131</sup> Bernard Pivot, ‘L’Humiliation’, *Apostrophes*, France 2, 7 April 1989.

However, in interviews with scholars, the author admits that, like Bouraoui, Pineau, and Tadjo, she has stretched the truth about her life, but for poetic effect, in a bid to enhance the empathy the reader feels towards the narrator. In 2001, when Nguyen asked her how she decided what to include and what to omit in her autobiography, Lefèvre replied:

tout est vrai, mais tout ne s'est pas déroulé exactement de cette façon. Il y a des choses qui se sont déroulées exactement de cette façon, et c'est la plupart du temps, mais il y a un certain nombre de choses que j'ai exprimées autrement, soit en prenant mon cas, soit en prenant un autre cas que j'ai vu ou connu, parce que ça dit plus profondément ce que je voulais dire. Voilà le rapport entre le vécu et ce qu'il y a dans le livre.<sup>132</sup>

She adapts the truth in order to express the sentiments of loneliness and alienation she felt as a child in a more emphatic manner, so that her audience can relate to her story more easily. This strategy differs considerably from the one adopted by Bouraoui and Pineau, who both admit that writing is an internal process which has helped them to regard their traumatic exile in a more positive light. Although Lefèvre's approach to self-writing does not necessarily correspond to Doubrovsky's definition of autofiction, she has fictionalised her life story to a certain degree, intentionally manipulating the structure of autobiography to achieve her aim of writing for others. Her texts are certainly not pure autobiographies, as O'Riley suggests.<sup>133</sup> Jack A. Yeager also comments on the unstable nature of autobiography in his article on rediscovering childhood in *Retour*, describing the genre as a 'problematic hybrid',<sup>134</sup> but then continues to read the text as an authoritative account of the author's life, as if she were a faithful representative of the Vietnamese mixed-race woman.<sup>135</sup> Isabelle Thuy Pelaud reminds us that 'the story emanates from Lefèvre's memory and imagination' because it is written

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<sup>132</sup> Lefèvre, 'Métisse blanche: entretien avec Kim Lefèvre', para. 13 of 25.

<sup>133</sup> O'Riley, pp. 935–36.

<sup>134</sup> Jack A. Yeager, 'Kim Lefèvre's *Retour à la saison des pluies*: Rediscovering the Landscapes of Children', *L'Esprit Créateur*, 33.2 (1993), 47–57 (p. 56).

<sup>135</sup> Yeager, 'Kim Lefèvre's *Retour à la saison des pluies*', p. 48.

approximately thirty years after she left Vietnam;<sup>136</sup> the author's memory cannot be entirely trusted and so the two texts are not entirely accurate representations of her life.

Lefèvre also writes her life story to give voice to other Vietnamese women of mixed race who were rejected too because of their skin colour. She confessed to Nguyen that 'mon histoire, ce n'est pas seulement la mienne, c'est celle des centaines de milliers de métis qui étaient au Viêt-nam à cette époque et puis même après, si on pense aux Amérasiens'.<sup>137</sup> Her comments refute Averis's argument that Lefèvre unites the various strands of her multiple identity 'in order to move towards a future with a united and coherent sense of identity'.<sup>138</sup> The texts seem less of a personal identity quest and more of a collective project which speaks to all those who suffered from racial discrimination during a time of colonial oppression, and that Lefèvre actually seeks to emphasise disorder and fragmentation. In another interview in 2010 for L'Assemblée Parlementaire de la Francophonie, instigated by the institution with the view of promoting Francophone Vietnamese culture, Lefèvre denied that writing is a means to compartmentalise emotions about her exile and reconcile herself with her former life. She stated that 'non, l'écriture n'est pas une expiation pour moi. J'écris pour m'exprimer, pour communiquer, pour partager avec le lecteur une certaine vision du monde'.<sup>139</sup> Writing is thus a creative practice which allows her to explore certain themes which have affected her life, but she does not feel indebted to writing in the same way that Bouraoui and Pineau perhaps do as a kind of personal therapy. Undoubtedly, though, writing has enabled her to form a

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<sup>136</sup> Pelaud, p. 124.

<sup>137</sup> Lefèvre, 'Métisse blanche: entretien avec Kim Lefèvre', para. 12 of 25.

<sup>138</sup> In 'Neither Here nor There: Linda Lê and Kim Lefèvre's Literary Homecoming', *Women in French Studies*, Special Issue 'Women in the Middle' (2009), 74–84, Kate Averis compares the ways in which both Lefèvre and Lê blur the boundaries between fiction and autobiography (p. 79). She argues that for both authors, a single, unified identity does not exist, and while Lefèvre uses her autobiography to try to forge a unified identity in the future, Lê intentionally 'celebrates the instability and disintegration of her identity in the present' (p. 79).

<sup>139</sup> Kim Lefèvre, 'Une parole francophone: Kim Lefèvre', *L'Assemblée Parlementaire de la Francophonie* (25 June 2010) <<http://apf.francophonie.org/Une-parole-francophone-Kim-Lefevre.html>> [accessed 15 September 2016] (para. 20 of 34).

clearer sense of self, becoming ‘transnational’, in Pelaud’s terms, as she creates connections with both France and Vietnam through her literature.<sup>140</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Autofiction enables all four authors to remember their displacement and alienation on their own terms. In Bouraoui’s case, writing allows painful wounds to begin to be healed, in a process reminiscent of Suzette A. Henke’s term, ‘scriptotherapy’. In her seminal book *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women’s Life Writing* (2000), Henke further develops the association between autobiography and psychoanalysis, arguing that autobiographers narrate ‘the unexpected irruption of repressed tales of traumatic experience’ in order to process their trauma verbally and eventually accept it.<sup>141</sup> According to Henke, writing the traumatic event enables the author to access fragmented images of the trauma which, until then, had been too painful to process, following which the autobiographer can translate these images into language. However, Henke’s analysis implies that this reconciliation with the traumatic past is complete, which is not necessarily the case. Bouraoui adopts the genre of autofiction in order to relive certain elements of her exile but omit others, suggesting that the resolution of her identity is continuous but incomplete. Pineau writes autofiction to reflect upon and come to accept issues of racism, social integration, and gender inequalities, while Tadjou learns to embrace the freedom and liberation of exile, both for herself and for her family. Her autofictional narrative focuses less heavily on her own life than the other texts examined in this thesis, demonstrating that exile affects many different people, regardless of nationality, ethnicity, or social background. For Lefèvre, writing her life

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<sup>140</sup> Pelaud, p. 133.

<sup>141</sup> Suzette A. Henke, *Shattered Subjects: Trauma and Testimony in Women’s Life Writing* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), p. xii.

story is less of a therapeutic practice than a means to speak for those displaced Vietnamese women who have been denied a voice and an individuality.

Through their life writing, these four women writers challenge existing tropes of displacement, opening up discussions about what it means to live in exile and the diaspora, and how these experiences impact upon their identity. Furthermore, as I will analyse in the chapters that follow, they draw attention to the ways in which gender and race intersect in their experiences and representations of migration.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE FOUR PROBLEMS OF NINA BOURAOU

‘Tous les matins je vérifie mon identité. J’ai quatre problèmes. Française? Algérienne? Fille? Garçon?’ (*Garçon manqué*, p. 163)

This evocative quotation from *Garçon manqué*, Nina Bouraoui’s best-known work to date, epitomises the identity quest which traverses the three autofictional texts analysed in this chapter: *Le Jour du séisme* (1999), *Garçon manqué* (2000), and *Mes mauvaises pensées* (2005).<sup>1</sup> Whether in Algeria or France, questions of national and gendered identity continue to haunt the narrator; to these can be added the relatively interlocking questions of sexual and linguistic identity. The narrative persona of *Garçon manqué* is called Nina, and although the narrators in the other two works are unnamed, I read them all as one and the same person, and as fictional representations of Bouraoui herself, with supporting references to bibliographical information in each of the three texts which corresponds to details Bouraoui gives about

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<sup>1</sup> Nina Bouraoui, *Le Jour du séisme* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 1999) (subsequently referred to as *Le Jour*); *Garçon manqué* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 2000); and *Mes mauvaises pensées* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 2005). All subsequent references to these texts will appear in parentheses in the main body of this chapter.

herself in interviews.<sup>2</sup> My reading nonetheless remains attentive to the nuances between these narrative personae.

The fact that Nina explicitly associates her identity with a series of ‘problèmes’ is indicative not only of how she feels troubled by her own multifaceted identity which does not correspond to social expectations, but also of her frustration at these expectations which dictate that identity must be placed within discrete categories. The adverbial time phrase of repetition, ‘tous les matins’, suggests that Nina’s identity is in a continuous state of flux because every day she struggles with questions of how to define herself. The fact that she perceives her complex, hybrid identity as problematic rather than emancipatory suggests that, paradoxically, she desires to fit into one of these neatly defined categories of identity which, I argue, she endeavours to denounce. Moreover, through the order in which these four adjectives are expressed, it appears that Nina associates Frenchness with a female identity, and conversely, that she considers Algeria to be synonymous with masculinity. She thus risks becoming complicit in perpetuating restrictive associations between nationality and gender.

This chapter argues that for Bouraoui’s literary heroine, identity is not fixed and static but fluid and mobile, and examines how her constantly-changing identity contributes to her sentiments of exile. Bouraoui’s writing thus seems to resonate with Homi K. Bhabha’s notion of hybridity as formulated in *The Location of Culture* (1994).<sup>3</sup> For Bhabha, hybridity designates the mixing of Eastern and Western cultures and acts as a subversive tool with which (formerly) colonised peoples may challenge colonial forms of oppression. In Bouraoui’s narratives, national identity is formed in the space ‘in-between’ French and Algerian culture, just as gendered identity is shaped at the intersection between masculinity

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<sup>2</sup> See Chapter One for an explanation of my autobiographical reading of the three texts.

<sup>3</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 2nd edn (Abingdon: Routledge Classics, 2004 [1994]).



and femininity. However, Nina's experiences of hybridity contest Bhabha's model. Whereas Bhabha argues that hybridity is a positive model of empowerment which is predicated on inclusion, for Bouraoui's protagonist, hybridity equates to exclusion. She does not feel *both* French and Algerian, *both* masculine and feminine, but rather, *none* of these four identitarian labels. She is always defined by what she is not, which engenders a sense of lack and malaise. This chapter expands the current paradigms of exile to consider how gendered, national, sexual, and linguistic hybridity provoke in Bouraoui's literary heroine an extreme sense of exclusion and alienation. This more metaphorical understanding of gender as exile appears frequently in North African Francophone literature by canonical writers including Assia Djebar, Leïla Sebbar, and Tahar Ben Jelloun, who have all used gender as a motif to explore alienation.<sup>4</sup>

The chapter seeks to challenge the many assumptions at work within theories of exile through a close comparative analysis of three of Bouraoui's self-referential narratives. Bouraoui's work tends to be divided into two groups: her early texts draw attention to the shame and guilt felt by her narrative counterpart about her otherness, while later texts published since 2005 explore more hopeful themes of love and desire. Although the more optimistic *Mes mauvaises pensées* is usually read alongside Bouraoui's later works because it considers themes of identity and sexuality in more positive ways<sup>5</sup> and evokes the 'affective

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<sup>4</sup> Assia Djebar focuses on the exilic condition of women in postcolonial Algeria in texts such as the autobiographical *L'Amour, la fantasia* (Paris: Éditions JC Lattès, 1985), while exile and displacement between Algeria and France are explored in Leïla Sebbar's oeuvre. For example, in *Parle mon fils, parle à ta mère* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 1984) and *Je ne parle pas la langue de mon père* (Paris: Éditions Julliard, 2003), characters are torn between the two cultures. The canonical Moroccan writer Tahar Ben Jelloun also writes about issues of gender in his most famous work, *L'Enfant de sable* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1985), in which the protagonist's daughter is raised as a boy, representing the privileged status of masculinity in North African society.

<sup>5</sup> See, for instance, Sylvain Montalbano, 'Nina Bouraoui, martyr(s) de l'écho: de la blessure à une nouvelle sexualité par l'affect', *Études littéraires*, 46.2 (2015), 147–62. Montalbano reads *Mes mauvaises pensées* alongside *Appelez-moi par son prénom* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 2008) and *Nos baisers sont des adieux* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 2010) in an exploration of how Bouraoui uses the image of the wound in these texts to create a new understanding of the body through the transmission of affect.

nature of non-normative sexuality’ and ‘the vitality of desire’, in Amaleena Damlé’s terms,<sup>6</sup> this thesis alters the habitual groupings by analysing the text alongside *Le Jour* and *Garçon manqué*. By bringing these texts into dialogue, a more complete, complex understanding of exile and alienation emerges. The chapter also contributes to widening the scholarship on Bouraoui’s writing, responding to the fact that *Le Jour* has not received the same degree of critical attention as the other two works.

Bouraoui’s autofiction is a unique depiction of exile because exile is bound up with both gender and sexuality in her writing. This chapter moves through a consideration of exile and gender before investigating how sexuality further complicates existing paradigms. How do Bouraoui’s own multiple experiences of exile set the backdrop for a discussion of the nuances and complexities of exile in her writing? What are the implications if we consider the texts as autofictional representations of the author’s life story? How does her exploration of her national, gendered, and sexual identity intersect with exile in her wider work? Furthermore, the chapter analyses how her exile is experienced through language — French and Arabic — and how the relationship to language changes depending on the context in which it is used. The chapter engages with theoretical work by Bhabha, Edward W. Said, John Durham Peters, Michael Hanne, Phyllis Zatlin, and Julia Kristeva. Through this discussion, it becomes evident, as Kinga Olszewska remarks, that exile is ‘a much broader term than the one that defines geographical distance. It is a cross-cultural, cross-territorial and cross-linguistic experience’.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Amaleena Damlé, ‘The Wild Becoming of Childhood: Writing as Monument in Nina Bouraoui’s *Sauvage*’, *Forum for Modern Languages Studies*, 49.2 (2013), 166–74 (p. 167).

<sup>7</sup> Kinga Olszewska, *Wanderers across Language: Exile in Irish and Polish Literature of the Twentieth Century* (London: Modern Humanities Research Association and Maney Publishing, 2007), p. 1.

### **Contextualising Bouraoui**

Bouraoui does not currently define her situation as one of exile — she is based in Paris through her own choice — and yet exile forms the backdrop to her family history. As her narrative surrogate Nina explains in *Garçon manqué*, her ‘corps se compose de deux exils’ (p. 20): during her childhood, the author was displaced from what had become her home on two separate occasions. Firstly, she left France for Algeria in 1967 when she was only two months old, when Algeria was undergoing unprecedented and violent transformation in the wake of the Algerian War of Independence. She then returned to France in 1980 aged fourteen because the situation for mixed-race families had become untenable: those of mixed Franco-Algerian heritage living in Algeria were forced to bear the burden of France’s colonial legacy and were blamed by Algerians for the atrocities committed against them during the war. Nina also embodies the different exiles of her parents. Rachid, her father, left Algeria to study economics at university in Rennes during the war. While at first glance this privileged displacement to complete his studies lies far from the traditional meaning of the term ‘exile’, again, according to the narrator of *Garçon manqué*, he perceived his time studying in France as a period of exile, since there he was forced to face ‘les colères des uns et des autres’ (p. 127). Overwhelmed by this ‘hystérie’ (p. 127), he longed to return to his family in Algeria.

While studying in Rennes, Rachid met Bouraoui’s mother, Maryvonne. After marrying in 1960, the couple became the victims of racial abuse in France, as Franco-Algerian relations deteriorated during the last years of a bitterly-fought war. Rachid suffered daily humiliations and racist taunts, such as ‘melon, bicot, bougnoule’ (p. 127), and

Maryvonne was also insulted frequently for falling in love with an Algerian.<sup>8</sup> Yet there appears to be no hospitable place for this mixed-race couple at that historical moment. The couple's decision to move to Algeria in 1968 is figured in *Garçon manqué* as not only a cultural but also a visual exile, particularly for Maryvonne who, with her pale skin, blond hair, and blue eyes, immediately stood out as being physically different to the native Algerians and thus represented 'un défi' to Algerian national identity (p. 12). The couple's exile was a specific reaction to political events after Algeria had gained independence from France in 1962. Most significantly, three years after the final Evian agreement was signed on 18 March 1962, Algerians living in France and the French living in Algeria had their dual nationality status withdrawn. Both groups were therefore forced to renounce either their French or Algerian citizenship.<sup>9</sup> If they had not given up their Algerian nationality in France, the family would have suddenly found their political status altered to that of 'des clandestins. Des étrangers. Sans travail. Sans argent' (p. 133). Unwilling to reject his Algerian identity, her father renounced his French identity and was forced to return to Algeria to find work, and his family soon followed.

While exile shapes the family's past, at a national level it also determines Algeria's collective contemporary history. As Helen Vassallo explains in *The Body Besieged: The Embodiment of Historical Memory in Nina Bouraoui and Leïla Sebbar* (2012), Bouraoui's texts reveal a 'meshing of the family history and a political one' as her own story coincides

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<sup>8</sup> 'Melon', 'bicot', and 'bougnoule' are all pejorative terms used by the French to designate the North African population living in France. They are predominantly used to insult men, rather than women. As Claude Liauzu explains in 'Mots et migrants méditerranéens', *Cahiers de la Méditerranée*, 54.1 (1997), 1–14, the origins of this vocabulary, which is still used today to insult populations of North African descent, lie in the French conquest of North Africa. These lexical items are associated with 'la conquête', 'l'armée', and 'le colon' (p. 12), demonstrating the long-lasting effects of France's colonial project on contemporary Franco-North African relations.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas Janoski, *The Ironies of Citizenship: Naturalization and Integration in Industrialized Countries* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 80.

with the broader national narrative of war and exile.<sup>10</sup> The triumvirate of texts studied here voice the complexity of exile within the specific context of Algeria's two recent wars which were fought from 1954 to 1962, and from 1992 to 2002. Marjorie Attignol Salvodon argues that the struggles are recognised as 'the two most important historical references in the Algerian collective imaginary',<sup>11</sup> while, on the contrary, Natalya Vince denounces what she considers as excessive attention to these two conflicts in Algerian cultural production which 'contribut[es] to the caricature of Algeria as locked in an eternal, pathological cycle of violence'.<sup>12</sup> Bouraoui's sustained emphasis on both conflicts throughout the three texts suggests that she supports Attignol Salvodon's assertion, although her literature undoubtedly also works to create the more nuanced and original depiction of both Algeria and identity for which Vince calls.

The Algerian War of Independence commenced on 1 November 1954 and was fought for eight years. It represented 'the beginning of the end of the long association with France that had lasted 130 years'.<sup>13</sup> Small attacks on French military installations within Algeria rapidly escalated into a national struggle to gain independence from the colonial regime. Nationalist parties and movements united to create the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN), which engaged in guerrilla warfare against the French. The French retaliated with tactics of extreme violence and torture; an example of which, the Battle of Algiers of 1956, resulted in

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<sup>10</sup> Helen Vassallo, *The Body Besieged: The Embodiment of Historical Memory in Nina Bouraoui and Leïla Sebbar* (Lanham, MD; Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2012), p. 39.

<sup>11</sup> Marjorie Attignol Salvodon, *Fictions of Childhood: The Roots of Identity in Contemporary French Narratives* (Lanham, MD; Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2008), p. 40.

<sup>12</sup> Natalya Vince, *Our Fighting Sisters: Nation, Memory and Gender in Algeria, 1954–2012* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), p. 6. James McDougall also deplores this negative depiction of Algeria. In *A History of Algeria* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), he explains that although Algeria is an important country because of its large oil and gas reserves and its strategic geo-political position in relations with the Middle East, Algeria is 'familiar to most only from news items about terrorism or illegal migration' (p. 6).

<sup>13</sup> Abdelkader Aoudjit, *The Algerian Novel and Colonial Discourse: Witnessing to a Différend* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), p. 163. The French occupation of Algeria began in June 1830, following the landing at Sidi-Fredj. By the end of the 1840s, France had control of the coastal areas of Algeria. However, the French army faced strong resistance from Algerian indigenous populations, and did not succeed in retaining control over the whole territory until shortly before the Great War.

the death of hundreds of Algerians as the conflict was transported to urban centres. Charles de Gaulle's arrival to power in 1958 did little initially to appease the situation; rather, he increased tensions between the French colonial government and the European settlers, who were known as the Pieds-Noirs.<sup>14</sup> After several years of negotiations between the two countries, and following referendums in France and Algeria, independence was proclaimed on 3 July 1962, with the official celebration on 5 July. Both during the hostilities and in the aftermath, exile was commonplace. Approximately one million Pieds-Noirs were forced to leave Algeria for France in 1962,<sup>15</sup> because they were no longer welcome in an independent Algeria, depriving the country of its skilled workforce.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, Harkis (indigenous Algerian soldiers who had fought for the French military campaign), and members of the French far-right dissident military group, the Organisation armée secrète (OAS), were also forced to return to France. Meanwhile, Algerians working in France, such as Bouraoui's father, lost the right to live in France and so were driven back to Algeria. In total, the conflict 'resulted in a half million deaths, a million exiles, and a million and a half displaced persons', demonstrating the terrible and far-reaching consequences of this intense war of decolonisation.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> As Amy L. Hubbell explains in *Remembering French Algeria: Pieds-Noirs, Identity, and Exile* (Lincoln, NE; London: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), the origins of the term *Pieds-Noirs* are unclear. One myth is that Algerians coined the term to refer to the black boots of the French colonial soldiers during the conquest of Algiers in 1830; another is that they invented it to designate the French settlers' activities as wine makers because they trampled on the grapes to make wine, staining their feet black (p. 9). In contrast, French sources state that the term appeared much later, in 1901, and referred to sailors working in the coal room of a steam ship, who would most likely be Algerian (p. 9). For Hubbell, 'these conflicting versions of the "origins" of the Pieds-Noirs reconfirm another important aspect of Pied-Noir identity: the source of origin is eternally displaced, and it is a return toward an origin that defines the Pied-Noir' (p. 10). Hubbell also explains that while the term was once used as an insult, it has been reappropriated by the community and has become 'a symbol of pride' (p. 10).

<sup>15</sup> Jo McCormack, 'Memory and Exile: Contemporary France and the Algerian War (1954–1962)', in *Exile Cultures, Misplaced Identities*, ed. by Paul Allatson and Jo McCormack (Amsterdam; New York: Éditions Rodopi, 2008), pp. 117–38 (p. 117).

<sup>16</sup> John Ruedy, *Modern Algeria: The Origins and Development of a Nation*, 2nd edn (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2005 [1992]), p. 195. As Ruedy notes, 'between 1960 and 1963, GNP contracted by 35 percent' because of the loss of skilled workers and private capital (p. 195).

<sup>17</sup> Edward R. Kantowicz, *Coming Apart, Coming Together* (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2000), p. 219.

Thirty years later, exile and mass displacement were also defining features of Algeria's civil war, a period known in Algeria as 'la décennie noire'.<sup>18</sup> The conflict began in February 1992 and lasted for almost a decade, brought about by years of social unrest, poverty, and political corruption as Algeria unsuccessfully tried to develop as an independent nation. After the Front islamique du salut (FIS), a political coalition of Islamist groups, won forty-seven percent of the votes in the legislative elections in December 1991, rather than being invited to form a government, the incumbent government took the decision to annul the election results. This led to armed Islamist insurgency against the military-backed regime. The army quickly reacted to try to repress the Islamists, outlawing the FIS and cracking down on other military groups which supported them. Both parties received external military and financial intervention throughout: the insurgents were bolstered by support from other countries with an Islamist agenda, such as Iran, whereas the Algerian government received approximately six billion dollars from the international community to curb the Islamist threat.<sup>19</sup> France in particular gave substantial financial support to the government.<sup>20</sup> Fighting continued well into the 2000s in the form of isolated attacks, despite the implementation of the Charter for Peace and National Reconciliation in September 2005 which granted amnesties and indemnifications in an attempt to bring peace to Algeria. Between a hundred thousand and two hundred thousand Algerians were killed during the conflict, many of whom

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<sup>18</sup> As Martin Stone explains in *The Agony of Algeria* (London: C. Hurst & Co. Publishers, 1997), the epithet 'la décennie noire' used by Algerians to denote the civil war is an 'indictment not only of the political failure of the Chadli regime [Chadli Bendjedid was President of Algeria from 1979 to 1992 when he was forced out of office], but also of the economic mismanagement and growing corruption that accompanied it' (p. 94). This term also emphasises the atrocities committed by both sides during the conflict.

<sup>19</sup> Miriam R. Lowi, 'Algeria, 1992–2002: Anatomy of a Civil War', in *Understanding Civil War: Volume 1: Africa: Evidence and Analysis*, ed. by Paul Collier and Nicholas Sambanis (Washington, D.C.: The World Bank, 2005), pp. 221–46 (p. 237).

<sup>20</sup> In *La Guerre civile en Algérie: 1990–1998* (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 1998), Luis Martinez explains that between 1992 and 2002, France negotiated a financial package with Algeria worth six billion francs (p. 347). According to Martinez, France feared the creation of an Islamist state in Algeria because of the risk that Algerians would then emigrate to France in large numbers (pp. 347–48). Michael Willis historicises Islamist movements in Algeria in *The Islamist Challenge in Algeria: A Political History* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1996), arguing that they are not a new phenomenon because they emerged during French colonial rule.

were unarmed citizens.<sup>21</sup> The displaced population was estimated at approximately one million.<sup>22</sup>

War and conflict are themes which pervade Bouraoui's narratives of exile. *Le Jour* does not describe the consequences of 'la décennie noire' explicitly but does make several indirect references to this tragedy.<sup>23</sup> *Le Jour* focuses on the deadly earthquake which struck in 1980 in the northern city of El Asnam,<sup>24</sup> a location which was renamed 'Chlef' after the earthquake in a collective attempt to move on from the catastrophe.<sup>25</sup> The text narrates the wanderings of an unnamed child narrator, who appears to be a fictional counterpart of Bouraoui herself as a young girl, across Algeria in search of safety. Her exile occurs within Algeria itself as she seeks refuge from the destruction wrought by the earthquake on her beloved landscape. She is overwhelmed with feelings of loss and confusion at having to abandon Algiers and consequently feels 'désaxée' (p. 11), suggesting that her movement is a kind of exile. This displacement is confined within the boundaries of her homeland: 'j'ouvre la marche vers le Hoggar' (p. 62), a mountainous region in southern Algeria. She also undergoes an internal exile, creating an 'other' self to distance herself from the destruction of

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<sup>21</sup> Lowi, p. 221.

<sup>22</sup> Mohamed Benrabah, *Language Conflict in Algeria: From Colonialism to Post-Independence* (Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2013), p. xiii. Benrabah describes the conflict as 'intellectual cleansing' because many of those who were killed, arrested, or forced to go into exile in France were highly educated, secular Francophone intellectuals and writers. He argues that Algerian forces were involved in the 'purging from society of "impure" influences' who criticised the Algerian authorities through their writing (p. xiii).

<sup>23</sup> In accordance with scholars such as Olivia C. Harrison, who argues that the term 'civil war' erroneously implies that the Algerian conflict adheres to 'Western clichés of sectarian conflict' in *Transcolonial Maghreb: Imagining Palestine in the Era of Decolonization* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016), p. 168, this chapter adopts the phrase 'la décennie noire' when discussing the Algerian conflict of the 1990s.

<sup>24</sup> The earthquake measured 7.3 on the Richter scale and killed approximately five thousand people. See Alexander E. Gates and David Ritchie, 'Asnam, El', in *Encyclopedia of Earthquakes and Volcanoes*, 3rd edn (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2007 [1994]), p. 17 (p. 17).

<sup>25</sup> 'El asnam' in Arabic means 'statues' or 'idols' and refers to the Roman statues found in the area. The city was renamed 'Chlef' after the large river which flows through the region when it was rebuilt following the earthquake. It was thought that this name would ward off any evil spirits from the pagan statues which may have brought about the earthquake. See Jeune Afrique, *Violent séisme à El-Asnam* (5 October 2008) <<http://www.jeuneafrique.com/222101/archives-thematique/violent-s-isme-el-asnam/>> [accessed 27 January 2017] (para. 4 of 4).



her land, and this is reflected in the way that the text is peppered with mystical supernatural incidents experienced by fictional characters Arslan and Maliha.

There is more at work here, however, than first meets the eye. The narrator openly compares the earthquake to ‘une guerre’ (p. 46), and although the text does not refer to any specific war, the Arabic term used to discuss the earthquake, ‘el zilzel’ (p. 22), implies the presence of religious conflict because the word ‘signifies an apocalyptic end of the world in a well-known passage of the Koran’.<sup>26</sup> This religious allusion denotes the ideological conflict between secular and religious fundamentalists which characterised ‘la décennie noire’. The real-life earthquake, then, also acts as an allegory for the Algerian conflict of the 1990s.

In contrast, Bouraoui’s subsequent text provides a discussion of the continued legacy of the earlier conflict, the Algerian War of Independence, on both populations, French and Algerian. *Garçon manqué* features a first-person homodiegetic narrator and is divided into four distinct sections, each placing emphasis on issues of identity and nationality. Cristina Boidard Boisson conceptualises these different geographic spaces of the text as ‘des espaces mémoriels’, in which the memories of Nina’s suffering are presented as being as fractured as her identity itself.<sup>27</sup> *Garçon manqué* is written from a child’s perspective, like *Le Jour*, although the narrator is now older. Set during the 1970s, the first part, subtitled ‘Alger’, charts the brutal racial prejudice Nina experiences as a mixed-race young girl living in Algiers. In an article which explores Bouraoui’s embodiment of Algeria’s bloody history, Vassallo claims that the violence to which Nina is subjected is caused by the fact that her blood mixes ‘both colonizer and colonized, perpetrator and victim of violence’, highlighting the hostility Nina

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<sup>26</sup> Attignol Salvodon, p. 48.

<sup>27</sup> Cristina Boidard Boisson, ‘Espace(s) et identité dans *Garçon manqué* de Nina Bouraoui’, *Francofonía*, 12 (2003), 27–46 (p. 32).

faces as a bodily reminder of the violent colonial relationship between France and Algeria.<sup>28</sup> In the second section, ‘Rennes’, Nina is displaced to France during the summer holidays to stay with her (French) maternal grandparents. This temporary departure is experienced by Nina as exile, as she admits that she ‘ne voulai[t] pas partir’ but was forced to by her parents (p. 99). This episode creates a sense of foreboding and foreshadows Bouraoui’s exile in 1980 from Algeria to Rennes, when her family seek refuge from the violence committed against Algerians living in France in the aftermath of the war. Back in France, however, she experiences rejection, as strong anti-Algerian sentiment is widespread.

*Garçon manqué* closes with two short sections: ‘Tivoli’, in which Nina departs from Algeria for Rome, and ‘Amine’. In this final section, written on her return to Algeria as a letter to her best friend Amine, Nina at last begins to accept her complex identity, but this is only possible after the liberation of life in Italy, which ushers in new perspectives. In *Writing Postcolonial France: Haunting, Literature, and the Maghreb* (2011), Fiona Barclay argues that *Garçon manqué* ‘does not address [Nina’s] status as the rejected product of both France and Algeria’ because Nina only becomes comfortable with her sense of self ‘by physically leaving the sites haunted by social violence’.<sup>29</sup> Yet I would argue that it is in fact Nina’s rejected status which drives the entire narrative. By removing herself from the physical spaces of France and Algeria, Nina is avoiding further direct confrontation with those who taunt and insult her, a temporary, rather than lasting, solution.

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<sup>28</sup> Helen Vassallo, ‘Embodied Memory: War and the Remembrance of Wounds in Nina Bouraoui and Leïla Sebbar’, *Journal of War and Culture Studies*, 1.2 (2008), 189–200 (p. 190). Vassallo’s observation can be read as an oversimplification of Franco-Algerian relations, as it depicts the entire French nation as guilty perpetrators of the colonial regime and all Algerians as innocent targets, disregarding the violence committed by Algerians themselves and by the French who fought for a free Algeria.

<sup>29</sup> Fiona Barclay, *Writing Postcolonial France: Haunting, Literature, and the Maghreb* (Lanham, MD; Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2011), p. 120. Barclay’s overarching argument in her study is that writers within metropolitan France, such as Bouraoui, Marie Cardinal, and Hélène Cixous, use different literary genres to articulate how France remains haunted by its colonial legacy in North Africa.

Bouraoui's narrator retains the emphasis on her personal involvement with the Algerian War in *Mes mauvaises pensées*.<sup>30</sup> The narrative portrays a woman's visits to a psychotherapist, a quintessentially French bourgeois activity which implicitly reveals Bouraoui's financial and social privilege. However, in this text, which eschews the childhood narrator of her other works on exile, she analyses how her sexual identity acts as another form of othering. In a further departure from *Le Jour* and *Garçon manqué*, *Mes mauvaises pensées* takes place primarily in France. This first-person narrative adopts the form of an interior monologue, and, as Sara Leek observes, the absence of chapters and paragraphs creates 'a very experimental stream-of-consciousness style' as Bouraoui lays bare her innermost thoughts and feelings.<sup>31</sup> In an emotional identity quest, the unnamed narrator, whose biography bears striking resemblance to Bouraoui's own, depicts important events which have shaped her life, such as her departure from Algeria, her move to France, and her complex relationship with her parents.<sup>32</sup> As such, the text needs to be brought into dialogue with *Le Jour* and *Garçon manqué*, as it provides reflection on episodes and characters depicted in these earlier works.

*Mes mauvaises pensées* portrays the narrator's attempt to escape from her past. It is a very personal, idiosyncratic text; all events are mediated through the narrator's voice, and

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<sup>30</sup> For instance, she explains that she pities all those who disappeared or lost their lives in the conflict, including her own paternal uncle: 'je pense au frère de mon père dont on n'a jamais retrouvé le corps, je pense aux images de la guerre d'Algérie' (p. 52).

<sup>31</sup> Sara Leek, "'L'Écriture qui saigne': Exile and Wounding in the Narratives of Nina Bouraoui and Linda Lê", *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 15.2 (2012), p. 240.

<sup>32</sup> In 'Reading Contemporary Narratives as Revolutionaries: Radical Textuality and Queer Subjectivity in the Works of Monique Wittig, Anne F. Garréta, and Nina Bouraoui', in *Sexuality, Eroticism, and Gender in French and Francophone Literature*, ed. by Melanie Hackney and Aaron Emmitte (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), pp. 1–15, Kristina Kosnick observes how 'Bouraoui's narrative voice picks up threads of memories of the past and weaves them into the present' (p. 10). This blurring of the past and the present disrupts the narrative. Extensive studies have been produced on the effects of this disruption of narrative time in Bouraoui's work. For instance, Anne-Martine Parent analyses the narrator through the metaphor of 'le buvard' or blotting paper, arguing that she acts as a palimpsest in which boundaries are blurred between past and present, between life and death. See Anne-Martine Parent, 'La Peau buvard de Nina Bouraoui', *Revue critique de fixation contemporaine/Critical Review of Contemporary French Fiction*, 4 (2012), 93–101.

while her unnamed psychotherapist is present throughout because the narrative is addressed to her, the reader never has direct access to her thoughts. Other characters who played an important role in the narrator's past are also enigmatically referred to by their initials (such as her former lover M. and Madame B., possibly an older lover although the specific nature of their relationship is unclear). The narrator embarks on a quest to understand her 'mauvaises pensées'. She concludes that her embodiment of Algeria's violent relationship with France is one contributing factor; another is her homosexuality. The text is cyclical and repetitive, and while at times it appears that she is making progress at accepting her hybrid identity, at other times she repeatedly makes reference to the fact that she remains haunted by her exile.

### **The Trauma of Exile**

A current important trend in literary criticism is the use of Western trauma theory to analyse Francophone women's life-writing. In her analysis of autobiographical narratives published by French women since 1968, Kathryn Robson defines trauma as both a bodily and psychic injury which 'is relived endlessly in the present', arguing that trauma can be articulated and overcome through self-writing.<sup>33</sup> Zoe Norridge, in contrast, examines different Anglophone and Francophone literary manifestations of pain and trauma as experienced by marginalised groups across the African continent who, until now, have been denied a voice.<sup>34</sup> She claims that fiction in particular 'is uniquely placed to explore the particularities of individual pain experiences' of war, genocide, and female genital mutilation because unlike rigidly-structured scientific or theoretical writing, fiction 'juxtapose[s] different forms of pain through a process of tangential, fluid, and non-hierarchical linking'.<sup>35</sup> Norridge then uses anthropologist Rodney

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<sup>33</sup> Kathryn Robson, *Writing Wounds: The Inscription of Trauma in Post-1968 French Women's Life Writing* (Amsterdam; New York: Éditions Rodopi, 2004), p. 11.

<sup>34</sup> Zoe Norridge, *Perceiving Pain in African Literature* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

<sup>35</sup> Norridge, p. 22.

Needham's concept of the polythetic in order to demonstrate that depictions of pain are both deeply personal and a shared, collective experience.<sup>36</sup> Although Stef Craps's arguments in *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds* (2013) surrounding the problematic use of Western trauma theory for postcolonial narratives must be acknowledged — most notably its failure to recognise the sufferings of non-minority groups through their own terms, and in their own frame of reference<sup>37</sup> — these theories are helpful analytical tools with which to approach Bouraoui's writing, provided that the analysis pays attention to the specificities of her context. As argued in Chapter One, Bouraoui uses autofiction to provide a powerful reflective and critical articulation of her traumatic exile.<sup>38</sup>

*Garçon manqué* offers a particularly compelling depiction of the trauma Nina experiences due to the crossing of national and gendered borders. As Damlé explains, these borders, 'be they political or personal, are experienced as culturally and historically constructed lines of constraint that multiply positions of alterity when crossed or transgressed'.<sup>39</sup> In other words, movement beyond the confinements of geographical and gendered borders limits the narrator to a very restrictive and reductive understanding of her identity because, in order to conform to the expectations of the country to which she has moved, she is forced to neglect the other part of her. Damlé suggests a correlation between displacement and alterity in Bouraoui's texts, although in her emphasis on 'culturally and

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<sup>36</sup> In 'Polythetic Classification: Convergence and Consequences', *Man*, 10.3 (1975), 349–69, Rodney Needham explains that while a particular category is defined by its common properties, these properties are unfixed and unstable. He argues that classes are composed in a 'chain complex'; that is, 'the definitive attribute keeps changing from one link to the next; there is no consistency in the type of bonds, and the variable meaning is carried over from one item in a class to the next with "no central significance", no "nucleus"' (p. 350). Norridge uses this concept to demonstrate how the pain experiences in the texts she analyses are linked to one another and can 'all be lined up like small threads of the textual rope' (p. 41), to use Needham's rope analogy (borrowed from Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Preliminary Studies for the "Philosophical Investigations", Generally Known as The Blue and Brown Books* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1958)), but once the pain experiences are separated, the differences between them become apparent.

<sup>37</sup> Stef Craps, *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> For a more detailed analysis of memory and trauma in Bouraoui's autofictional narratives, see Antonia Wimbush, 'Memory and Exile in Nina Bouraoui's Autobiographical Narratives', *Bulletin of Francophone Postcolonial Studies*, 6.2 (2015), 16–22 (p. 19).

<sup>39</sup> Damlé, p. 167.

historically constructed lines of constraint', she neglects to analyse the role of contemporary social and political limitations upon the narrative persona's identity. For example, in Nina's experience, the Algerian War continues long after 1962, since the entrenched, unresolved tensions between the two countries are internalised by groups such as her child self who did not even participate in the conflict. She therefore finds herself trapped in the aftermath of the war because she is marked out as 'representative of the Metropolitan enemy' and punished unnecessarily.<sup>40</sup> No attempt is made to distinguish between the innocent individual and the collective group of the former coloniser.

Mona El Khoury reads Nina's emotions through Marianne Hirsch's idea of 'postmemory'.<sup>41</sup> In *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (2012), Hirsch defines postmemory as 'the relationship that the "generation after" bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before — to experiences they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviours among which they grew up'.<sup>42</sup> El Khoury argues that the family's oral and photographic accounts of the war 'still induce affects linked to the trauma'.<sup>43</sup> Even though Nina did not experience the war personally, it has had important and traumatic resonances on her and her family: for instance, her uncle Amar was reported missing during the war, and the family suspect that he was killed (p. 30).

Nina's trauma is played out physically on her body. She wonders which part of her belongs to France and which to Algeria and asks how to 'porter une identité de fracture. Se

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<sup>40</sup> Vassallo, *The Body Besieged*, p. 41.

<sup>41</sup> Mona El Khoury, 'To Be or Not to Be Métis: Nina Bouraoui's Embodied Memory of the Colonial Fracture', *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, 22.1 (2017), 123–35.

<sup>42</sup> Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), p. 5. Hirsch argues that because these stories are so traumatic, and have been passed down to the next generation in such an emotional manner, they 'seem to constitute memories in their own right' [original emphasis], p. 5.

<sup>43</sup> El Khoury, p. 127.

penser en deux parties. À qui je ressemble le plus? Qui a gagné sur moi? Sur ma voix? Sur mon visage? Sur mon corps qui avance? La France ou l'Algérie?' (p. 19). The abundance of rhetorical questions in this passage, combined with the repetition of the preposition 'sur' and the possessive adjective 'mon', is indicative of her obsessive identity quest throughout the text, and in her wider oeuvre. The verb 'porter' is repeated throughout the narrative, demonstrating how, as Vassallo remarks, 'guilt, suffering and rejection are embodied in the author/narrator',<sup>44</sup> Nina feels responsible for bearing the wounds of the war and believes that society is punishing her for her part in the conflict, even though she was not alive at the time.

It is thus unsurprising that Nina's mixed origins are psychologically damaging for her, and are a cause of tension for both the Algerian and French populations. In Algiers, she and her friend Amine are racially insulted because of their Franco-Algerian background, being jeered at as 'bâtards' (p. 29) while they walk innocently along a beach. They always feel like outsiders, 'encore exclus d'un monde étranger, impossible et fermé' (pp. 55–56), even though they are not 'étrangers', or foreigners, because they have spent most of their lives in Algiers. This exclusion becomes violent when Nina, a young adolescent, is almost kidnapped by an Algerian man when she is playing outside. Although the man does not harm her physically, this incident represents 'le viol de [s]a confiance' (p. 44), symbolising the end of her childhood. Here, Bouraoui's wordplay between the two near-homonyms 'vol' (theft) and 'viol' (rape) is significant. By equating the stealing of Nina's confidence and trust with a sexual attack, the narrative emphasises Nina's racialised and gendered vulnerability: her appearance marks her out for humiliation by Algerians, while her female gender puts her at increased risk of sexual assault in the tense post-war context, even as a young child.

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<sup>44</sup> Vassallo, 'Embodied Memory', p. 194.

Nina's visit to Rennes to stay with her grandparents is no less isolating, which explains why she experiences this second displacement as an exile. Now it is the French who view her as the enemy. On the plane, she reflects on her loneliness as 'une fille non accompagnée' (p. 99). Although she is in a financially privileged position, as her family can afford to buy her and her sister Jami a plane ticket, her journey into exile is nonetheless emotionally and physically challenging. Struggling with her large suitcase as the two girls travel by train to Rennes, she equates the transportation of her material possessions with the displacement of her identity as she acknowledges the difficulty of coping with 'une identité à soulever. Une famille à déplacer, à emporter' (p. 100). Even once they arrive in Rennes, before undergoing a further displacement to their grandparents' holiday home in Saint-Malo, Nina feels unable to settle because she considers her departure as a betrayal of Algiers: 'cette ville est dans le corps. Elle hante. La quitter est une trahison' (p. 91). These sentiments expose her complex relationship with both countries: Nina felt that she had no choice but to leave Algeria, yet no sooner has she left than she wishes to return.

In her analysis of exile in North African women's writing, Pamela Pears deconstructs the dichotomy between the guest and the host, two oppositional concepts which are grouped under the same term in French (*l'hôte*), in Sebbar's *Marguerite* (2007) and Bouraoui's *Garçon manqué*.<sup>45</sup> She argues that while Nina is expected to be the host in Algeria, explicit in which 'is the idea of being at home', because she was brought up there, and the welcomed guest in France where she is staying with her grandparents, she actually feels uncomfortable with either status.<sup>46</sup> She therefore invents her own world in which 'she can be the host *and* the

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<sup>45</sup> Pamela Pears, 'The Guest/Host Dichotomy of "L'Hôte" in Leïla Sebbar's *Marguerite* and Nina Bouraoui's *Garçon manqué*', *Rocky Mountain Review*, 66.1 (2012), 64–75.

<sup>46</sup> Pears, p. 70.



guest' [original emphasis].<sup>47</sup> Pears's argument here is slightly contradictory. She claims that neither label is applicable to the narrator, while attesting simultaneously that Nina lives voluntarily as both the guest and the host, both the dweller and the visitor. Both these meanings of 'l'hôte' imply a sentiment of being accepted; yet in contrast, Nina does not feel welcome anywhere. She is certainly not the host in Algeria where she is shunned for her difference, but neither is she the guest in France because there she is still subject to racial abuse and violence. Instead, Nina is frequently singled out for her difference as the French make cruel remarks about her skin colour and Algerian origins, causing her to wonder where she belongs: 'je ne sais pas si je suis chez moi, ici, en France. Je ne le saurai jamais d'ailleurs' (p. 156). Moreover, in France, she is constantly questioned about Algeria. The French appear to consider the country a distant, strange place, in which people live in poverty: 'il fait toujours chaud là-bas? Et la misère? Elle est belle? Comme au Maroc ou en Tunisie? À peine visible avec le tourisme. Non? Pas de touristes en Algérie? Ah bon? Alors la misère doit être laide' (p. 123). This denigration of Algeria angers Nina, particularly given her desire to return, and she wonders how people can be so prejudiced and narrow-minded about a country they do not even know, particularly a country whose history is so significant for France. This quotation also offers an important insight into French socio-economic attitudes towards poverty and tourism in North Africa. For the French, Algeria is an impoverished, disadvantaged country in which there is no touristic value, unlike in Morocco and Tunisia, which were established tourist centres for French package holidays; since the Arab Spring, however, these naïve and blinkered assumptions have been robustly challenged.

Nina's complex affiliation with both the former coloniser and the colonised stands in sharp contrast to Bhabha's theoretical framework of hybridity. For Bhabha, the association

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<sup>47</sup> Pears, p. 70.

between coloniser and colonised is not binary but slippery and illusory as the two cultures merge into a hybrid space, mutually dependent upon each other. Bhabha's model suggests a relationship of co-dependency between coloniser and colonised which certainly seems applicable in the case of Algeria. Even after legal, political, and military efforts to separate Algeria and France, the two countries remain tightly intertwined. However, whereas Bhabha sees the creation of a cultural and racial hybridity as a positive step, allowing for 'political empowerment' of the formerly colonised peoples,<sup>48</sup> Nina's experience differs. Her hybridity gives her a certain degree of agency because it acts as a catalyst for her creativity, but it also alienates her: 'je suis tout. Je ne suis rien' (p. 20). She is always representative of the 'other': in Algeria, she is accused of being too French, but when she settles in France, it is her Algerian identity which takes prominence. She feels neither wholly Algerian nor wholly French.

Lydie Moudileno reads Nina's identity quest as one specifically located in Brittany because her birthplace is Rennes. In a book chapter exploring postcolonial trajectories to the *province*, Moudileno argues that these journeys break with the notion that Paris is the central converging centre for black, colonial, and postcolonial identities.<sup>49</sup> Defining Brittany as a 'postcolonial province', or a site of migration following the collapse of France's imperial project,<sup>50</sup> she then argues that the narrator's hybridity is complicated by her local status as a 'Bretonne', and so Nina not only has to negotiate her hybrid French/Algerian identity, but she also has to position herself in relation to the region of Brittany. Brittany does play an important role in her family history — it was where her parents met, and where she herself was born — but Nina does not currently feel any strong ties to the region. Moudileno

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<sup>48</sup> Bhabha, p. 4.

<sup>49</sup> Lydie Moudileno, 'Nina Bouraoui's Detoured Journey to the *Métropole*: Paris by Way of Brittany', in *Metropolitan Mosaics and Melting-Pots: Paris and Montreal in Francophone Literatures*, ed. by Pascale De Souza and H. Adlai Murdoch (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), pp. 204–22.

<sup>50</sup> Moudileno, p. 206.

disagrees, suggesting that returning to Brittany offers her a ‘reconciliation with the familial territory of the local which grants the expatriate the cultural anchoring she needs in order to tackle the complexities of her difference’.<sup>51</sup> Brittany, however, is not ‘local’ to Nina. She only lived in Rennes for a few months before moving to Algiers, and it is unclear in the text how regularly she goes back to visit her maternal grandparents. The repetition of the phrase ‘je suis à Rennes’ (p. 99) implies her total disorientation as she is constantly forced to remind herself of her current location. Moreover, she regards the landscape, which is so different to Algiers, as bleak, hostile, ‘glaciale, immense’ (p. 93). Her physical appearance makes her stand out at the beach once more, rendering her uncomfortable and embarrassed: ‘je suis si différente sur cette plage-là. Ça se voit tout de suite’ (p. 156). She thus locates herself on the periphery of Brittany, inhabiting the ‘interstitial spaces’ between Algeria and France, but more specifically between Algiers and Brittany. Rather than providing her with political empowerment and a cultural grounding, as Moudileno implies in the above quotation, her return to Rennes only serves to emphasise her position ‘in-between’ the two regions, which constantly unsettles and alienates her.

Nina’s situation also contradicts Bhabha’s claim that ‘interstitial spaces’ are not hierarchical,<sup>52</sup> because Nina is always reminded her of her inferiority. In Algeria, she is depicted as the colonising enemy, and in France her status as ‘half-Algerian’ represents the formerly colonised, subjugated peoples. She is a constant, uncomfortable reminder of the connections and conflicts which bind France and Algeria together. In *Mes mauvaises pensées*, these sentiments of inadequacy continue to haunt the narrator, who claims that her mixed Franco-Algerian origins are at the root of her psychological troubles. She tells her psychotherapist that:

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<sup>51</sup> Moudileno, pp. 210–11.

<sup>52</sup> Bhabha, p. 5.

c'est toujours cette histoire, au fond de moi, de venir de deux familles que tout oppose, les Français et les Algériens. Il y a ces deux flux en moi, que je ne pourrai jamais diviser, je crois n'être d'aucun camp. Je suis seule avec mon corps (p. 52).

This passage foregrounds the loneliness provoked by her 'deux flux'; rather than experiencing her hybridity as a positive phenomenon which allows her to access two cultures, she is overwhelmed by the feeling that she is always inferior to the dominant group in both France and Algeria. The war imagery in this passage is noticeable; she regards the French and the Algerians as being on contrasting sides, emphasising opposition rather than unity, and does not position herself in any political 'camp'. She thus stands in opposition to critics who agree with Bhabha that, as Haj Yazdiha explains, 'hybridity has the ability to empower marginalised collectives and deconstruct bounded labels'.<sup>53</sup> Instead, her hybridity reinforces these labels by demonstrating her frustration at not corresponding neatly to these different identitarian categories.<sup>54</sup>

It is Nina's uncomfortable relationship with her own hybridity that forces her to question where she belongs. Durham Peters argues that exile involves a 'pining for home'.<sup>55</sup> He claims that all those who have been forced to leave their land of origin, regardless of the circumstances of their departure, are nostalgic for a return, even if this return is impossible

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<sup>53</sup> Haj Yazdiha, 'Conceptualizing Hybridity: Deconstructing Boundaries through the Hybrid', *Formations*, 1.1 (2010), 31–38 (p. 36).

<sup>54</sup> Nina's racial hybridity also causes her to be rejected by her French family. El Khoury analyses Nina's rejection by her grandfather in a scene in *Mes mauvaises pensées*, in which, at a family dinner at a restaurant, she orders a large pig's trotter (p. 199). Her grandfather scolds her when she is unable to eat it, having already warned her not to order the dish: 'il m'en veut, et il me punit, et je me couche sans dîner' (p. 199). For El Khoury, 'Bouraoui's inability to ingest the pork — an animal whose consumption is forbidden under Islamic dietary laws, and associated with French cuisine — represents a symbolic resistance: she cannot swallow a certain France's imperialism which rejects difference and is embodied by her grandfather' (p. 131). Although there is no textual indication that Nina's Algerian family subscribe to Islam, El Khoury's analysis does point out how lonely Nina's hybridity makes her feel because she can never fully identify with the two sides of her family.

<sup>55</sup> John Durham Peters, 'Exile, Nomadism, and Diaspora: The Stakes of Mobility in the Western Canon', in *Home, Exile, Homeland: Film, Media, and the Politics of Place*, ed. by Hamid Nacify (New York; London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 17–41 (p. 20).

because their home is ‘no longer safely habitable’.<sup>56</sup> *Garçon manqué* presents an intriguing challenge to such theories. Nina feels more at ease with herself and her surroundings during her summer trip to Rome. In Italy, she finds the freedom to discover herself and feels liberated: ‘je n’étais plus française. Je n’étais plus algérienne. Je n’étais même plus la fille de ma mère. J’étais moi’ (p. 184). The Italian gaze does not read into Nina the entangled historical and social baggage for which she is relentlessly scrutinised in France and Algeria. Liberated from the Franco-Algerian tensions, in this neutral space, she is finally released from the violent historical burden of her Franco-Algerian heritage. Significantly, it is also here that Nina has the freedom to explore her gendered and sexual identity without the weight of familial and social pressures. She realises that she is no longer defined by what she is or is not, but she can simply *be*, and her inherent marginality no longer troubles her. Yet this optimistic chapter, in which Nina finally gains agency over her life and finds somewhere to call home, even if only for a short period of time, does not completely shut down the themes of exile and alienation in the text because it is unlikely that her lifelong struggles to reconcile her French and Algerian identities can be adequately resolved by a short summer vacation. Moreover, Nina returns to Algeria following this apparent revelation in Rome, as she explains to Amine (p. 187). Beyond *Garçon manqué*, the narrator decides as an adult to make France her home (she makes various references in *Mes mauvaises pensées* to well-known Parisian streets and landmarks, such as rue Beaubourg (p. 14), implying that she now lives permanently in Paris). It seems, then, that sub-consciously she still desires to belong to both France and Algeria, contradicting her claim that she is not tied to these national affiliations. In *The Narrative Mediterranean: Beyond France and the Maghreb* (2014), Claudia Esposito plays on the word ‘médi-terra-née’ to argue that Nina’s identity is not associated with either

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<sup>56</sup> Durham Peters, p. 19.

France or Algeria; rather, it is formed in the Mediterranean, in the middle ground between both countries.<sup>57</sup> For Esposito, the sea acts as a space of safety, liberating Nina because she is ‘free to invent herself’ and be reborn, far from both French and Algerian constraints.<sup>58</sup> However, if Nina’s freedom is located in an in-between space between France, Italy, and Algeria, she has not eschewed the dichotomy of French or Algerian nationality. Her narrator’s identity remains defined by her proximity to, or distance from, the two locations. Movement beyond French and Algerian borders is thus not as emancipating as Esposito claims.

Even when removed from the problematic spaces of Algeria and France, then, Nina still feels alienated, conforming to Said’s assertion in ‘Reflections on Exile’ (2001) that exile ‘can never be surmounted’.<sup>59</sup> She is always haunted by the sentiment of being uprooted. In this way, *Garçon manqué* corresponds to other immigrant narratives that explore the Franco-Algerian context, such as *Journal ‘Nationalité, immigré(e)’* (1987) by Sakinna Boukhedenna<sup>60</sup> and *Shérazade: 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts* (1982) by Sebbar.<sup>61</sup> Displacement is depicted differently in the two texts: in Boukhedenna’s semi-autobiographical text, the narrator-protagonist Sakinna flees racial discrimination in France and returns to Algeria where she is still met with hostility, while Sebbar’s novel remains within French borders and tells the story of Shérazade, a young woman of Algerian origin who runs away from her family to escape to Paris. Both texts, however, like *Garçon manqué*, ‘explore the theme of “double exile”’, examining how immigrants, particularly women, attempt to ‘negotiate traditional Arab culture, while also integrating into French society’.

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<sup>57</sup> Claudia Esposito, *The Narrative Mediterranean: Beyond France and the Maghreb* (Lanham, MD; Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2014), p. 73.

<sup>58</sup> Esposito, p. 75.

<sup>59</sup> Edward W. Said, ‘Reflections on Exile’, in *Reflections on Exile: And Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London: Granta Books, 2001), pp. 173–86 (p. 173).

<sup>60</sup> Sakinna Boukhedenna, *Journal ‘Nationalité, immigré(e)’* (Paris: Éditions L’Harmattan, 1987).

<sup>61</sup> Leïla Sebbar, *Shérazade: 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 1982).

according to Madelaine Hron.<sup>62</sup> All three women writers analyse the difficulties of belonging simultaneously to both cultures.

*Le Jour* and *Mes mauvaises pensées* move the discussion of trauma in a different direction by drawing attention to the loss provoked by exile. In *Mes mauvaises pensées*, the narrator reflects on the material possessions she is forced to leave behind when she moves to France: ‘je laisse ma chambre d’Alger, je laisse mes livres, je laisse mes vêtements, je laisse les sables et la mer, Je laisse le vent et les fleurs, [...], je laisse ma première vie’ (p. 97). While the striking anaphoric repetition of the phrase ‘je laisse’ reinforces her feelings of being uprooted, it is telling that the phrases describing her belongings are given a more prominent position in the sentence than those describing Algeria, thereby suggesting that she is more nostalgic for her lost possessions than for her personal landscape. This passage nuances Elsa Laflamme’s argument about exile provoking ‘une perte de soi’ for the narrator’.<sup>63</sup> According to Laflamme, exile is highly traumatic in the text because it causes the narrator to lose her roots and the parameters by which to define her identity, but as the above passage demonstrates, she seems more concerned with her material losses, equating the loss of her ‘première vie’ with abandoning her clothes and books.

*Le Jour* offers a more poignant reflection on the loss provoked by exile. Although the narrator recognises that this loss is shared by all Algerians because the earthquake causes them to ‘perdre, l’enfance. Perdre, le pays. Perdre, les lieux’ (p. 53), her own exile is particularly painful because of her deep connection with the Algerian landscape. Throughout the text, the possessive adjective ‘mon’ is contrasted with destructive imagery as she loses ownership of her land. The text is punctured by short, staccato sentences which describe her

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<sup>62</sup> Madelaine Hron, *Translating Pain: Immigrant Suffering in Literature and Culture* (Toronto; Buffalo, NY; London: University of Toronto Press, 2009), p. 107.

<sup>63</sup> Elsa Laflamme, “‘Il faut déconstruire avant de construire’: *Mes mauvaises pensées* de Nina Bouraoui”, *Spirale: arts, lettres, sciences humaines*, 209 (July–August 2006), 48–49 (p. 49).

exile across Algeria in an attempt to escape from the devastation caused by the earthquake: ‘je cours. Je fuis’ (p. 13). The brevity of these sentences conveys the speed and urgency of the young narrator’s flight and reflects her distress at being displaced from her home because she is unable to articulate her emotions adequately. Her identity is deeply embedded within the Algerian landscape, rendering her exile away from her beloved home all the more traumatic. She realises that she is ‘marquée, à jamais’ (p. 9) by her experience of exile, suggesting that her exile is a permanent condition of trauma which she will never overcome. Reading the earthquake as an allegory for the ‘décennie noire’ adds an additional layer of trauma to exile in the text. During the conflict, communities were torn apart by brutal fighting and families were forcibly displaced across Algeria in search of safety; Bouraoui is therefore suggesting a similar fate for her narrative surrogate and her family.

### **Exile: A Liberating Condition?**

Despite this intense focus on exile as a source of trauma which uproots the narrative persona into a state of homelessness, *Le Jour*, *Garçon manqué*, and *Mes mauvaises pensées* also all underscore that exile may be positive and life-affirming. Focusing specifically on Canadian-born novelist Nancy Huston, Diana Holmes posits that for many women writers, exile means ‘both pleasure and pain, gain and loss’;<sup>64</sup> the suffering provoked by being forced to abandon homes, families, and material possessions and settle in a new, unfamiliar land is offset by the possibilities for freedom and creativity which exile offers. Bouraoui’s three texts reveal that she refuses to conform neatly to definitions which posit exile as either an entirely beneficial or distressing condition.

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<sup>64</sup> Diana Holmes, ‘No Common Places: Exile as Loss and Gain in the Work of Nancy Huston and Other Writers from Elsewhere’, *Dalhousie French Studies*, 93 (2010), 33–42 (p. 41).



Firstly, exile succeeds in removing the narrator from natural catastrophes and human violence. In *Garçon manqué*, attacks upon Nina and her family become increasingly vicious as tensions escalate after independence: they are sent anonymous parcels of poisoned food, stones are thrown at them, and a bucket of urine is thrown over Nina's head as 'une punition pour la fille de la Française' (p. 81). Here, she is targeted not only for her French heritage but also for her gender; her femininity makes her as much of a victim as her Frenchness. These attacks cause her to realise that she 'doi[t] partir. D'abord l'été' in order to 'fuir le rêve des massacres. Le rêve d'acharnements. Fuir toutes les armes blanches qui brillent dans la nuit' (p. 87). Violence towards the French is so deeply embedded within the Algerian consciousness that Nina dreams about being threatened with the 'armes blanches' which were used during the war. She has internalised this hostility and believes that her only option is to flee Algeria. There is also a gendered and sexual element to her exile, as the 'armes blanches' function on a deeper level as phallic symbols. She is not only escaping from Algeria's historical burden but also from threats of sexual violence against women. This gendered and sexual violence to which Nina is subjected on a daily basis pervades patriarchal Algerian society. In this instance, exile is not a trope of 'loss in relation to "home"', as Hanne argues,<sup>65</sup> but rather, it emerges as one of freedom and protection. She realises that exile is the only option left for her if she is to survive the bloody aftermath of the Algerian War of Independence and is to preserve her own independent sexuality. For Nina, exile represents what Devleena Ghosh terms 'a life saving necessity'.<sup>66</sup>

In *Le Jour*, exile indeed saves the narrator's life, even though she feels lost and alone as she tries to find her way to safety. Her body becomes elided with the land which has been

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<sup>65</sup> Michael Hanne, 'Creativity and Exile: An Introduction', in *Creativity in Exile*, ed. by Michael Hanne (Amsterdam; New York: Éditions Rodopi, 2004), pp. 1–12 (p. 4).

<sup>66</sup> Devleena Ghosh, 'Coda: Eleven Stars Over the Last Moments of Andalusia', in *Exile Cultures, Misplaced Identities*, ed. by Paul Allatson and Jo McCormack (Amsterdam; New York: Éditions Rodopi, 2008), pp. 277–87 (p. 278).

destroyed by the earthquake, and so she undergoes her own internal rupture. She imagines the earthquake creating a scission within her, making her 'other': 'le séisme forme déjà l'exil et la différence. Il traverse le corps et impose une scission. Il dénature et fonde une autre origine. Il modifie les naissances. Il est immédiat et profond. Je deviens une autre' (p. 61). The repetition of the masculine subject pronoun 'il', demonstrates the power and control the earthquake has over her body, and her subsequent lack of agency in this process. Moreover, she likens the earthquake to an act of physical violence, in terms which imply the sexualised violence of rape:

je sens une main sur ma nuque. Elle serre et surprend. Elle modifie la couleur et le volume. Elle étrangle. Je résiste. Elle force sa prise. Je cède à sa violence. Elle relâche, à peine. Je reconnais la puissance d'un homme, ses ongles, ses doigts et son poignet (p. 27).

Exile, therefore, is not simply a means for her to escape from the violent Algerian landscape; it is also a way to remove herself from the violence of patriarchal Algerian society. The striking anaphora 'elle... je...' reinforces the power struggle at play. The assault carried out by the man on the young girl represents the control the earthquake has over the fragile landscape. Exploiting the inherent gendering in the French language, the object which inflicts violence, 'la main', is feminine, until it is revealed as masculine. 'Elle', replacing 'la main' of the man who assaults her, is always accompanied by a powerful verb of action, whereas 'je' is followed by a verb of reaction as she meekly succumbs to his violence. Rosie MacLachlan suggests that this imagery may allude to Algeria's attempt to escape from France's colonial grip because the man represents 'the dynamic of imperial force as a strong, masculine, dominating presence, overempowering the weak, feminised, and colonised land'.<sup>67</sup> Yet this analysis posits the earthquake as an allusion to Algeria's civil war because of the religious references throughout the text, and so a colonial reading is not appropriate here. Rather, as

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<sup>67</sup> Rosie MacLachlan, *Nina Bouraoui, Autofiction and the Search for Selfhood* (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2016), p. 87.

Laura Loth suggests, ‘by juxtaposing a very real natural catastrophe with other traumatic events, such as rape, Bouraoui points to the pervasive presence of trauma in daily life’.<sup>68</sup> A connection can also be made here with the ‘évènement’, or near-rape, which occurred in *Garçon manqué* (p. 44), a further reminder that the three texts need to be read together in order to gain a more complete understanding of exile in Bouraoui’s work. Although a catalyst of trauma, then, exile can also be a means to escape from trauma. Exile physically removes the narrator from the site of violence and ensures her safety, even though she finds it difficult to leave her home behind. She is forced to mature and become more independent in her search for safety. Exile thus represents her passage from childhood to adulthood: ‘j’apprends à être une femme’ (p. 83). While she equates the losing of her beloved landscape with the loss of her childhood, as she remarks that ‘le séisme brûle [s]on enfance’ (p. 39), exile also represents the opportunity to become independent and self-sufficient. She realises that just as Algeria will be rebuilt, she will also survive the changes in her life: she ‘quitte [s]a fragilité’ (p. 82) and, despite the forced loss of her innocence, she becomes a strong, courageous, and resistant young woman.

Bouraoui’s three texts all demonstrate that while exile is traumatic, isolating, and alienating, it also enables Bouraoui’s narrative persona to reinvent herself repeatedly, to be creative, and to avoid being defined within strict parameters. The exilic role of language and writing, particularly in *Mes mauvaises pensées*, acts as an ongoing mechanism of self-discovery as the narrator recovers painful, repressed memories through writing: ‘l’écriture m’a transformé, je crois, je ne suis plus la même’ (p. 144). Despite their potential as a source of liberation and hope, though, these representations of exile become all the more traumatic

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<sup>68</sup> Laura Loth, ‘Traumatic Landscapes: Earthquakes and Identity in Franco-Algerian Fiction by Maïssa Bey and Nina Bouraoui’, *Research in African Literatures*, 47.1 (2016), 21–38 (p. 32).

when their historical resonances are taken into account because they are replicated on such a wide scale during Algeria's recent bloody history.

### **Gendered and Sexual Exile**

One of the most striking elements of Bouraoui's writing on exile is her emphasis on how gender and sexuality intersects with exile. Her literature thus acts as a reminder, as Hron contends, that 'exile also carries metaphorical connotations — as a pervasive feeling of alienation, estrangement, or angst' which are associated with categories of otherness.<sup>69</sup> Exile is not always a geographical movement: for Bouraoui's heroine, exile also constitutes a psychological state of alienation, brought about by her failure to adapt to French and Algerian norms of gender and sexuality. In 'Un nouveau type d'intellectuel: le dissident' (1977), Kristeva argues that women in particular can experience a form of exile without any territorial displacement as they are always confined within the constraints of their gender and are inherently excluded from male-dominated society.<sup>70</sup> Furthermore, in her analysis of the inner exile experienced by female protagonists in post-war Spanish novels written by women, Zatlin argues that nonconformist women in fact undergo two metaphorical exiles: 'a self-conscious exile, the adolescent heroine has a clear sense of being excluded from the relative freedom of masculine culture but also of being alienated, socially and politically, from acceptable feminine culture'.<sup>71</sup> She regards these exiled people as 'solitary individual[s]' who do not fit in anywhere and are rejected by both masculine and feminine norms, retreating

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<sup>69</sup> Hron, p. 12.

<sup>70</sup> Julia Kristeva, 'Un nouveau type d'intellectuel: le dissident', *Tel Quel*, 74 (Winter 1977), 3–8.

<sup>71</sup> Phyllis Zatlin, 'Passivity and Immobility: Patterns of Inner Exile in Postwar Spanish Novels Written by Women', *Letras Femeninas*, 14.1–2 (1988), 3–9 (p. 3).

within themselves until they lose ‘all communication with the outside world’ and suffer from passivity, immobility, and madness.<sup>72</sup>

Bouraoui’s heroine exemplifies similar sentiments of exclusion because of her inability to conform to French and Algerian stereotypes of masculinity and femininity. Her ‘gender trouble’, to echo the title of Judith Butler’s foundational text on gender performativity, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990),<sup>73</sup> is particularly prominent in *Garçon manqué*. In Algeria, Nina enjoys her status as a tomboy, and it is obviously an attempt to emulate her father whom she greatly admires. She replaces him as head of the family when he goes away to Washington with work: he himself tells her that ‘tu veilleras sur la maison’ in his absence (p. 50). Moreover, she is always chosen to be on the boys’ team when playing football at school, admitting that she ‘joue contre [s]on camp’ (p. 17). She thus willingly betrays her femininity by participating in what are deemed as ‘masculine’ pursuits, on a par with her male peers — and with their recognition. Furthermore, she alters her appearance to look more like a boy, cutting her hair, wearing the jeans her father brought back for her from America, and assuming a masculine gait in order to ‘dénature [s]on corps féminin’ (p. 49). Her father is complicit in her adoption of masculine traits and participates in the subversion of her gender. He not only buys her clothes which, in 1970s Algeria, were associated with masculinity, but he also teaches her masculine pursuits, such as football.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, he ‘détourne [s]a fragilité’ by giving her the nickname ‘Brio’ (p. 24). Yet she actively ‘prend[] un autre prénom, Ahmed’ (p. 15), preferring this powerful and virile

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<sup>72</sup> Zatlin, p. 3.

<sup>73</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York; London: Routledge, 1990).

<sup>74</sup> As Vince explains, ‘a repressive, patriarchal state which has sought to instrumentalise women, and a socially conservative society, have both undeniably characterised post-independence Algeria’ (p. 253). In the wake of the war, in which Algerian women participated alongside men, Algeria sought to return to a patriarchal society in which men were dominant and women were subordinate. This is exemplified in *Garçon manqué* by the very rigid gender divisions at play, even at the level of appearance. Only boys are allowed to wear trousers; girls, in contrast, are expected to have long hair and wear skirts and dresses (p. 15).

name to ‘Brio’ which her father chooses for her. Nina describes how she moves ‘de Yasmina à Nina. De Nina à Ahmed. D’Ahmed à Brio’, comparing her multiple appellations to ‘un assassinat’ (p. 60) because her identity is being violently renegotiated, at times against her will. Martine Fernandes claims that the multiple names Nina adopts articulate her ‘multiplicité culturelle’ because they denote both her French and Algerian identity.<sup>75</sup> Yet none of her names are typically French, despite Adrienne Angelo’s assertion that Nina is her ‘French’ identity.<sup>76</sup> Although ‘Nina’ is the least Arabic, it is also not a common French name; ‘Yasmina’ and ‘Ahmed’, in contrast, are traditional Algerian Arabic names.<sup>77</sup> Her names, therefore, foreground her Algerian identity over her French identity, but they also represent her gendered multiplicity, as she adopts two girls’ names and two boys’ names. She does not conform to the expectations of Algerian society about how a girl should behave, and so she actively decides to ‘perform’, in Butler’s terms, like a boy.

Attignol Salvodon reads Nina’s desire to become a man as evidence of a ‘desire for freedom’, arguing that the narrator longs for another existence in which she is not held back, restricted, or exiled by her female gender.<sup>78</sup> This is particularly relevant in patriarchal Algeria where ‘être un homme en Algérie c’est devenir invisible’ (p. 37). Women, on the contrary, are only too visible because they are constantly judged and objectified by men. Adopting a masculine persona gives Nina the ability to become invisible, far from men’s piercing gaze.

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<sup>75</sup> Martine Fernandes, ‘Confessions d’une enfant du siècle: Nina Bouraoui ou la “bâtarde” dans *Garçon manqué* et *La Vie heureuse*’, *L’Esprit Créateur*, 45.1 (2005), 67–78 (p. 69).

<sup>76</sup> In ‘Vision, Voice, and the Female Body: Nina Bouraoui’s Sites/Sights of Resistance’, in *Francophone Women: Between Visibility and Invisibility*, ed. by Cybelle H. McFadden and Sandrine F. Teixidor (New York: Peter Lang, 2010), pp. 77–98, Adrienne Angelo argues that the narrator’s female names change depending on her location: she is called Nina, her French name, in France; and Yasmina, the Algerian equivalent, when living in Algiers (p. 88). However, Nina is not a typically French name, nor is Yasmina the corresponding Algerian name. Moreover, there is no explicit relationship between her name and her location in *Garçon manqué*: at times, she is called Nina, rather than Yasmina, when living in Algeria (for example, p. 52).

<sup>77</sup> ‘Yasmina’ is the Arabic equivalent of the Persian name ‘Jasmine’. See Sharifa Zawawi, *African Muslim Names: Images and Identities* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1998), p. 179. ‘Ahmed’ is an alternative spelling of ‘Ahmad’, one of the Islamic prophet Muhammad’s many names. It means ‘the most praised’. See Salahuddin Ahmed, *A Dictionary of Muslim Names* (London: C. Hurst and Co. Publishers, 1999), p. 9.

<sup>78</sup> Attignol Salvodon, p. 65.

However, Bouraoui's position in the text, and indeed Attignol Salvodon's reading of it, is problematic because it reinforces the gendered stereotypes which equate masculinity with strength, power, and freedom. By dressing and behaving like a boy in order to be liberated, Nina is not overturning the imposed gender norms, as Attignol Salvodon suggests,<sup>79</sup> but rather, is playing into them.

Nina continues to operate within these binaries in France, but here she must hide her masculine side because '[s]a grand-mère aime les vraies filles' (p. 92). Seeking her grandparents' approval, she alters her appearance again, wearing her hair long and dressing in skirts and dresses because she realises that 'les jeans, les shorts, les maillots en éponge, les claquettes, les cheveux ébouriffés, ça va pour ici. Pas pour la France' (p. 92). This exaggerated femininity does not sit well with Nina, though, and so she now feels 'une fille ratée' (p. 107), a phrase which inverts and plays with the title of the text, 'garçon manqué'.<sup>80</sup> The adjectives 'ratée' and 'manqué' both conjure negative connotations of failure and disappointment. As Ann-Sofie Persson remarks, the two gender labels suggest that 'Nina ne réussit à être ni l'un ni l'autre'.<sup>81</sup> Nina embodies Zatin's theory of gendered exile, since she does not conform to the models of masculinity or femininity which are available to her, either in France or in Algeria.

Her identity remains bound to these gender labels in France, though, because by underscoring her frustration at not conforming to stereotypes of masculinity and femininity, she is actually perpetuating these stereotypes, rather than moving beyond or eradicating them.

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<sup>79</sup> Attignol Salvodon claims that Nina 'destabilise[s] the conventions of gender in order to imagine another kind of existence' (p. 65), just as, according to the critic, she also undoes the norms associated with her cultural identity.

<sup>80</sup> As MacLachlan notes, 'garçon manqué' is only used by her French grandmother in the narrative, and not by Nina herself (except in the title of the book). This symbolises, according to MacLachlan, that 'once again, it is other people's language which attempts to restrictively characterise Nina's identity' (p. 42). In other words, Nina lacks the agency to determine her own identity.

<sup>81</sup> Ann-Sofie Persson, 'Pluralité et fragmentation dans *Garçon manqué* de Nina Bouraoui', in *This "Self" Which Is Not One*, ed. by Natalie Edwards and Christopher Hogarth (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), pp. 15–33 (p. 21).

Fernandes interprets the creation of Nina's masculine double Amine as a means for Bouraoui to subvert stereotypes of what it means to be a man or a woman in both Algeria and France. She argues that Bouraoui's characters exemplify Butler's notion of performing gender because they demonstrate that categories of gender are not rigid and fixed but fluid and mobile.<sup>82</sup> Fernandes claims that Bouraoui plays with masculinity and femininity in the two characters as Nina's exaggerated masculinity contrasts with Amine's sensitivity, revealing that 'la masculinité n'est pas forcément liée aux hommes'.<sup>83</sup> On a superficial level, Amine is Nina's best friend. The two young children play together until Amine's mother wants to separate them because she is afraid her son will be contaminated by Nina's homosexuality (p. 61). This is the first time Nina has heard the word 'homosexuel'; she does not understand it and presumes that there must be something wrong with her. Nina addresses Amine directly throughout the text using the second-person subject pronoun 'tu', but it is clear that she is actually examining herself. For instance, when he discusses his desires to move to France, she tells him that she will never be accepted there, just as he is not fully integrated into Algerian society: 'en France tu ne seras pas un métis. Ta peau est blanche mais tes cheveux sont trop noirs. En France tu ne seras pas un bon Arabe. Tu ne seras rien' (p. 38). This quotation forebodes Nina's own failure to be accepted in France when she moves to Rennes later in the text.

However, the very act of creating a masculine double for her female character is a further indication that Bouraoui operates within the conventional gender norms, in which masculinity is equated to power and resistance, and femininity to meekness, oppression, and submission. A problematic outcome of this behaviour is that the text implies that women can only become emancipated by adopting male characteristics. Any agency Bouraoui might have

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<sup>82</sup> Fernandes, p. 70.

<sup>83</sup> Fernandes, p. 70.



granted her female protagonist by blurring the differences between definitions of masculinity and femininity is thus immediately undermined. Moreover, through the role reversal between Nina and Amine, in which Nina performs boyhood and Amine girlhood, the heterosexual norm remains intact. Nina is now the active male who desires the submissive female: ‘ainsi, je quitte son ombre. Ainsi, je prends sa force. Je protégerai toujours Amine’ (p. 18). Although, as Persson remarks, ‘chiasmically cross-gendered, Amine and Nina can be seen to subvert the idea of continuity between anatomical sex and acquired gender’,<sup>84</sup> the characters are still operating within a heteronormative society. They are complicit in perpetuating the notion that same-sex desire is morally wrong, and indeed, Nina becomes masculinised not only in a bid for greater freedom, as Attignol Salvodon claims, but also to conceal and disguise her homosexual desires.

As *Garçon manqué* draws to its conclusion, however, Nina appears to embrace her feminine identity. As she explains to Amine on her return from Rome, she now willingly exposes her femininity and pays more attention to her physical appearance. Amine hardly recognises her, but his mother approves of the changes: ‘ta mère m’a trouvée belle. Elle l’a dit. Plusieurs fois’ (p. 187). Nina has become more comfortable with her status as a young woman and more reconciled to the idea of a homosexual feminine identity, just as she has also seemingly reconciled her struggles about her national identity. However, the text ends rather enigmatically as Nina admits that ‘il restera toujours une trace de toi, Amine. Sur ma peau. Un petit tatouage bleu, comme le ciel d’Alger’ (pp. 188–89). On one level, this quotation is an endearing recognition of her close friendship with Amine, and of her strong bond with Algiers. If, however, as critics such as Trudy Agar-Mendousse suggest, Amine acts as the

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<sup>84</sup> Ann-Sofie Persson, ‘Performative Bodies in Nina Bouraoui’s *Garçon manqué*’, in *The Body in Francophone Literature: Historical, Thematic and Aesthetic Perspectives*, ed. by El Hadji Malick Ndiaye and Moussa Sow (Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Company, 2016), pp. 84–95 (pp. 90–91).

narrator's male double,<sup>85</sup> what underlies this passage is the idea that Nina will never eradicate her masculine identity but will always be reminded of its presence. She remains troubled by her desires to be both masculine and feminine.

In *Mes mauvaises pensées*, the narrator-protagonist continues to articulate her refusal to conform to traditional models of masculinity and femininity. The text presents episodes which will be familiar to the reader of *Garçon manqué*. When remembering a summer in France with her male cousin, she remarks that people assumed she was his brother because she has had 'longtemps cette relation avec les garçons, l'image-miroir' (p. 38). Moreover, while she has always respected her father, this admiration is taken to the extreme when she replaces him as head of the family while he remains in Algeria, imitating how he acts, speaks, and dresses: 'je prends mon père pour modèle', quite literally (p. 117). These unique relationships with male family members contribute to her alienation because they differ widely from social norms for women.

The motif of drowning in *Mes mauvaises pensées* is a further indicator of her desired masculinity. She frequently recalls an incident when she may have tried to drown a young girl in a swimming pool when she was staying with Madame B. in Algeria because she is jealous that the girl has captured the attentions of the older woman. The details of the incident are vague, but it is implied that it was the narrator who pushed the girl into the pool and refused to pull her out (p. 132). This episode reveals the narrator's overwhelming confusion and fear about her homosexual desires which, until now, she has been forced to conceal and suppress. Here, *Mes mauvaises pensées* responds to a discussion of drowning in *Garçon manqué*. Nina saves a young woman named Paola from drowning in the sea (p. 36), after remembering how

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<sup>85</sup> Trudy Agar-Mendousse, 'Fracturing the Self: Violence and Identity in Franco-Algerian Writing', in *Violent Depictions: Representing Violence across Cultures*, ed. by Susanna Scarparo and Sarah McDonald (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2006), pp. 18–31 (p. 22). Agar-Mendousse draws a parallel between *Le Jour* and *Garçon manqué* because in both texts the narrator takes control of her male double: 'she steals Amine's trousers in an attempt to take on his gender, and bleeds when Arslan [in *Le Jour*] is circumcised' (p. 22).

her father had tried in vain to save a young Algerian man from drowning (p. 14). Her father is a role model for her and she endeavours to become more masculine in her appearance and behaviour to emulate him. The fact that she later becomes the perpetrator in subsequent drowning incidents suggests a desire to become even more aggressive and virile in order to overcompensate for her femininity.

*Mes mauvaises pensées* also addresses issues of sexuality in a more explicit manner than *Garçon manqué*. The older, more mature narrator describes her homosexual desires and her attraction to her female psychotherapist, admitting that ‘vous êtes jolie et douce’ (p. 13). Although she is becoming increasingly comfortable with her lesbianism, discussing encounters with her lovers honestly and openly, her sexuality still others her to a certain extent. Her family, particularly her grandparents, do not approve of her lifestyle, a fact which preoccupies her: ‘je ne sais pas si mes grands-parents ont honte de ce que je suis’ (p. 158). She feels overwhelmed with guilt which ‘descend en [elle] comme une pierre dans l’eau’ (p. 95) for disappointing her family. While she herself is becoming more confident with her sexual identity, then, she appears to contribute to the othering of those around her who still subscribe to the ideals of a heteronormative society.

In his examination of dissident desire expressed by Maghrebi writers, William J. Spurlin comments that Bouraoui never uses the adjective ‘lesbienne’ to describe her narrator in *Mes mauvaises pensées*, but that ‘the very act of writing attempts to address and name the struggle to negotiate new forms of sexual subjectivity, while, at the same time, the struggle to write and sexual struggles are inextricably intertwined’.<sup>86</sup> In this quotation Spurlin not only points to the role of writing in the creation of Bouraoui’s subjectivity, but he also makes an important remark about how the author invents new ways to formulate her sexuality. For

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<sup>86</sup> William J. Spurlin, ‘Contested Borders: Cultural Translation and Queer Politics in Contemporary Francophone Writing from the Maghreb’, *Research in African Literatures*, 47.2 (2016), 104–20 (p. 117).

Spurlin, the fact that Bouraoui moves away from defining her sexuality in very rigid terms liberates her because it allows her to conceive of her sexuality on her own terms, rather than adhering to labels imposed on her by others. However, it could also be argued that by refusing to define her sexuality in concrete terms, Bouraoui propagates the stereotypes she tries to denounce: the narrative persona does not proudly proclaim her sexuality, suggesting that subconsciously she still feels ashamed or afraid of it.

Parallels can be drawn between the development of Bouraoui's ideas as she progresses through her writing career and the maturation of her narrator throughout her texts. The narrator appears more confident in accepting her issues of gender and sexuality as she grows older, becoming 'increasingly at peace with her childhood, her exile and her sexuality', as Agar-Mendousse concludes.<sup>87</sup> In a similar vein, Bouraoui becomes more successful at distorting social stereotypes through her literature the more she writes. Her character's promising progress is illustrated by the specific changes in the author's unique writing style. The emotive appeal of *Le Jour* and *Garçon manqué* arises from her use of the present tense for narration and her characteristically short, staccato sentences which are repeated throughout (for instance, in *Le Jour*, the structure 'ma terre tremble' appears on p. 9, p. 11, and p. 46). These characteristics depict the narrator's young age and lack of verbal maturity. In other words, as Agar-Mendousse comments in an earlier publication on the aesthetics of Franco-Algerian writing, 'Bouraoui produces writing of a singular, creative violence' in an attempt to renegotiate her complex identity.<sup>88</sup> The literary qualities of *Mes mauvaises pensées* are very different: chapter breaks are entirely absent and the single paragraph which makes up the narrative is composed of long, convoluted sentences which often repeat each other. At

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<sup>87</sup> Trudy Agar-Mendousse, 'A Fine Risk: Illicit Love in Djébar and Bouraoui', in *Women Taking Risks in Contemporary Autobiographical Narratives*, ed. by Anna Rocca and Kenneth Reeds (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), pp. 21–32 (p. 32).

<sup>88</sup> Agar-Mendousse, 'Fracturing the Self', p. 19.

times, sentences span pages as clauses are woven together to form a creative, layered text. Moreover, punctuation is sporadic as commas and semi-colons replace full stops. These long, winding sentences emphasise the orality of the narrative and suggest that while the narrator's identity struggles are initially incessant and all-consuming, she finally finds the phrases to articulate her complex problems.

The texts Bouraoui publishes after *Mes mauvaises pensées* are much more fictional in nature, and Leek reads this as an indication that her writing has 'allowed her to attain some sense of closure in relation to the past'.<sup>89</sup> Although *Avant les hommes* (2007), *Appelez-moi par mon prénom* (2008), and *Nos baisers sont des adieux* (2010) sit within the autobiographical genre, they show more affinities with fictional works than the three texts analysed here: new characters are introduced and events seem to differ from Bouraoui's lived experience as related in her earlier work and in interviews.<sup>90</sup> Bouraoui's latest works, *Standard* (2014) and *Beaux rivages* (2016), fit accurately within the category of novel rather than autobiography.<sup>91</sup> *Standard* is written in the third person, in a break from her other texts, and the protagonist is not a version of herself, but a man in his mid-thirties named Bruno who is trying to escape from the depths of a spiralling depression. *Beaux rivages*, shortlisted for the Prix Anaïs Nin in 2017, is an emotive first-person narrative about the difficult break-up of a relationship. While Bouraoui has undoubtedly been inspired to write this text by her own failed relationships, the fact that the two fictional protagonists Adrian and A. are male and female respectively suggests that the story is not her own, since she has explicitly revealed her

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<sup>89</sup> Leek, p. 251.

<sup>90</sup> Nina Bouraoui, *Avant les hommes* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 2007); *Appelez-moi par mon prénom* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 2008); and *Nos baisers sont des adieux* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 2010).

<sup>91</sup> Nina Bouraoui, *Standard* (Paris: Éditions Flammarion, 2014); and *Beaux rivages* (Paris: Éditions JC Lattès, 2016).

homosexuality in interviews throughout her career.<sup>92</sup> The writing of *Mes mauvaises pensées*, then, signalled a milestone in the healing process regarding her distressing past, and she no longer needs to use the autobiographical genre as an identity quest.

### **Linguistic Otherness: Arabic ‘me sépare des autres’** (*Garçon manqué*, p. 12)

Bouraoui’s recurring literary heroine has a difficult relationship with both Arabic and French. Despite attending compulsory Arabic lessons at school following the state policy of Arabisation as a process of cultural decolonisation in 1963, she is not proficient in spoken or written Arabic because she has been brought up immersed in French culture, passed down to her by her mother.<sup>93</sup> This troubles her since, as she explains in *Garçon manqué*, she considers Arabic ‘une magie’ (p. 8) and feels that becoming proficient in Arabic would be a step towards her integration into her father’s culture. Her familial relationships affect her position towards language. She admires her father and longs to be strong, powerful, and virile like him; her desire for masculinity is echoed in her desire to speak Arabic. The French language, in contrast, is represented by her mother, who is depicted as weak and fragile, both because of her femininity and her position as the colonial enemy. The narrator tries to protect her mother in a role-reversal between parent and child, but she realises that by looking after her mother, ‘c’est être sans [s]on père, sans sa force, sans ses yeux, sans sa main qui conduit’ (p. 20). In

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<sup>92</sup> For instance, in an interview for France Inter on 15 March 2014, she admitted that ‘ce n’était pas facile de tout, quand on a quatorze ou quinze ans, et quand on se rend compte qu’on n’est pas comme les autres, [...], on comprend qu’[...] on n’arrive pas à tomber amoureuse comme les autres, mais qu’on a un secret parce qu’on est homosexuelle’ [my transcript]. Nina Bouraoui, ‘Saint-Malo et le rocher plat à Alger, avec Nina Bouraoui’, *Le Matin du départ*, Interview by Dorothee Barba, France Inter (15 March 2014) <<https://www.franceinter.fr/emissions/le-matin-du-depart/le-matin-du-depart-15-mars-2014>> [accessed 28 January 2017].

<sup>93</sup> After Algeria had become an independent country in 1962, the government imposed a strict language policy in an attempt to unite the people. Only Modern Standard Arabic was permitted; French and local Arab and Berber dialects were banned. Moreover, the religious instruction of Islam was made compulsory. See Hafid Gafaiti, ‘The Monotheism of the Other: Language and De/Construction of National Identity in Postcolonial Algeria’, in *Algeria in Others’ Languages*, ed. by Anne-Emmanuel Berger (Ithaca, NY; London: Cornell University Press, 2002), pp. 19–43.

contrast, identifying with her father would mean living without maternal support. As Thérèse Migraine-George notes, Nina's complex family situation is representative of 'the conflicted history of the relationship between France and Algeria'.<sup>94</sup> It is significant that even today, Algeria, the second largest French-speaking country in the world in terms of the number of speakers of French as a first or second language, does not participate in the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie, a cultural and political organisation which is still perceived in Algeria as a direct link with the colonial past.<sup>95</sup>

Just as Nina feels as though identifying with one of her parents brings about a betrayal of the other, privileging one language over the other also makes her feel guilty. She tries to practise speaking and writing in Arabic in order to emulate her father and make him proud, but she struggles to understand the spoken language. At a party in Paris in *Mes mauvaises pensées*, she meets several young men who are talking in Arabic. Barely able to understand them, she experiences a flush of shame: 'je m'en veux de cela' (p. 93). She is thus forced to speak French, resenting the language for preventing her from integrating into Algerian life.

Nina's position here is reminiscent of Algerian poet and writer Malek Haddad, who, publishing during the Franco-Algerian conflict, wrote in his essay 'Les Zéros tournent en rond' (1961) that he feels 'en exil dans la langue française', referring to his realisation of the distance between his French writing and the Arabic readership in Algeria.<sup>96</sup> Nina is also exiled in the coloniser's language because it cuts her off from other Algerians; French serves to remind the Algerians of the colonial exploitation which they seek to overcome. The fact that 'je parle en français. Uniquement. Je rêve en français. Uniquement. J'écrirai en français.

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<sup>94</sup> Thérèse Migraine-George, *From Francophonie to World Literature in French: Ethics, Poetics, and Politics* (Lincoln, NE; London: University of Nebraska Press, 2013), p. 42.

<sup>95</sup> Phillip C. Naylor, *Historical Dictionary of Algeria*, 4th edn (Lanham, MD; London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015 [1981]), p. 197.

<sup>96</sup> Malek Haddad, 'Les Zéros tournent en rond', in *Écoute et je t'appelle* (Paris: François Maspero, 1961), pp. 1–47 (p. 21).

Uniquement' (*Garçon manqué*, p. 167) limits her existence because there is a completely different side to her, her Algerian side, which she is unable to express, despite her vehement desires. She cannot express it in Arabic because she cannot speak the language confidently. Moreover, she cannot use the colonial language, French, to verbalise this aspect of her identity. This would be 'une forme de trahison' (p. 166) because she would be using the language of the coloniser to articulate her Algerian identity, imposing the formerly colonial relationship between powerful France and dominated Algeria upon a postcolonial situation. At school, she is segregated from the other children in the class because of her inability to speak Arabic, and labelled an 'arabisant[e]', or Arabist, by her teacher and the other pupils (p. 11). Although this term is frequently used to define a speaker of Arabic for whom the language is not the mother tongue, for Nina it separates her from the rest of the class and makes her feel 'abandonnée' (p. 11). However, she is partly complicit in her own linguistic exile because she later abandons her attempts to learn Arabic in order to give voice to this equally important element of her identity in its own language (*Mes mauvaises pensées*, p. 93).

In *Mes mauvaises pensées*, linguistic exile takes a different twist to reveal how writing itself is a site of exile. The narrator has an ambiguous, often violent relationship towards writing: at times, she compares it to a prison from which there is no escape — 'l'écriture est aussi une prison, je dois la justifier, je dois la réparer, je dois la supplier quand elle ne vient pas' (p. 35) — while at other times, she recognises its cathartic properties. It allows her both to heal the wounds of her personal history and removes her from her family who do not approve of her fascination with writing.

A scene set in a restaurant in Rennes with her family in *Mes mauvaises pensées* illustrates the family tension concerning writing. During the meal, the narrator notices a guest book on the table. It has been brought to dinner by her maternal grandfather — the nature of



the family event is unclear — and he asks her to write in it. She is reluctant to do so because she feels flustered and out of her depth. She then becomes angry: ‘la colère revient et ouvre mon ventre, elle revient parce que je ne suis pas à ma place, je ne sais pas faire l’écrivain, je ne sais pas faire la fille de la télévision’ (p. 153). Writing has removed her from her familiar private space into the public eye, isolating and exiling her: she does not feel like a writer who is expected to share intimate details about her life with her readers. This episode contradicts Kirsten Husung’s claim that writing is the only space where Bouraoui’s protagonist can freely express her identity. In *Hybridité et genre chez Assia Djebar et Nina Bouraoui* (2014), Husung analyses *Garçon manqué* and *Mes mauvaises pensées* together because they both ‘font référence à une même période de la vie de la protagoniste, l’enfance et l’adolescence, et dans *Mes mauvaises pensées*, à sa vie comme jeune adulte’.<sup>97</sup> Husung claims that ‘s’il existe dans les romans un lieu où les protagonistes peuvent exprimer leur hybridité, bref se sentir chez eux, c’est l’écriture: l’écriture est leur seule demeure’.<sup>98</sup> Yet in the above passage, writing does not allow her to feel ‘chez elle’; in contrast, it renders her uncomfortable and lonely because it emphasises how different she is from the rest of her family. Here, she conforms to Kristeva’s argument that the female writer’s position is one of exile; Kristeva asserts that as a writer she ‘parle une langue d’exil’ because writing and reading displaces her into another time and space.<sup>99</sup> Bouraoui’s heroine is catapulted through writing into another world, far away from all sense of familiarity.

Yet writing also acts as a restorative process through which she articulates her multi-layered identity, enabling her to begin to make sense of her thoughts and prevent them from suffocating her:

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<sup>97</sup> Kirsten Husung, *Hybridité et genre chez Assia Djebar et Nina Bouraoui* (Paris: Éditions L’Harmattan, 2014), p. 21.

<sup>98</sup> Husung, p. 252.

<sup>99</sup> Kristeva, p. 7.

j'ai toujours écrit, vous savez. Avant j'écrivais dans ma tête, puis j'ai eu les mots, des spirales de mots, je m'en étouffais, je m'en nourrissais; ma personnalité s'est formée à partir de ce langage, à partir du langage qui possède (p. 12).

The sudden switch in tense from the past to the present in the powerful verb 'possède', though, suggests that her identitarian resolution is incomplete because language continues to take control of her. Katharine N. Harrington disagrees with this analysis. In *Writing the Nomadic Experience in Contemporary Francophone Literature* (2013), Harrington analyses the idea of 'seeing', arguing that writing allows Bouraoui to see the world from an outsider's perspective in order to distort the rigid boundaries of identity categories which are so deeply entrenched in society.<sup>100</sup> She posits that 'writing has been a necessary reaction for Bouraoui when faced with the silence that she finds frequently grips her in the face of injustice or racism'.<sup>101</sup> While writing has allowed Bouraoui's narrator to begin to accept her past and 'effacer [s]es mauvaises pensées' (p. 79), in reality it raises a succession of further questions about identity, gender, and sexuality which are not necessarily any closer to being resolved. Vassallo remarks that writing symbolises for Bouraoui 'a work of reconstruction of the embodied memory that is perpetually in progress, rather than offering an end point of "healing"', alluding to the absence of any finite resolution of her identitarian crisis.<sup>102</sup>

Nevertheless, the ending of *Mes mauvaises pensées* does seem a genuine attempt to reconcile issues of alterity, identity, and sexuality. The resolution of her struggles is an ongoing process for Bouraoui's literary heroine throughout the entire text and is not confined to a short, final section of the narrative, as was the case in *Le Jour* and *Garçon manqué*. Moreover, she is actively involved in the process of re-claiming her identity through the rewriting of her psychotherapy sessions, unlike in the other two texts in which the narrator

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<sup>100</sup> Katharine N. Harrington, *Writing the Nomadic Experience in Contemporary Francophone Literature* (Lanham, MD; Plymouth: Lexington Books, 2013), pp. 77–104.

<sup>101</sup> Harrington, p. 98.

<sup>102</sup> Vassallo, *The Body Besieged*, p. 80.

simply describes her alienation and does not actively participate in the narrative action. Breaking free from constraints in both France and Algeria which had previously held her back during her childhood, she slowly realises that ‘chaque jour [elle] avance dans [s]a vie’ (p. 226), creating a new sense of self through the rediscovery of her identity. She no longer feels the need to negate either her French or her Algerian self but is finally ready to accept the two components of her identity. She has progressed on her personal journey, and while her issues with her identity are not yet fully resolved, she slowly begins to reconcile herself with her condition of personal, national, and sexual exile.

## Conclusion

As Bouraoui herself commented in a candid interview for the French literary magazine *Transfuge* in April 2010, ‘il n’est pas facile d’appartenir à une minorité, et on cherche à tout prix des référents’.<sup>103</sup> *Le Jour*, *Garçon manqué*, and *Mes mauvaises pensées* all illustrate this attitude, as the narrative persona experiences her minority status as a form of exile. The texts reveal her feelings of loss and abandonment at being forced to leave home in their repetitive, disjointed style, and the carefully chosen vocabulary and metaphors create a vivid portrayal of a character in turmoil, alienated and exiled. She remains haunted by Algeria’s bloody history. Neither France nor Algeria accept her because of her embodiment of the conflict, so no matter where she lives, she is always the outsider, the ‘other’. Yet this association in the three texts with Algeria’s recent bloody conflicts demonstrates that, while often very painful, exile can also be a liberating phenomenon which offers freedom, safety, and protection from violence. In Bouraoui’s work, exile constitutes a negotiation between trauma and freedom because

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<sup>103</sup> Nina Bouraoui, ‘Nina Bouraoui: l’écriture au corps’, Interview by Damien Aubel and Sophie Pujas, *Transfuge*, 39 (April 2010), 40–47 (pp. 44–45).

although it undoubtedly disrupts the stability of the narrator's life, it also simultaneously broadens her horizons and acts as a catalyst for personal exploration for her.

Her issues of alterity and alienation have not been fully brought to a close in the corpus, though, and so the narratives seem to confirm Said's remark that 'the achievements of exile are permanently undermined by the loss of something left behind forever'.<sup>104</sup> On closer inspection, her national, gendered, and sexual hybridity conflict with, rather than correspond to, Bhabha's model, as they do not give her the freedom that he suggests. For Bhabha, hybridity is an enriching condition which grants agency to the formerly colonised community and 'reverses the effects of the colonialist disavowal, so that other "denied" knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority — its rules of recognition'.<sup>105</sup> Yet Nina's hybridity does not succeed in breaking down barriers between France and Algeria; rather, she recreates these divisions because she acts as a constant reminder of the unequal and hierarchical colonial relationship between the two countries. The three texts suggest, then, that hybridity, a postcolonial trope of movement associated with mobility and emancipation, can in fact reinforce 'the effects of the colonial disavowal', to echo Bhabha, rather than overturn them. Bouraoui goes beyond the binaries of nationality, gender, and sexuality in her writing by refusing to limit her narrator's condition to discrete terms and labels, but, as has been argued in this chapter, she continues to define her identity in relation to these concepts by expressing her frustration at these reductive terms. The author thus remains partly complicit in perpetuating these narrow stereotypes of what it means to belong to a particular race, country, religion, gender, and family, for all her attempts to move beyond them.

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<sup>104</sup> Said, 'Reflections on Exile', p. 173.

<sup>105</sup> Bhabha, p. 162.

## CHAPTER THREE

### EXILE AS A 'FORCED CHOICE': WAR AND MIGRATION IN GISÈLE PINEAU'S

#### *L'EXIL SELON JULIA*

War is a trigger for displacement and exile across the world. Vast numbers of people worldwide have been removed from their homes and compelled to migrate either within or beyond the borders of their country because of an actual or perceived threat of danger to their lives. Currently, war is displacing unprecedented numbers of people. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), at the end of 2016, 'the global number of people of concern' who had been forcibly displaced across the world due to conflict, violence, or human rights' violations surpassed sixty-seven million.<sup>1</sup> Alarming, this is the highest figure recorded since the end of World War Two when, as Malcolm J. Proudfoot notes, approximately sixty million were displaced.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), *Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2016*, (2017) <[http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/gr2016/pdf/01\\_Intro.pdf](http://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/gr2016/pdf/01_Intro.pdf)> [accessed 28 June 2017] (p. 6).

<sup>2</sup> Malcolm J. Proudfoot, *European Refugees: 1939–52: A Study in Forced Population Movement* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1956), p. 21.

This chapter offers a new approach to the autofictional novel *L'Exil selon Julia* (1996) by Guadeloupean writer Gisèle Pineau, a text which has already attracted significant critical attention for its insights into exile and gender.<sup>3</sup> The chapter moves beyond existing scholarship on Pineau by exploring in greater detail how war affects themes of exile, migration, and gender within the narrative. The role of warfare in twentieth-century Caribbean migration has been neglected in literary criticism of Pineau's oeuvre, and in Francophone Caribbean literature more generally. To date, the only detailed study of war in Pineau's writing is a 2015 article by Tina Harpin.<sup>4</sup> Harpin analyses the alienating after-effects of the Second World War for female characters in Pineau's *L'Exil selon Julia* and her short story 'Paroles de terre en larmes',<sup>5</sup> arguing that these texts act as pedagogical tools which write Antillean women back into metropolitan French history. Although she provides a detailed historical account of twentieth-century warfare in the Caribbean context, Harpin does not connect the specific forms of alienation manifested by individual characters with their own experiences of war and fails to examine the significance of the *dissidence* movement in the text. This chapter responds to these gaps by analysing the causal relationship between war and displacement for three generations of Pineau women, arguing that the mobility which arises as a result of warfare has complex, long-lasting, and, at times, even unexpectedly beneficial impacts on the family, and analysing how the text represents a marginalised but crucial aspect of Antillean war history: the *dissidence*. Approaching Pineau's best-known text through this lens allows for a more nuanced understanding of the intersections between

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<sup>3</sup> Gisèle Pineau, *L'Exil selon Julia* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 1996). All subsequent references to this text will appear in parentheses in the main body of this chapter.

<sup>4</sup> Tina Harpin, 'Menteries sur la patrie, violence et exils: la guerre selon les narratrices de Gisèle Pineau dans "Paroles de terre en larmes" (1987) et *L'Exil selon Julia* (1996)', *Études littéraires africaines*, 40 (2015), 91–109.

<sup>5</sup> Gisèle Pineau, 'Paroles de terre en larmes', in *Paroles de terre en larmes: nouvelles*, ed. by Centre d'action culturelle de la Guadeloupe (Paris; Montéran, Guadeloupe: Éditions Hatier, 1988), pp. 5–20.

colonialism, war, gender, and exile for the Antillean population, and for Antillean women more particularly.

In the twentieth century, warfare was a significant driving force behind large-scale migration from the French Antilles to metropolitan France. During the First and Second World Wars, soldiers were recruited from France's colonies, and after World War Two, Antilleans were encouraged to settle in the metropole to help rebuild the infrastructure destroyed by war.<sup>6</sup> Pineau sets *L'Exil selon Julia* against this backdrop of conflict and displacement. The direct and indirect consequences of military life bring about the geographic displacement of the female characters between France, Africa, and the Antilles, while also causing them psychological distress. Their diasporic existence thus becomes a form of exile: their racial and linguistic otherness hinders their integration into French society, despite their legal status as French citizens. At the time of Pineau's childhood, and therefore in the narrative time of the text, Guadeloupe was a *département d'outre-mer* (DOM); in 2003 it became a *département et région d'outre-mer* (DROM).<sup>7</sup>

The narrative voice shifts between different characters. The enigmatic main narrator is referred to by name only once as the quintessentially French name 'Marie', Pineau's middle

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<sup>6</sup> In *Emigration and Caribbean Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), Malachi McIntosh explains that the wave of Caribbean migration to France came later than its Anglophone Caribbean counterpart to Britain: 'unlike Britain, which actively solicited island subjects immediately after World War II to fill vacancies in manufacturing and medicine, France did not entice people from its Caribbean colonies until the 1960s' (p. 105). Immediately after the war in the 1940s and 50s, France preferred to encourage European labourers. As Klaus J. Bade notes in *Migration in European History*, trans. by Allison Brown (Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003 [2000]), European workers were split into three groups, depending on how easily it was perceived that they could assimilate into French society (p. 248). The first group included those from the Benelux countries, Switzerland, Germany, Ireland, and Britain; the second from Italy, Spain, and Portugal; and the third from Poland, Slovakia, and former Czechoslovakia. By the late 1950s, France lost many of its European workers because it could no longer compete with the attractive working conditions in Germany and Switzerland. France was then forced to recruit from its Caribbean territories and its former colonies in North Africa.

<sup>7</sup> The status of France's overseas territories was modified in March 2003 after a constitutional reform was passed by the French government. Guadeloupe, Martinique, French Guiana, and Réunion, previously DOMs, became DROMs. In addition, the *territoires d'outre-mer* (TOMs) of Mayotte, French Polynesia, and Saint-Pierre-and-Miquelon became *collectivités d'outre-mer* (COMs), in accordance with article 73 of the French Constitution. See <<http://www.vie-publique.fr/chronologie/chronos-thematiques/evolution-institutionnelle-statutaire-outre-mer.html>> [accessed 11 February 2016].

name, as Kathleen Gyssels notes.<sup>8</sup> The present analysis retains the narrative distance of the text by referring to Marie as ‘the narrator’, thus preserving Pineau’s intention of distancing the narrative voice. At other moments, the narrative adopts the perspective of the narrator’s female relatives: her paternal grandmother Julia (Man Ya in Creole), to whom the text is dedicated through the title; and her mother Daisy. It is unclear whether this perspective emanates directly from these women or is being mediated through the main narrator. The reader thus discovers the intimate thoughts of the principal female characters as they struggle to adapt to metropolitan French life.

The narrative structure of *L’Exil selon Julia* is complex and reflects the narrator’s migratory patterns through its ruptures and dislocations. The text begins in Paris before going back in time to describe her family history and early childhood in Guadeloupe and Africa.<sup>9</sup> The action then crosses the Atlantic to explore the narrator’s alienation in mainland France before returning once again to the Antilles in 1970.<sup>10</sup>

The active military participation of two men, who occupy roles as sons, husbands, and fathers, forms the impetus for the female family members’ migration from Guadeloupe to metropolitan France. The narrator suffers from a childhood of ‘amarrages et démarrages. Allées et virées’ (p. 28) as she is constantly uprooted by her father’s military career. Her constant peregrinations create a melancholic wistfulness in her and an impetus to recover something lost — history, identity, knowledge — expressed in an early passage: ‘j’ai

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<sup>8</sup> Kathleen Gyssels, ‘L’Exil selon Pineau, récit de vie et autobiographie’, in *Récits de vie de l’Afrique et des Antilles: exil, errance, enracinement*, ed. by Suzanne Crosta (Sainte-Foy, Quebec: GRELCA, 1998), pp. 169–87 (p. 175).

<sup>9</sup> In ‘Looking Back to Move Forward: The Counter-Poetics of Memory in Contemporary Caribbean Fiction’, *Journal of Caribbean Literatures*, 3.2 (2002), 23–35, Christine Duff explains that by narrating her parents’ early life, courtship, and marriage in Africa, the narrator is claiming her place in their lives, even though she had not yet been born. Duff argues that ‘these notions help clarify how Pineau’s character conceptualizes her existence: her self extends beyond her own lifetime, even though she does not have personal memory of time before her’ (p. 30).

<sup>10</sup> For a detailed account of the complexity of the narrative structure, see Louise Hardwick, *Childhood, Autobiography and the Francophone Caribbean* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), p. 141.



longtemps gardé le sentiment d'avoir perdu quelque chose: une formule qui perçait jadis les geôles, un breuvage souverain délivrant la connaissance, une mémoire, des mots, des images' (p. 20). Her father, in contrast, enjoys the freedom and glory his military service brings him, both during World War Two and afterwards. He takes pride in being one of the 'agents of French hegemony' despite his racial difference, as Renée Larrier observes in her study of the 'citoyenneté inachevée' of the Pineau family.<sup>11</sup> Larrier argues that Pineau's text reveals the harsh reality of life in the Hexagon for Antilleans, despite France's rhetoric of equality. The family are French citizens but they are not treated as such; instead they encounter racism and discrimination. Their continuous 'va-et-vient' between the Antilles and mainland France reflects the migration patterns of many Antilleans who travel between the two locations for personal and professional commitments, due to the incorporation of the Antilles into French administrative frameworks. Their initial move to Paris anticipates the mass immigration of Antilleans to the metropole through the BUMIDOM scheme, or the *Bureau pour le développement des migrations dans les départements d'outre-mer*. In the current era, a discussion of the long-lasting impacts of the BUMIDOM on French Caribbean citizens is particularly timely, following heated debate on the subject in France and the French Caribbean on its fiftieth anniversary in 2013.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, there has been a recent resurgence

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<sup>11</sup> Renée Larrier, "'Sont-ils encore gens de Guadeloupe?'" Departmentalization, Migration, and Family Dynamics', *International Journal of Francophone Studies*, 11.1–2 (2008), 171–87 (p. 178). Larrier explores the impacts of the change in status of the French Antilles from colony to DOM on Caribbean migrants arriving in mainland France from the 1960s. She draws on Justin Daniel's notion of 'la citoyenneté inachevée' which he explains in 'La Citoyenneté inachevée: une analyse comparative des situations antillaises et portoricaine', in *Histoire de l'immigration et question coloniale en France*, ed. by Nancy L. Green and Marie Poinsot (Paris: La Documentation française, 2008), pp. 139–44. Departmentalization of the French Antilles promised the inhabitants citizenship, but in fact it only served to reinforce their status as second-class citizens.

<sup>12</sup> For instance, on 19 December 2013, the French television network France Ô (and 1ère de Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Guyane) broadcast 'Génération Bumidom', a special programme exploring the consequences of the migration scheme and featuring debates with politicians, sociologists and participants of the BUMIDOM, including the French Minister for Overseas France at the time, George Pau-Langevin, and French sociologist Michel Giraud. 'Génération Bumidom', France Ô, 19 December 2013. See <<http://la1ere.francetvinfo.fr/2013/12/19/soiree-speciale-bumidom-ce-soir-sur-le-reseau-outre-mer-en-direct-sur-la1erefr-95411.html>> [accessed 4 December 2015].

in cultural production which portrays the harsh realities of state-controlled migration between France and the French Caribbean.<sup>13</sup>

Pineau's text offers the opportunity to investigate whether exile caused by war constitutes a forced displacement imposed on each family member, as Amy K. Kaminsky, who posits that exile 'is always coerced',<sup>14</sup> would argue, or whether some characters have more choice than others about when and how they leave Guadeloupe. In her study of exile and French and Hispanic women's writing, Kate Averis draws on the concept of 'forced choice', which concedes that enforcement and choice are not inherently contradictory phenomena within the paradigm of exile.<sup>15</sup> 'Forced choice' is useful here to assess the problematic dichotomy between voluntary and involuntary exile at work in Pineau's text. Moreover, this chapter engages with Madelaine Hron's theoretical approach of reading exile as translation,<sup>16</sup> and explores how the eponymous Julia fails to integrate linguistically and culturally into metropolitan French society. Underlying the methodological approach to exile in this chapter is a consideration of how military involvement impacts upon the framework of women's exile as developed by Julia Kristeva, who posits that gendered difference heightens the sentiment of being uprooted physically 'de famille, de pays, de langue'.<sup>17</sup> As such, this chapter offers a new reading of *L'Exil selon Julia* by questioning how matters of will and agency come to bear on each character's exile, a question raised by the narrator herself when she scrutinises her

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<sup>13</sup> The difficult consequences of the BUMIDOM for Antillean migrants are explored in *L'Avenir est ailleurs*, dir. by Antoine Léonard-Maestrati (Cinéma Public Films, 2006). The BUMIDOM continues to fascinate film makers to this day. For instance, in 2016, Jean-Claude Barny directed *Le Gang des Antillais* (Les Films d'ici, 2016), a thriller which charts the struggles of a group of young men migrating through the BUMIDOM who try to adapt to life in Paris and who are eventually driven into a life of crime.

<sup>14</sup> Amy K. Kaminsky, *After Exile: Writing the Latin American Diaspora* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 9.

<sup>15</sup> Kate Averis, *Exile and Nomadism in French and Hispanic Women's Writing* (London: Modern Humanities Research Association and Maney Publishing, 2014), p. 17.

<sup>16</sup> Madelaine Hron, *Translating Pain: Immigrant Suffering in Literature and Culture* (Toronto; Buffalo, NY; London: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> Julia Kristeva, 'Un nouveau type d'intellectuel: le dissident', *Tel Quel*, 74 (Winter 1977), 3–8 (p. 7).

parents' motives for voluntarily choosing a life of movement, exclusion, and ostracisation, asking: 'pourquoi ont-ils emmêlé leurs destins dans l'idée d'un exil?' (p. 28).

### **Exile as a 'Forced Choice'**

Discourses of displacement typically categorise exile according to people's motives for departure, distinguishing between voluntary and involuntary migration. Voluntary migration 'results from a personal cost/benefit analysis that indicates relocation will maximise utility', perceived as a rational decision based on a variety of economic, familial, or political reasons.<sup>18</sup> Those who choose to leave their country of origin seek a better standard of living for themselves and their families. Involuntary exile, in contrast, is defined as a displacement enforced upon an individual or community, either by manmade forces, such as armed intervention and political turbulence, or by natural disasters beyond human control. These people, who are either forcibly removed from their country of origin or pressured into leaving, 'have no choice in the migration decision' and are often unlikely to ever return to their native land because it is deemed unsafe to do so.<sup>19</sup>

This chapter, however, argues that the distinction between voluntary and involuntary geographic exile is much more fraught. Many scholars of exile, such as Kaminsky, argue that exiled communities never have any choice in their banishment;<sup>20</sup> others, such as Paolo Bartoloni, acknowledge that those who undergo a self-imposed exile, who have the means and opportunity to migrate, often still feel alienated, as though they are 'living at the borders of [their] own life', but that their experience is undoubtedly different to the experiences of those

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<sup>18</sup> Milica Z. Bookman, *After Involuntary Migration: The Political Economy of Refugee Encampments* (Lanham, MD; Oxford: Lexington Books, 2002), p. 8.

<sup>19</sup> Bookman, p. 8.

<sup>20</sup> Kaminsky, p. 9.

whose departure has been enforced, or indeed, of those who seek exile but who are denied the opportunity to leave.<sup>21</sup> Yet for Averis, this problematic contradiction between enforced and voluntary exile is ‘a false dichotomy’.<sup>22</sup> She maintains that understanding exile in terms of choice erroneously creates a moral hierarchy of exile, whereby a self-imposed, chosen departure is somehow less of an exile, a ‘phony’ exile. Moreover, for Averis, connecting exile with notions of will further problematises the concept of guilt. She argues that ‘a persistent sense of guilt is commonly expressed by displaced individuals from across the spectrum of displacement — guilt at having abandoned a cause, a people, or a nation’.<sup>23</sup> For those who willingly leave their homeland, however, this sense of guilt is undoubtedly even more acute because their departure stems from the result of a personal decision for which they alone are responsible. Despite Averis’s compelling argument against making any distinction between voluntary and involuntary exile, it is important to acknowledge that some individuals certainly do have more control than others over when and how they leave their native country, and even over where they live their new life in exile. Neither Bouraoui, Pineau, Lefèvre, nor Tadjó were banished because of political dissidence or religious persecution. When they were infants or young adults, they were either brought or encouraged to move to metropolitan France for what their families perceived to be improved life chances. It thus must be acknowledged that the authors enjoy a degree of privilege that is not shared by all exiled people; they possess the political power and financial resources to leave and return when they so wish.

Averis posits that it is more productive to examine exile through the lens of a ‘forced choice’. This is an appropriate description of the Pineau family’s exile because the complex

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<sup>21</sup> Paolo Bartoloni, *On the Cultures of Exile, Translation, and Writing* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2008), p. 99.

<sup>22</sup> Averis, p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> Averis, p. 14.

motivations for their departure do not entirely fit the dichotomous labels of either enforced or voluntary exile. The term ‘forced choice’ originates from the field of research methodology, in which participants of an interview or survey are required to make a choice from a selection of alternative responses ‘that best approximates his/her opinion or attitude’, but which the participant might not have chosen had other options been available.<sup>24</sup> Averis understands this concept as ‘a limited, yet nevertheless existing set of choices’.<sup>25</sup> For Averis, this paradigm best suits experiences of exile because it takes into account that free will lies on a wide continuum, and that even those who seemingly choose a life of exile are often forced into this decision by political or socio-economic factors beyond their control. Moreover, she asserts that this notion of ‘forced choice’ also enables the incorporation of ‘the “need” for flight from a home environment perceived as culturally inhibiting or disabling in the case of intellectual dissonance at home’ into analyses of exile,<sup>26</sup> thus broadening the conventional definition of exile which has frequently been criticised for its overly prescriptive nature.

The present analysis considers the individual circumstances of each character’s displacement, focusing primarily on how the three generations of Pineau women attempt to negotiate their identity within a space of chosen or imposed exile. Each family member presents a complex and different case of both belonging and rejection, of integration and exile. The initial focus is the conscription of the male family members in the French military during the First and Second World Wars, as their military engagements represented the Pineau family’s first encounter with migration to the continents of Africa and Europe, before moving to a more detailed consideration of the female characters.

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<sup>24</sup> Bill Taylor, Gautam Sinha, and Taposh Ghoshal, *Research Methodology: A Guide for Researchers in Management and Social Sciences* (New Delhi: Prentice-Hall of India, 2006), p. 77.

<sup>25</sup> Averis, p. 17.

<sup>26</sup> Averis, p. 17.

### Conscription: 'L'armée est leur credo' (p. 12)

As Angela K. Smith and Sandra Barkhof observe in their study of war and global displacement, 'the move from civilian to military life must inevitably lead to a change of world experience and perhaps world life' because it entails abandoning homes and families and engaging in violent conflict.<sup>27</sup> Soldiers, therefore, often become estranged and isolated when participating in military action. Even if migration does not bring about this negative psychological change for the soldiers in *L'Exil selon Julia*, who are initially enthusiastic to fight for their motherland, it certainly does for the female characters who become involved in the military through the enlistment of a male family member.

The Pineau family has engaged in compulsory military service in France's armed forces since 1916, when Asdrubal, the narrator's grandfather, went to fight in the trenches in France during the First World War. Asdrubal was one of five hundred thousand colonial subjects from across the empire who formed the 'troupes indigènes', deployed by the French army to serve on European battlefields.<sup>28</sup> In 1914, the French empire covered approximately twelve million square kilometres and held control over sixty three million colonial subjects.<sup>29</sup> France used its extensive imperial force to its advantage, mobilising men from the colonies across the world to bolster metropolitan troops.<sup>30</sup> Asdrubal's enlistment in the French army,

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<sup>27</sup> Angela K. Smith and Sandra Barkhof, 'Introduction: The No-Man's-Land of Displacement', in *War and Displacement in the Twentieth Century: Global Conflicts*, ed. by Sandra Barkhof and Angela K. Smith (New York; Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), pp. 1–18 (p. 4).

<sup>28</sup> Richard S. Fogarty, *Race and War in France: Colonial Subjects in the French Army, 1914–1918* (Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), p. 2. Yet in *The French Empire Between the Wars: Imperialism, Politics and Society* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), Martin Thomas analyses the decline of colonial rule in the interwar period. See also Martin Thomas, *The French Empire at War, 1940–1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998). Thomas examines how both the Vichy government and the Free French authorities exploited the empire in different ways, arguing that for both sides, the empire was more important for its political and symbolic values than for its material contributions to the war effort.

<sup>29</sup> Kenneth J. Orosz, 'French Empire', in *Encyclopedia of the Age of Imperialism, 1800–1914, Volume One*, ed. by Carl Cavanagh Hodge (Westport, CT; London: Greenwood Press, 2008), pp. 240–50 (p. 245).

<sup>30</sup> Guadeloupe was still a French colony in 1914 as the loi de la départementalisation, which transformed its status from a French colony to a French department, was not passed until March 1946.

which brought about his displacement to northern France, would have been compulsory. He was one of thirty thousand conscripted soldiers who were sent from the French Antillean colonies to fight in France in World War One,<sup>31</sup> after France's 1905 conscription law was extended to the *vieilles colonies* (Martinique, Guadeloupe, French Guiana, and Réunion) on 7 August 1913.<sup>32</sup> For many colonial soldiers, enlistment represented an enforced exile, as Richard S. Fogarty explains: they were forced to migrate to a new land where their racial and cultural difference 'set them apart' from metropolitan French soldiers 'and made their full integration into the French nation, which official rhetoric insisted was their "adopted fatherland", difficult, if not impossible'.<sup>33</sup>

Despite the difficulties to which Fogarty calls attention, Asdrubal's experience was overwhelmingly positive. Although he was a conscript, it appears that he actively desired to be part of the popular movement to defend France against German forces, rather than simply following the herd. As the narrator points out, Asdrubal 'n'était pas parti en guerre comme un chien fou. Juste pour imiter les autres' (p. 115). Importantly, as Sylvie Durmelat remarks, his first name is a military name,<sup>34</sup> which recalls the mighty King Hasdrubal of Carthage, the uncle of military commander Hannibal. His first name itself thus underscores his strength and military prowess. During his military service, Asdrubal proudly sees his surname on a map of France, in Charentes; the reference in the novel is cryptic as it does not state the surname, but as Hardwick has observed, a metropolitan French reader would deduce that the narrator is referring to the aperitif 'Pineau des Charentes'.<sup>35</sup> Asdrubal thus feels a deep sense of

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<sup>31</sup> Robert Aldrich and John Connell, *France's Overseas Frontier: Départements et Territoires d'Outre-Mer* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 61.

<sup>32</sup> Jacques Dumont, 'Conscription antillaise et citoyenneté revendiquée au tournant de la première guerre mondiale', *Vingtième siècle, Revue d'histoire*, 92 (2006), 101–16 (p. 106).

<sup>33</sup> Fogarty, p. 2.

<sup>34</sup> Sylvie Durmelat, 'Narrative of a "Return to the Non-Native Land": Gardens and Migration in *L'Exil selon Julia* by Gisèle Pineau', *Journal of Caribbean Literatures*, 4.2 (2006), 109–18 (p. 110).

<sup>35</sup> Hardwick, p. 142.

belonging in metropolitan France and unquestionably accepts his military engagement as a means of protecting his motherland. He subscribes to France's colonial ideology which was underpinned by the notion of the *mission civilisatrice*: France had 'civilised' its African and Caribbean colonies through colonisation, so now it must be the turn of these colonies to save France. As Robert Aldrich notes, France's colonial expansion was predicated on the notion that Europeans were inherently superior to all other races who lacked 'a Graeco-Roman heritage, Christian religion, the legacy of the Enlightenment and Revolution, modern science, a capitalist economy and white skin', and that it was their responsibility to civilise the uncivilised.<sup>36</sup> However, there was a wide gulf between the principle of the *mission civilisatrice* and the everyday realities of the subjugated peoples living in the colonies. As Alec G. Hargreaves and Mark McKinney explain, 'the French commitment to assimilation was always more rhetorical than real: few resources were devoted to the "civilising mission", and the promise of political equality was perpetually deferred, since it was fundamentally at odds with the whole colonial system'.<sup>37</sup> Yet Asdrubal is entirely convinced of the value of the colonial project: he feels proud to claim French rather than African ancestry and belong to the 'superior' race. Although his thoughts are mediated through the narrator's voice, Asdrubal clearly believes he went to war in order to 'secourir la Mère-Patrie, défendre la terre de ses ancêtres' (p. 115), an ancestral link strengthened by his decidedly metropolitan French surname, 'Pineau', neither invented in the Caribbean after abolition nor representative of 'un vestige d'Afrique' (p. 115). Problematically, and in a gesture typical of French Caribbean behaviour and attitudes at the time of World War One, Asdrubal uses his position in the

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<sup>36</sup> Robert Aldrich, *Greater France: A History of French Overseas Expansion* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1996), p. 92.

<sup>37</sup> Alec G. Hargreaves and Mark McKinney, 'Introduction: The Post-Colonial Problematic in Contemporary France', in *Post-Colonial Cultures in France*, ed. by Alec G. Hargreaves and Mark McKinney (London; New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 3–25 (p. 21). If the French granted political equality to the colonised peoples, they would not be able to claim any superiority over them, thus undermining France's justification of the colonial enterprise.



French military to reclaim and consolidate his French identity and, by extension, to negate his Africanness.

Despite feeling honoured to fight for France, the effects of his national service in World War One are catastrophic for his family. Asdrubal undergoes a form of psychological exile on his return. He is tormented ‘par les esprits des morts tombés dans les tranchées de 1916, du temps où il faisait la guerre en France’ (p. 16). The horrors he witnessed during the war pervade his dreams: his wife Julia remembers one night when ‘les défunts de la Sale Guerre sont encore venus visiter Asdrubal. Il a poussé ses cris de bête. Son corps pleurait la mort sur le grabat’ (p. 33). Here, the phrase ‘la Sale Guerre’ contrasts sharply with the more glorified epithet associated with World War One, ‘la Grande Guerre’, suggesting that in Julia’s opinion, the war does not instil pride and glory in her family but becomes their source of suffering and violence. Asdrubal’s trauma manifests itself in extreme anger, which he releases through domestic violence. He beats Julia, seeking to find in violence ‘un soulagement pour son âme’ (p. 99), a deeply troubling example of gendered violence, which depicts his role as abuser as a direct consequence of his participation in European warfare. Parallels can be drawn here between Asdrubal’s psychological troubles and contemporary experiences of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a medical condition defined in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (2013) as the presence of ‘recurrent, involuntary, and intrusive distressing memories of the traumatic event(s)’ which causes psychological and physiological reactions,<sup>38</sup> but which only appeared in medical discourse in

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<sup>38</sup> American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th edn (Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Association, 2013 [1952]), p. 271.

1980, long after World War One.<sup>39</sup> Like those who suffer from PTSD after participating in military combat, Asdrubal's behaviour is impulsive and uncontrollable.<sup>40</sup>

Moreover, his psychological stress is compounded by existing racial hierarchies in the French Caribbean. As a lighter-skinned black man, he justifies his violent actions by claiming to be racially superior to his wife, and the narrator recalls how Asdrubal insultingly calls his wife 'cette Nègresse Julia' (p. 34). His family abandon him in Guadeloupe and move to Paris, taking Julia with them because of his abusive conduct. The narrative strongly implies that Asdrubal's fierce temper and irrational mood swings are a direct consequence of both his participation in combat, and the colonial ethnoclass hierarchy; and therefore, also a direct legacy of French colonialism. The entire Pineau family pay a high price for their colonial and postcolonial ties with France because Asdrubal uses violence against them as a release from the horrors of war, and this results in his physical and emotional separation from his wife and his wider family. For Asdrubal, conscription is twofold: it allows him to relocate temporarily to the motherland and demonstrate his pride in being a French citizen, but, decades later, it also causes him great long-term psychological distress and precipitates the near break-down of his family.

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<sup>39</sup> Bradley D. Grinage, 'Diagnosis and Management of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder', *American Family Physician*, 68.12 (2003), 2401–2408 (p. 2401).

<sup>40</sup> In *The Philosophy of War and Exile: From the Humanity of War to the Inhumanity of Peace* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), Nolen Gertz argues that a high proportion of American soldiers returning from recent conflicts in Irak and Afghanistan suffer from anxiety and depression, despite efforts to help them cope with their trauma. Gertz interprets their experiences as a manifestation of psychological exile. As the title of the book suggests, Gertz deconstructs the dichotomy between the violence and inhumanity of war and the normality and humanity of peace, suggesting that the states of war and peace are not so different. In *L'Exil selon Julia*, Asdrubal experiences a similar fate on returning to Guadeloupe as that of the veterans analysed in Gertz's monograph.

### ***La Dissidence: Forced or Involuntary Exile?***

The military engagement of Maréchal, Asdrubal's son, also merits closer attention. In a parallel with his father, Maréchal's commitment to the military cause is underscored by his military name. However, Maréchal's military involvement and subsequent displacements arise from a specific event: in 1943, he becomes a *dissident* to assist in the liberation of Occupied France. The following section uses this pivotal episode of Antillean history to analyse the tensions between voluntary and enforced exile.

Antilleans played an important role in the French Resistance against the Vichy regime in the early 1940s. Their service and dedication to France, however, only began to be recognised officially during the 1990s,<sup>41</sup> and Pineau's text can therefore be understood as part of that cultural drive to articulate and reclaim this marginalised episode in Antillean history. In July 1940, after France had fallen to Nazi Germany, the country was divided into occupied and unoccupied zones: northern and western France were occupied by the Nazis, and the rest of the country was controlled by Maréchal Pétain at Vichy. The French Antilles were also placed under Pétain's authority in 1940, governed locally by Admiral Georges Robert (High Commissioner for the Antilles), Constant Sorin (governor of Guadeloupe), and Henri Bressolles (governor of Martinique).<sup>42</sup> The Vichy regime soon imposed rigid authoritarian laws and regulations on the Antillean population, as they did in the metropole. Antillean resistance to the Vichy regime in the form of protests in Fort-de-France and Pointe-à-Pitre were quickly and violently repressed by the authorities.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Julien Toureille, 'La Dissidence dans les Antilles françaises: une mémoire à préserver (1945–2011)', *Revue historique des armées*, 270 (2013), 68–78 (p. 71).

<sup>42</sup> Éric T. Jennings, 'La Dissidence aux Antilles (1940–1943)', *Vingtième siècle. Revue d'histoire*, 68 (2000), 55–71 (p. 55). Yves Nicol replaced Bressolles as Governor of Martinique in 1941.

<sup>43</sup> Toureille, p. 68.

From 1940 to 1943, between four and five thousand Antilleans escaped to the neighbouring British islands of Dominica and Saint Lucia.<sup>44</sup> The *dissidents*, mainly young black men and women, made the perilous journey to the British Caribbean islands on small fishing boats and dinghies in the middle of the night. There they joined the Forces françaises libres and, after undergoing military training in Canada or the United States of America, crossed the Atlantic to fight alongside metropolitan soldiers in North Africa and France against Nazism.<sup>45</sup> Martinican theorist and psychiatrist Frantz Fanon was among those who fled to join the French army in 1943, although he was sent back from Dominica to Martinique because, at seventeen, he was too young to enlist.<sup>46</sup> Antilleans were responding to their patriotic sense of duty to protect France, and to terrible conditions in their home islands. They were suffering from extreme hunger after Britain had established blockades against Admiral Robert's troops, which prevented food imports from reaching the French Caribbean. Despite these hardships, the Antillean community came together, showing remarkable ingenuity and resourcefulness.<sup>47</sup> Yet some saw the Vichy regime as a return to slavery because universal

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<sup>44</sup> Jennings, p. 60.

<sup>45</sup> In 'Vichysme et vichystes à la Martinique', *Les Cahiers du CERAG*, 34 (1978), 1–101, Richard Burton describes this military exile, which deprived the Antilles of a large proportion of its workforce, as 'un équivalent contemporain du marronage', (pp. 2–3). He draws parallels between Antillean slavery and the Vichy regime. The Vichy government subjected Antilleans to such a repressive society that they felt they had no option but to flee, just as the maroons had escaped slavery during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

<sup>46</sup> David Macey, *Frantz Fanon: A Biography*, 2nd edn (London; New York: Verso Books, 2012 [2000]), p. 87. As Macey explains, by the time Fanon had reached Dominica and had undergone military training, Martinique was no longer part of the Vichy regime (p. 87).

<sup>47</sup> In *Seeking Imperialism's Embrace: National Identity, Decolonization, and Assimilation in the French Caribbean* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), Kristen Stromberg Childers explains that Antilleans learnt to become self-sufficient because they were unable to import raw materials from France. They made shoes out of old tyres, used alcohol for fuel, cooked with coconut oil, and made bread out of manioc (p. 44). According to Childers, 'despite the painful memories of the Vichy regime, for many Antilleans, this period represented a time of authenticity and self-reliance that has been lost in the subsequent years of assimilation to a "French" way of life' (p. 44). The economic independence that characterised the Vichy era was also an important reference point in the general strikes which brought life in Guadeloupe and Martinique to a halt in early 2009. As Louise Hardwick observes in 'Depicting Social Dispossession in Guadeloupe: *Nèg Marron, Lettre ouverte à la jeunesse* and the General Strike of 2009', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 48.3 (2012), 288–305, the strikes were a revolt against 'la vie chère' in the Antilles and a cry to break their economic and political dependence on France. The strikers aimed to recast Antilleans 'as a group who, rather than exploiting metropolitan financial assistance, are themselves economically exploited by metropolitan markets' (p. 290).

male suffrage was abolished in Martinique and Guadeloupe in October 1940, and Antilleans risked losing their rights as French citizens.<sup>48</sup>

In *L'Exil selon Julia*, Maréchal joins some four thousand Antillean soldiers in crossing the Caribbean Sea to become part of Charles de Gaulle's Free French forces. This is the first time he has left Guadeloupe, and it represents the beginnings of his military career. In making this dangerous crossing, Maréchal is positioned as a brave hero who risks his life to save metropolitan France from Nazi rule. However, in a typically elliptical statement, the narrative explains that it was actually Julia, his mother, who persuaded him to join the *dissidents*, 'pour pas qu'il lève la main sur son papa' (p. 18). Maréchal's heroic status is weakened by the suggestion that he joined the Resistance movement primarily to please his mother and avoid violent confrontation with his father, rendering the question of will and agency in his displacement ambiguous. Was Maréchal compelled to participate out of a sense of patriotic duty towards France, or did his mother persuade him to leave so that he no longer had to witness the domestic abuse to which Asdrubal subjected her? The reader is left wondering how much choice Maréchal himself had in his exile to France to be a *dissident*, and how much of the decision was made by his mother who, to mitigate family conflict, wanted him to return 'dans la gloire du Seigneur' (p. 18). The shifts in focus here — from the international events, to the national, and finally to the immediate family — reveal that exile is both a collective, shared experience within the Antillean community, and a very personal and individual decision, part of a complex network of family dynamics.

Maréchal's experiences as a *dissident* resonate more clearly with Averis's concept of 'forced choice', discussed earlier in the chapter, than with notions of exile as either a voluntary or enforced action. Although ultimately the final decision to join the French

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<sup>48</sup> Jennings, p. 56.

Resistance movement and demonstrate that he is ‘jeune, brave, tellement pétri d’honneur’ (p. 23) lies with him, his choice is limited: his mother wants him to go to prove his dedication to the French nation and, as a young man, he is expected to choose to fight alongside his fellow Antillean compatriots. Nevertheless, his actions are a choice, as he is not targeted as an individual and banished from his home, or forced to leave by an authoritarian political regime or natural disaster. ‘Forced choice’ thus facilitates a better understanding of the ‘irreconcilability of the extent to which displacement is undergone by force or by choice’.<sup>49</sup> Maréchal is proud of the glory that his military engagements grant him, in addition to the personal relief which his departure presumably affords him. He is awarded numerous medals for his service, returning to Guadeloupe at the end of the war as a war hero who is ‘entier, victorieux, décoré, galonné’ (p. 18). Yet through the narrator’s poignant lament, it is clear that these soldiers who risked their lives for France have received scant official recognition for their heroic actions and ‘n’ont connu qu’avec parcimonie le levain de la gloire’ (p. 14).

Pineau’s text makes an important political statement because when *L’Exil selon Julia* was published in 1996, the struggles and hardships endured by Antillean soldiers during the two World Wars had not been officially recognised by the French government. Indeed, cultural and political recognition for the Antilleans’ bravery and patriotism is only now coming to the fore. As Julien Toureille remarks, until the 1980s there was no mention of the French Caribbean *dissidence* movement in the French school curriculum, and few historical accounts of the period discuss the *dissidents’* actions in any detail.<sup>50</sup> In recent years, writers

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<sup>49</sup> Averis, p. 17.

<sup>50</sup> As Toureille explains, the first historical account of the role of the *dissidents* in World War Two was not published until 1989 (p. 71). That year saw the publication of *La Dissidence an tan Sorin (1940–1943): au nom de la Patrie* (Pointe-à-Pitre, Guadeloupe: Éditions Jasor, 1989) by Éliane Sempaire. This synthesis was followed by a more personal account of the movement, written by Henri Joseph, a *dissident* himself. See Lucien-René Abénon and Henri E. Joseph, *Les Dissidents des Antilles dans les Forces françaises combattantes, 1940–1945* (Fort-de-France, Martinique: Association des dissidents et des anciens des Forces françaises libres de la Martinique, 1999).

and film directors have engaged in cultural activism to raise public awareness about the sacrifices of the Antillean *dissidents*. In 2001, the French documentary maker Barcha Bauer produced the court-métrage *La Dissidence aux Antilles et en Guyane*, which examines historical documents in order to narrate the story of these Guadeloupean and Martinican exiled individuals.<sup>51</sup> In addition, the Resistance movement has been the subject of French literature, and novels aimed at young people have also addressed this crucial period of French Caribbean history, such as Pierre Davy's *Guadeloupe 1943: sous le vent de la guerre* (2010).<sup>52</sup> Moreover, the leading Martinican film director Euzhan Palcy has been active in fighting to recognise the achievements of the *dissidents*. Her 2006 documentary *Parcours de dissidents*, voiced by world-famous French actor Gérard Depardieu, brought the heroism of the *dissidents* into the public sphere.<sup>53</sup> Her struggle on behalf of their cause finally came to fruition in 2009 when Nicolas Sarkozy, the French president at the time, paid homage to the *dissidents* for the first time during an official visit to Martinique and Guadeloupe.<sup>54</sup> Pineau's *L'Exil selon Julia*, then, paved the way for greater recognition of Antillean soldiers and their role in France's victory during World War Two, although remarkably, this aspect of her text has gone uncommented by critics.

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<sup>51</sup> *La Dissidence aux Antilles et en Guyane*, dir. by Barcha Bauer (Les Productions de la lanterne, 2003).

<sup>52</sup> Pierre Davy, *Guadeloupe 1943: sous le vent de la guerre* (Paris: Éditions Nathan, 2010). This text narrates the trials and tribulations of the young Guadeloupean protagonist Benjamin who, arrested for having helped the *dissidents* to escape to Dominica, joins the movement himself and participates in the liberation of Guadeloupe in 1943. The novel was published within the 'Romans de la mémoire' series, instigated by the 'Direction de la mémoire, du patrimoine et des archives' which was established in 2010 and which, among other tasks, 'finance at accompagne des projets éducatifs' to facilitate the remembering of recent traumatic conflicts. See Sous-direction de la mémoire et de l'action éducative <<http://www.defense.gouv.fr/sga/le-sga/son-organisation/directions-et-services/direction-de-la-memoire-du-patrimoine-et-des-archives-dmpa/sous-direction-de-la-memoire-et-de-l-action-educative-sdmae>> [accessed 29 February 2016].

<sup>53</sup> *Parcours de dissidents*, dir. by Euzhan Palcy (France 5/JMJ Productions, 2006).

<sup>54</sup> See 'Outre-Mer: hommage aux "dissidents" antillais' <[http://archives.gouvernement.fr/fillon\\_version2/gouvernement/outre-mer-hommage-aux-dissidents-antillais.html](http://archives.gouvernement.fr/fillon_version2/gouvernement/outre-mer-hommage-aux-dissidents-antillais.html)> [accessed 23 February 2017]. In 2009, thirty-six former *dissidents* were named 'chevaliers' of the Légion d'honneur for their courage. See '1939-45: Légion d'honneur à des Antillais' <<http://www.lefigaro.fr/flash-actu/2009/06/23/01011-20090623FILWWW00484-1939-45-legion-d-honneur-a-des-antillais.php>> [accessed 23 February 2017].

## **African Adventures and French Flight**

After fighting for France's liberation during the Second World War, Maréchal becomes a professional soldier in the French army. He is stationed in Senegal before meeting his wife Daisy back in their native Guadeloupe, and the married couple are later posted to Congo-Brazzaville, Cameroon, Zimbabwe, Chad, and Madagascar. A year before migrating to the metropole in 1961, the family live in an unnamed country in Sub-Saharan Africa where Maréchal is stationed, after which they return to Guadeloupe for four months 'de congé de fin de campagne' (p. 31). During their time in Africa, Maréchal and Daisy remain within the confinements of the French military barracks and intentionally isolate themselves from the local people. They frighten their children with exotic accounts of African savagery, telling them stories about 'tel lion qui massacra un village. Tel tigre qui dévora une famille jusqu'aux dents' (p. 19). The narrator, who was only five at the time and cannot even remember in which country they were stationed,<sup>55</sup> believes these ferocious stories, dreaming about 'grandes aventures, expéditions sauvages peuplées d'une faune imprévisible' (p. 19). However, these mysterious tales are undoubtedly a figment of her parents' imagination (or her incorrect recollections of her parents' stories): tigers are not found in Africa, and while other animals such as lions, snakes, and elephants do inhabit African savannahs and grasslands, they are unlikely to be found around the army barracks where the family lived. The narrator's parents thus exoticise Africa and play on French stereotypes of the continent as a wild and savage

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<sup>55</sup> In *Creolizing the Metropole: Migrant Caribbean Identities in Literature and Film* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2012), H. Adlai Murdoch observes that the narrator's initial displacement is to Senegal (p. 260), yet there are no definitive indicators in the text to place the family's time in Africa in Senegal. In fact, the narrative makes it clear that Maréchal's posting in Senegal occurred before the narrator was born, and even before he met Daisy in Guadeloupe (p. 25).



place which needs to be ‘tamed’ by civilised Western peoples.<sup>56</sup> Her parents act in a similar manner to the French colonisers who deplored the brutality of the indigenous peoples and sought to spread France’s cultural values and linguistic traditions to enlighten Africans through the *mission civilisatrice*. In the afterword to Betty Wilson’s English translation, *Exile According to Julia* (2003), Marie-Agnès Sourieau remarks that Maréchal’s situation ‘exemplifies another irony of history’ and argues that as France’s military representative in Africa, the continent of his ancestors, he willingly propagates the same civilising mission which undermined the cultural identity of the land of his origins.<sup>57</sup> This pivotal example illustrates the cultural and political chasm between French Caribbean and French African subjects; the French colonial project was so longstanding in Guadeloupe that there, the *mission civilisatrice* was far more deeply embedded, as Fanon argues in his seminal *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952).<sup>58</sup> For Fanon, Antilleans are alienated from their traditional Caribbean community and from the very fact of their blackness because the colonial education system forces them to eradicate any other aspects of their identity: ‘le Noir n’a pas de résistance ontologique aux yeux du Blanc’.<sup>59</sup> The black man only becomes aware of his blackness, and how he has been historically constructed as black, when confronted with the white gaze. The narrator’s parents exhibit this typical black Antillean obsession with white metropolitan language and culture and suffer a self-imposed, colonising exile. As Larrier

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<sup>56</sup> These stereotypes about Africa have abounded in metropolitan French society since 1638, when France first began setting up trading posts along the West coast of Africa in Senegal, Ghana, and Benin. For a detailed account of France’s colonisation of Sub-Saharan Africa, see Francis Terry McNamara, *France in Black Africa* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1989).

<sup>57</sup> Marie-Agnès Sourieau, ‘Afterword’, in *Exile According to Julia*, by Gisèle Pineau, trans. by Betty Wilson (Charlottesville, VA; London: University of Virginia Press, 2003 [1996]), pp. 171–87 (p. 183).

<sup>58</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952).

<sup>59</sup> Fanon, p. 89.

claims, ‘the parents therefore not only choose to distance themselves from any notion of kinship with Africans, but they are complicit in propagating negative images’.<sup>60</sup>

However, Larrier’s remarks about the parents do not apply to the narrator who, in hindsight as she looks back on her early childhood, realises that she did feel she was missing something, and that she had very much wanted to participate in the local way of life as a young girl. The ‘représentations colorées’ of Africa which ‘s’affrontaient, passaient et trépassaient’ in her mind stand in sharp contrast to the mundane recollections of the realities of life in the French barracks (pp. 19–20). Her memories of being fascinated with ‘des femmes en boubous’ and ‘des chasseurs d’ivoire’ (p. 19) suggest that she is in part complicit in her parents’ exoticisation of African life, although they also reflect the fact that she was only a young child. Unlike her parents, however, she does not aspire to eradicate her blackness. Indeed, she is disappointed to learn from her mother that the colour of her skin did not create an inherent affinity with Africans because, as a ten- or eleven-year-old child at the time of narration, she is beginning to embrace her black identity. She admits that ‘manman disait que l’Afrique nous avait pourtant toujours tenus à distance, comme si la couleur de la peau seule ne faisait pas la famille...’ (p. 20). Although Sourieau reads the narrator’s time in Africa as a positive experience because here ‘she has learned that the colour of the skin does not define one’s identity’,<sup>61</sup> a fact which will be crucial to her survival in France, for the narrator this displacement, caused by her father’s direct participation in the military, is above all a painful manifestation of psychological exile, and a specifically Antillean kind of alienation. She embodies those who, as Edward W. Said explains, are forever ‘at odds with their society’ and always feel outsiders, whether in their homeland or their adopted country.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Larrier, “‘Sont-ils encore gens de Guadeloupe?’”, p. 178.

<sup>61</sup> Sourieau, p. 184.

<sup>62</sup> Edward W. Said, *Representations of the Intellectual* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), p. 39.

Even though the narrator shares a racial and historical heritage with Africa, she comes to recognise her difference due to her family's social conditioning.

This episode places Pineau's narrator at odds with *négritude*, which privileges a shared black African identity for all people with black ancestry, because her narrative emphasises that a shared racial identity does not equate to a shared culture. It might suggest the narrator is more in line with *créolité*, which argues for the distinctiveness of a black Caribbean culture. Although sometimes associated with the movement in the 1990s, Pineau herself rejected this cultural label in a 2004 interview with Nadège Veldwachter, commenting that she feels 'closer to African-American writers than to writers of Creolity' because, like them, she was brought up as a minority in a white society.<sup>63</sup> There is also a gendered angle to her frustration towards *créolité*; the movement is very male-dominated, whereas she admits that she has been inspired the most by Simone Schwarz-Bart and Toni Morrison, two female writers who have both explored female experiences over different generations.<sup>64</sup>

In 1961, following their adventures in Africa, the family migrate to the metropole, first to rural Aubigné-Racan in Pays de la Loire, and then to the densely-populated Parisian suburb of Le Kremlin-Bicêtre. In keeping with the enigmatic tone of the text, no explicit reason is given for the family's migration. A careful reading establishes that they arrive in France primarily because of Maréchal's military activities: he is given a much-coveted post in Paris, after being awarded medals for his heroism, and is even 'félicité par le Général en personne' in recognition of his military service (pp. 32–33).<sup>65</sup> He then joins French forces on their

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<sup>63</sup> Gisèle Pineau, 'An Interview with Gisèle Pineau', Interview by Nadège Veldwachter, *Research in African Literatures*, 35.1 (2004), 180–86 (p. 185).

<sup>64</sup> Gisèle Pineau, 'An Interview with Gisèle Pineau', p. 184. See Chapter One for a more detailed discussion of Pineau's relationship with the movement of *créolité*.

<sup>65</sup> Maréchal's migration to France echoes that of many other Antillean migrants in the late 1950s and early 1960s who take up residence in France after a period of compulsory national service in the military. See Aldrich and Connell, p. 109.

military operations on Tahiti (p. 106). However, it is likely that the ambiguity created here is intentional, since it allows more open interpretations as to why the family moved to France, which increases the number of readers who can identify with the themes of the text. Their displacement in late 1961 anticipates the formal creation of the BUMIDOM scheme just over one year later, on 26 April 1963. This migration scheme, established following the success of military emigration, encouraged workers from the Antilles and Réunion to migrate to mainland France as a solution to the islands' increasingly problematic demographic issues, caused by growing unemployment and rising birth rates. In 1961, very few black people from the French Caribbean lived in Paris, causing the Pineau family to be an object of fascination and disgust simultaneously; children at school are fascinated by the narrator's appearance, touching her braids and expressing amazement at 'la face claire' of her hands (p. 80), while also insulting her. Yet in 1963, France instigated mass migration from the Caribbean, and the majority of Antilleans settled in Paris. As Stephanie A. Condon and Philip E. Ogden explain, these early arrivals were predominantly male workers who left their families behind in the Antilles, before the scheme was extended in order to recruit women and encourage family reunification.<sup>66</sup> The Pineau family's migration could thus be read as a blueprint for this scheme, as military emigration ushered in the new era of the BUMIDOM. After witnessing the successful insertion of Antillean soldiers in the French armed forces, the government decided to extend the policy to Antillean workers. Indeed, Condon and Ogden describe military emigration as 'the precursor to organised labour recruitment by the state', suggesting that state migration schemes were established following the success of military emigration.<sup>67</sup> Margaret Byron and Condon explicitly link these two procedures of emigration, noting that

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<sup>66</sup> Stephanie A. Condon and Philip E. Ogden, 'Emigration from the French Caribbean: The Origins of an Organized Migration', *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research*, 15.4 (1991), 505–23 (p. 515).

<sup>67</sup> Condon and Ogden, p. 510.

‘following these military connections, [...] came the decision by elements of the British and French public and private sectors to recruit civilian labour from the islands’.<sup>68</sup>

Despite state rhetoric promoting the BUMIDOM as a means of social promotion for *domiens*, it appears to have been much more beneficial for metropolitan France. Antilleans were often exploited as a cheap workforce to restore buildings and infrastructure which had been damaged during the Second World War and to bolster France’s depleted workforce in health care and domestic service sectors.<sup>69</sup> For many Antilleans, these migration schemes equated to what Martinican writer and politician Aimé Césaire famously described as ‘l’instrument de la déportation’.<sup>70</sup> Césaire’s choice of vocabulary is heavily laden with historical reproach, for using the loaded term ‘déportation’ in the decades immediately following the Second World War recalls the mass deportations of Jews in France during the Holocaust, suggesting that those Antilleans who volunteered to participate in the scheme in fact had little choice in the matter. The BUMIDOM wrenched Antilleans away from their families, bringing them to the metropole where they were often treated as second-class citizens and accused of taking jobs which belonged to the French, despite the fact that they were French citizens too and so had the same right to access French services, training, and employment.<sup>71</sup> Although the narrator, her siblings, and her grandmother Julia are not financially exploited in the same manner as Antilleans migrating through the BUMIDOM

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<sup>68</sup> Margaret Byron and Stephanie A. Condon, *Migration in Comparative Perspective: Caribbean Communities in Britain and France* (New York; Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), p. 54.

<sup>69</sup> In 1963, Michel Debré, the first prime minister of the Fifth Republic of France and in office between 1959 and 1962, wrote in *Le Monde* that ‘l’immigration a pendant trente ans couronné l’insuffisance de notre natalité. [...] Si elle [l’immigration] n’augmentait pas la situation deviendrait critique dans des secteurs tel que le bâtiment’, suggesting that the official rhetoric of the BUMIDOM scheme focused more on the needs of metropolitan France than those of the Antilles. See Michel Debré, *Le Monde*, 14–15 July 1963, p. 1.

<sup>70</sup> Aimé Césaire, ‘Crise dans les départements d’outre-mer ou crise de la départementalisation?’, *Présence Africaine*, 36.1 (1961), 109–12 (p. 110).

<sup>71</sup> Although initially Antillean migrants were promised a paid return ticket home after three years, in many cases this was not granted. For the majority of Antilleans, the myth of return remained just that: a myth. Alain Anselin remarks that while ‘il y a trente ans, dans la Caraïbe, 600,000 Antillais rêvaient de la France’, ‘aujourd’hui [in the 1990s], en France, 400,000 Antillais rêvent des Antilles’. Alain Anselin, *L’Émigration antillaise en France: la troisième île* (Paris: Éditions Karthala, 1990), p. 100.

project because they are not at working age, their migration is not a rewarding experience because they do not receive the same rights and responsibilities as metropolitan French citizens. They therefore subscribe to Philippe Dewitte's claim that Antilleans migrating through the BUMIDOM scheme are not perceived, as Césaire famously declared, as 'des citoyens à part entière', but rather, as 'des citoyens entièrement à part'.<sup>72</sup>

While Maréchal's military activities are a source of unease and estrangement for his family, Maréchal, in contrast, appears grateful for the opportunities that migration has given him and is particularly indebted to the metropole and the *mission civilisatrice*, reinforcing his complicity in France's colonial project. He feels proud and honoured to be able to prove his Frenchness by fighting alongside metropolitan French soldiers and to contribute to military operations throughout the French territory overseas. In a switch of narrative voice, which, unusually, incorporates a masculine perspective, he comments that 'lui, Maréchal, a voyagé. Il a vu comment vivent les gens' in mainland France (p. 32), suggesting that he desires to emulate this behaviour because he believes the rhetoric that the metropolitan French are superior to Antilleans. As Brinda Mehta points out, though, France does not give him much back in return: his 'national service is ironically rewarded by obscurity in the immigrant Parisian ghetto', suggesting that France does not value its French Caribbean citizens as much as the country's colonial rhetoric had proclaimed.<sup>73</sup> In Paris, Maréchal begins to feel that France has failed him. In one of the letters sent to Julia, who has already returned to Guadeloupe, the narrator writes that 'Papa n'est plus le même non plus. Une partie de lui a perdu foi en l'armée, en la France, en la vie, en l'honneur' (p. 163); he is dismayed that the French values and ideals he fought for during the war are not extended to him as a black

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<sup>72</sup> Philippe Dewitte, 'Des citoyens à part entière, ou entièrement à part?', *Hommes et migrations*, 1237 (May–June 2002), p. 1.

<sup>73</sup> Brinda Mehta, *Notions of Identity, Diaspora, and Gender in Caribbean Women's Writing* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 102.

citizen. In fact, Maréchal finally decides that the family will move back to the Antilles in 1970 in a protest against de Gaulle's resignation from power following the referendum of April 1969, when the French rejected his proposed constitutional reforms after civil unrest had paralysed the country in May 1968.<sup>74</sup> De Gaulle was Maréchal's hero; he admired him profoundly as 'le Sauveur de la France' (p. 162), the charismatic leader who rallied France in support of the Resistance and brought the country to victory in the Second World War. He even made his children distribute fliers to support de Gaulle in the referendum campaign (p. 162). Maréchal's disappointment at de Gaulle's humiliating defeat was therefore felt on a very personal level.

Even when the family return to the Antilles, their exile does not come to an end: once again, they remain enclosed within military barracks and are not free to choose where to live. Before transferring to Guadeloupe in 1973, the family are initially stationed in Fort Desaix in Martinique, formerly a fort built between 1768 and 1772 to safeguard against British attack and now a military base where the headquarters of the French armed forces of the Antilles are located, on the hill of Morne Garnier in Fort-de-France. The narrator is disappointed that Fort Desaix turns out to be a military base which does not live up to her romantic expectations, as she had imagined a fort to be a military stronghold like those she had seen in exciting cowboy films. The chaotic activity of the military base gives her the impression 'd'être en guerre. En perpétuel état de siège' (p. 175). On her return, the Caribbean, once a place of desire and longing, initially becomes an inhospitable, militarised space of confinement and imprisonment. Moreover, while at first the narrator is elated to have returned at last to the Antilles, she realises that she does not know anything about the Caribbean. Just as in France,

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<sup>74</sup> Philip E. Converse and Roy Pierce, *Political Representation in France* (Cambridge, MA; London: Harvard University Press, 1986), p. 441.

she feels exiled from the local way of life: ‘qu’en savons-nous? Nous ne connaissons rien d’ici’ (p. 182).

Military service, then, both during and following the two World Wars, acts as a channel for emigration from the French Antilles to metropolitan France in *L’Exil selon Julia*, providing new, prestigious opportunities but further complicating ideas of belonging and identity. Having examined the impact on male characters, this chapter will now argue that this is even more the case for female family members. Julia and Daisy follow their son and husband respectively on their military exploits to improve their own socio-economic situation. However, as the following section explores, their gender, and lack of educational and professional opportunities that this entails, limits their agency in the metropole and further emphasises their subaltern status.

### **Military Wives**

Soldiers who fought for the French army during the twentieth century did not necessarily relocate to military camps or barracks alone; often they brought their spouses and families with them. This phenomenon, which is still in practice today, is frequently referred to as the displacement of the ‘military wife’. In the French context, women were only permitted to serve in France in October 1951, after the resolution of the two World Wars.<sup>75</sup> Nevertheless, prior to that, their lives were often entirely shaped by the army, either through their civilian

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<sup>75</sup> Irène Eulriet, *Women and the Military in Europe: Comparing Public Cultures* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 114.



roles in the forces,<sup>76</sup> or through their capacity as military wives. These positions, however, did not grant them any official military recognition or status. Female civilians travelling with an army have also sometimes been described as ‘camp followers’, a problematic term which implies a ‘parasitic’ relationship between servicemen and their wives.<sup>77</sup> While many women wished to follow their husbands, it was nevertheless a difficult decision to take, as Betty Sowers Alt and Bonnie Domrose Stone explain: ‘those who stayed behind suffered the loneliness of separation; those who followed suffered the hardships (and had the adventure) of travel, camp living, and separation when husbands went into the field’.<sup>78</sup> Becoming a ‘military wife’ thus meant a challenging life, with a heightened risk of adversity and psychological distress.

In *L’Exil selon Julia*, Daisy becomes a ‘military wife’ as she accompanies Maréchal on his military postings. Initially, however, Daisy is not aware of her condition as one of exile, as she represents the archetypal soldier’s wife who is proud of her husband’s achievements and is pleased to share his ‘tourbillon d’aventures’ in France’s African colonies (p. 14). Despite being attached to her native land, she had always wanted to leave rural Guadeloupe, even before meeting Maréchal. In a section of the narrative which articulates Daisy’s hopes and dreams prior to her marriage, the narrator notes how her mother, as a young woman, was eager for a life of adventure, excitement, and travel, and thus longed for Eurocentric landscapes: ‘il lui faut des horizons d’hivers, des hirondelles pour ouvrir les

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<sup>76</sup> Women had been employed by the French military before 1951 but as civilians, undertaking clerical and domestic tasks. For instance, as Thomas Cardoza explains in *Intrepid Women: Cantinières and Vivandières of the French Army* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2010), ‘from 1916 to 1918, despite intense hostility from many generals, the French army grudgingly employed 120,000 female civilian employees as nurses, clerical workers, telephone operators, cleaners, and even in a limited capacity as drivers’ (p. 221).

<sup>77</sup> Donna Alvah, ‘U.S. Military Wives in the Philippines, from the Philippine War to World War II’, in *A Companion to Women’s Military History*, ed. by Barton C. Hacker and Margaret Vining (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2012), pp. 431–52 (p. 432).

<sup>78</sup> Betty Sowers Alt and Bonnie Domrose Stone, *Campfollowing: A History of the Military Wife* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1991), pp. 3–4.

printemps, des aubes rouges d'automne, des étés à Paris' (p. 26). Here, the narrative passes ironic comment on the manner in which Daisy has become estranged from the Caribbean by her French education under the *mission civilisatrice*, as she longs for the European landscapes she had learned about as a child in the French education system. Analysing Daisy's plight through Kristeva's theory of women's exile is insightful: Daisy's exile is symptomatic of the fact that she remains enclosed by patriarchal structures, even within the mobility her status affords her. She only moves as a direct consequence of her marriage and her husband's career. Kristeva argues that women are always inherently condemned to a life of marginalisation and subalternity, regardless of their social position and financial status, because of their gender; they always feel '*en exil dans ces généralités qui font la commune mesure du consensus social, en même temps que par rapport au pouvoir de généralisation du langage*' [original emphasis].<sup>79</sup>

Daisy is not officially registered as a participant in the BUMIDOM project; however, her reflections on migration offer striking parallels with the experiences of the thousands of Antilleans who were encouraged to migrate to the metropole between 1963 and 1982.<sup>80</sup> Daisy's thoughts on migration to mainland France anticipate the claim of prefect J. E. Vié, chair of the BUMIDOM administration, that Antillean migration represented '*une perspective de promotion sociale*', because its mission was to find jobs for unemployed Antilleans, often women, providing them with the necessary training and facilitating their integration into metropolitan France.<sup>81</sup> Pineau directly discusses the opportunities given to women through

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<sup>79</sup> Kristeva, p. 5.

<sup>80</sup> In 1983 the scheme was replaced by the Agence Nationale pour l'insertion et la promotion des Travailleurs d'outre-mer (ANT). The ANT favoured family reunification and integration projects over the recruitment of new workers, and consequently the number of Antilleans migrating to France began to fall. See Wilfred Bertile, '*Où en sont les politiques ultramarines de mobilité?*', in *Mobilités ultramarines*, ed. by Philippe Vitale (Paris: Éditions des archives contemporaines, 2014), pp. 35–61 (p. 42).

<sup>81</sup> J. E Vié, '*Conditions de vie et droits des ressortissants des DOM*', *Hommes et migrations*, 842 (1972), 24–26 (p. 24).

this non-patriarchal scheme in her testimonial narrative *Femmes des Antilles: traces et voix cent cinquante ans après l'abolition de l'esclavage* (1998).<sup>82</sup> Martinican woman Julétane has a bleak view of prospects in the Caribbean; she is thus grateful for the BUMIDOM which ‘en a sauvé plus d'une, qui auraient mal tourné si elles étaient restées au pays, assises dans la case de leur manman, à attendre quoi? de trouver un homme et de tomber enceinte’.<sup>83</sup> Like Julétane, Daisy is proud to live and work alongside metropolitan citizens. Mediated through the narrator, Daisy tells her children that they should consider themselves lucky to live in France, which is, for Daisy, the country of respect, freedom, and possibilities: ‘enfants! Rien, il n'y a rien de bon pour vous au Pays [...] Profitez de la France! Profitez de votre chance de grandir ici-là!’ (p. 28). Mary Gallagher explains the origins of the contradictory Creolism ‘ici-là’, noting that the term is formed by adding the French adverb ‘là’ as a suffix to the deictic adverb ‘ici’ to form a ‘demonstratively inflected definite article’, which can be translated into English in a variety of ways: ‘the’, ‘this’, ‘that’, ‘here’, or ‘here-there’.<sup>84</sup> While Gallagher acknowledges the spatial instability at work in the phrase and the distancing it provokes between the local and the distant, she also recognises the positive potential of the term, since it emphasises the ‘connection and simultaneity’ between ‘here’ and ‘there’.<sup>85</sup> Pineau’s use of ‘ici-là’ at this instant in *L'Exil selon Julia*, however, reinforces the distance between France and the Antilles. Here, the term solely refers to the metropole rather than to a constant back and forth between the overseas department, and Daisy sees huge discrepancies in the prospects offered by Guadeloupe, or ‘le Pays’, and France.

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<sup>82</sup> Gisèle Pineau and Marie Abraham, *Femmes des Antilles: traces et voix cent cinquante ans après l'abolition de l'esclavage* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 1998).

<sup>83</sup> Pineau and Abraham, p. 112. For Julétane, the scheme provides women with personal and professional opportunities which would not have been available to them had they decided to stay in the Caribbean.

<sup>84</sup> Mary Gallagher, ‘Introduction: Between “Here” and “There” or the “Hyphen of Unfinished Things”’, in *Ici-là: Place and Displacement in Caribbean Writing in French*, ed. by Mary Gallagher (Amsterdam; New York: Éditions Rodopi, 2003), pp. xiii–xxix (p. xiii).

<sup>85</sup> Gallagher, p. xiv.

Like those migrating through the BUMIDOM, then, Daisy's migration to France elevates her social status, although in contradistinction, her mobility was not independently undertaken. Her position as the wife of a soldier in the French army enables her to fulfil her dreams of becoming one of the 'grandes femmes libres' in France (p. 14), a phrase which implies that life in France offers her more economic opportunities than she would have enjoyed in Guadeloupe during the 1960s. She is now able to earn a living, and she even owns her own car (p. 85), a status symbol which gives her greater geographic mobility and demonstrates her heightened social position. It is never clear exactly what work Daisy undertakes, but the narrator does comment in one of her letters to her grandmother (after Julia has returned to Guadeloupe) that her mother's demanding work schedule does not allow her to cook traditional Antillean cuisine. Instead, she reveals, they rely on 'des sachets de purée Mousseline et des raviolis' (p. 154). Daisy's increased economic independence is offset by her daughter's perceptive realisation that employment in the metropole results in distancing them from Guadeloupean customs and traditions; moreover, it is inferred that Daisy, by becoming a career woman, has less time for her family. There is no implication in this section of the narrative that because Daisy is now working too, Maréchal should share the domestic parental duties. *L'Exil selon Julia* thus intersects with wider contemporary gender debates about masculine and feminine roles within the family in western countries.

Pineau's concern for gender issues is similarly evoked through Daisy's release from her 'joug paternel' (p. 14). Her migration to the metropole with Maréchal grants her the freedom to live her own life, away from the constraints of her oppressive family. She is no longer forced to conform to her father's expectations and is able to travel and see the world but only because of her husband's military activities. In fact, she passes from one patriarchal structure to another by becoming a military wife. Travel, then, does not grant her the freedom

and independence she anticipated because she does not discover new places in her own right, only through Maréchal. Her own experiences are always defined by her role as a wife, rather than self-determined.

It is only with hindsight that Daisy realises that her marriage — and her subsequent life of displacement — has been unfulfilling, and this realisation shapes the opening pages of the text. She does appreciate that she and her female friends chose this life of exile themselves, since it was their decision to marry servicemen and follow the soldiers on their military activities. However, she is disappointed that the dreams of emancipation and freedom that they thought their military husbands and French adventures would grant them have not been translated into reality; observing these women, the narrator reports that ‘les soupirs qu’elles poussent à présent dénoncent tous leurs rêves’ (p. 15). Daisy’s alienation is apparent from when she reflects on her colonial adventures while cooking and washing up for the soldiers with the other army wives in Paris, and this episode takes place in the traditionally female space of the kitchen. Here, she remains confined to a typically domestic role, reinforcing the argument that migrating to France has done nothing to eradicate deeply-embedded gender norms. Ironically, now Daisy yearns for her simple life in Guadeloupe before marriage, when the only thoughts that troubled her were the love stories she enjoyed reading, a time before she naively agreed to ‘l’exil, qui semblait aussi simple que changer de casaque’, as ventriloquised by the narrator (p. 14). This important quotation demonstrates that Daisy herself now considers her migration as an ‘exile’, a forced departure. ‘Casaque’, an unusual word which means ‘blouse’, might also subtly reinforce the connection between Daisy’s migration and her husband’s military activities because the term originally referred to the long coats worn by soldiers and horsemen in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Doreen Yarwood, *The Encyclopaedia of World Costume* (London: B. T. Batsford, 1978), p. 70.

Daisy's migration is related with unmistakable disappointment and ambivalence. Mehta argues that the women's dissatisfaction with their lives is portrayed in the food they eat together; the sweet desserts symbolise their 'capacity to sugarcoat their bitterness under the guise of romantic fantasy' as they realise that exile had not been altogether rewarding.<sup>87</sup> However, eating together does at least provide them with some sense of female solidarity.

Daisy's marginality resonates in part with Kristeva's assertion that women are confined to the margins by a masculinised society to such an extent that femininity has been silenced, and that the condition of woman cannot be defined: 'I therefore understand by "woman" that which is not represented, something that is not said'.<sup>88</sup> Daisy's position bears out this subaltern absence; her presence in the metropole is entirely dependent upon her husband's role in the French military. Although she does have a limited amount of control over her displacement because she is among those who have 'the means to turn their will into practical action' and have 'the freedom to do so', in Bartoloni's terms,<sup>89</sup> and later becomes financially independent in France, she cannot choose for herself where to go or when to leave. Her position confirms Sue Jervis's assertion that soldiers' wives often suffer from alienation just as acutely as the soldiers themselves.<sup>90</sup> In her psychoanalytical account of the reactions of current British servicemen's wives to their relocation, Jervis explicitly compares their experiences to those of exiled people, emphasising the lack of material and emotional support these women receive when they leave behind the familiarity of their homeland. She argues that 'since servicemen's wives who move overseas not only experience significant losses but also become personally disempowered and denied support conducive to their adaptation, they

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<sup>87</sup> Mehta, p. 102.

<sup>88</sup> Julia Kristeva, 'Woman Can Never Be Defined', in *New French Feminisms: An Anthology*, ed. by Elaine Marks and Isabelle de Courtivron (New York; London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1981), pp. 137–41 (p. 137).

<sup>89</sup> Bartoloni, p. 99.

<sup>90</sup> Sue Jervis, *Relocation, Gender, and Emotion: A Psycho-Social Perspective on the Experiences of Military Wives* (London: Karnac Books, 2011).

are likely to suffer similar alienating culture shock to that found among exiles'.<sup>91</sup> Daisy's exile is arguably even more acute than her husband's because she is not only confronted with the hostility of the metropolitan French community, but she must also come to terms with the fact that the course of her life is entirely controlled by her husband.

Julia's exile to the metropole in 1961 also arises from war. She does not fit the category of 'military wife' who follows her husband's military deployments, although she is also literally a military wife who had to endure solitude when Asdrubal fought in the trenches in France during World War One, following their marriage (p. 69). Her migration to France is wholly planned and orchestrated by a male family member, and so she too is placed in a subordinate position, whose lack of agency is a direct result of being 'prise par les frontières' of her gender, in Kristeva's terms.<sup>92</sup> Her son Maréchal plots a 'calcul d'enlèvement' (p. 32) to take her to live in France, so that she escapes the abuse she suffers at the hands of Asdrubal. On her way home from church one day, she is indeed kidnapped when, in a disturbing scene, Maréchal bundles Julia into his car without any explanation. Julia does not understand what is happening but simply gets in the car 'sans se défier' (p. 35). Ironically, she feels proud to travel in a car which was, at the time, a symbol of real social and financial privilege. As María Cristina Rodríguez comments, 'others decide what is best' for Julia.<sup>93</sup> Even though Maréchal believes he is acting with the best of intentions by protecting her from Asdrubal, telling the children that 'c'est ça ou la mort au Pays' (p. 18), he too eradicates Julia's agency by removing her from Guadeloupe against her will. Sam Haigh argues that here, Pineau engages with the legacies of Antillean history because Julia's imposed exile 'has strong parallels with

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<sup>91</sup> Jervis, p. 72.

<sup>92</sup> Kristeva, 'Un nouveau type d'intellectuel', p. 5.

<sup>93</sup> María Cristina Rodríguez, *What Women Lose: Exile and the Construction of Imaginary Homelands in Novels by Caribbean Writers* (New York: Peter Lang, 2005), p. 42.

the way slaves were captured in Africa and transported, by ship, to the Caribbean'.<sup>94</sup> Although comparisons can be made between Julia and her slave ancestors — like them, she is forced to migrate by ship against her will, and dreams of returning to her land of origin — Julia is not financially exploited nor is she treated as chattel in metropolitan France, and such comparisons must be approached with caution. Haigh's claim could be seen to trivialise the plight of transatlantic slaves by drawing comparisons between their oppression and that of Julia, two very different situations. More generally, Mary Jo Muratore also draws parallels between the transatlantic slave trade and the Caribbean condition of exile and alienation.<sup>95</sup> Whereas Haigh analyses Julia's condition in her discussion of *L'Exil selon Julia*, Muratore posits that it is the young narrator whose identity quest is structured around the desire to 'recover that part of her identity which was lost in the wake of the transatlantic slave trade'.<sup>96</sup> However, the narrator was not personally involved in the slave trade; nor had she been born when slavery was outlawed in 1848. Muratore's desire to focus attention exclusively towards the enduring shadow of slavery problematically overlooks contemporary issues of racism and xenophobia in France which are at the heart of the narrator's alienation.

Julia is not a slave, then, but nonetheless has no choice in her captivity and waits patiently to return home to Asdrubal. She is hidden away in a little house at Îlet Pérou, a village in the municipality of Capesterre-Belle-Eau, located in the south east of Basse-Terre Island, until, two days later, she receives her first *carte d'identité* which will enable her to travel by boat from Guadeloupe to France. She is illiterate and so signs her name with a cross. This episode, which implies her lack of agency in her displacement, becomes engraved in

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<sup>94</sup> Sam Haigh, 'Migration and Melancholia: From Kristeva's "Dépression nationale" to Pineau's "Maladie de l'Exil"', *French Studies*, 60.2 (2006), 232–50 (p. 245).

<sup>95</sup> Mary Jo Muratore, *Exiles, Outcasts, Strangers: Icons of Marginalization in Post World War II Narrative* (New York; London: Continuum, 2011).

<sup>96</sup> Muratore, p. 69.



Julia's mind. She did not understand why she had to write a cross: 'personne ne lui a dit le sens de cette croix-là, un peu bancal, posée au bas d'écritures muettes' (p. 93). It is this aspect of her removal, which underscores her marginalisation and helplessness, which perhaps provides some echo with the plight of her slave ancestors under colonialism, and a social commentary on the enduring post-colonial failure of France to empower its more vulnerable French Caribbean citizens. While Julia's identity card confirms her French nationality, it does not guarantee her equality, nor does it provide her with opportunities to improve her standard of living. Rather, her struggles and anxieties at leaving behind her Creole culture are aggravated by the second-class citizenship which she discovers in France. This is despite her confirmed legal status — symbolised by the rapid acquisition of her *carte d'identité* — as a French citizen, a status she has held since the implementation of the *loi de la départementalisation* in 1946. Although she is not technically an immigrant in Paris, then, having remained in France despite a transatlantic voyage, she is an exile. Indeed, the experiences of French Caribbeans in metropolitan France are almost always described as experiences of immigration.

Julia is doubly exiled against her will, from both Guadeloupean and metropolitan culture and society. In Paris, she becomes withdrawn because she does not feel as though she belongs there. She misses her simple life back in Guadeloupe, particularly her Creole garden; as Bonnie Thomas points out, 'the land is classically linked to the painful memories of the sugar plantations and slavery in the Caribbean context', but for Julia, the Caribbean landscape is crucial to the preservation of her identity.<sup>97</sup> She even misses Asdrubal, despite his violent rages. Exile fails to rescue Julia from a life of violence and subordination. As the narrator comments, Julia 'n'est pas délivrée' by her exile (p. 38), as her family had anticipated; rather,

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<sup>97</sup> Bonnie Thomas, *Connecting Histories: Francophone Caribbean Writers Interrogating Their Past* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2017), p. 59.

her suffering is transformed, as she continues to feel imprisoned in metropolitan France, conveyed by the narrator's comment that Julia 'débarque tout juste en terre d'exil et cinq encablures de chaînes viennent d'être ajoutées à son existence' (p. 38). Here, Pineau provides a deliberate echo with Guadeloupe's haunting past of slavery through the imagery of incarceration and enchainment. As Larrier remarks, it is only when Julia is finally released from exile and goes back to Guadeloupe that Julia feels liberated.<sup>98</sup> Her homesickness is so acute that at times she does not leave her bed: 'un genre de mélancolie la terrasse' (p. 123). She also has to cope with the racist attitudes of the metropolitan French who look down on her because of her cultural and racial alterity. Drawing on Freud, Haigh reads Julia's depression as representative of the 'dépression nationale' from which, according to Kristeva in *Contre la dépression nationale* (1998), France is currently suffering after losing national prestige in the Second World War.<sup>99</sup> Kristeva argues that France is humiliated, having lost its influence in Europe and America, and like the depressed individual who becomes introverted and withdrawn, 'beaucoup de Français déconsidèrent la vie communautaire et politique, n'agissent plus, gémissent'.<sup>100</sup> France's isolation is aggravated, according to Kristeva, by its arrogant belief in its own cultural superiority and rejection of immigrant communities. Haigh highlights the problems in Kristeva's argument, namely that in her analysis of the role of the foreigner in the nation's melancholia, she neglects to interrogate the foreigner's own depression and ask 'what is his or her place in a nation built on his or her own foreignness?'.<sup>101</sup> She then addresses 'this "other side" of France's national depression'<sup>102</sup> by drawing parallels between the yearning and melancholy of France and Julia, who has also

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<sup>98</sup> Renée Larrier, *Autofiction and Advocacy in the Francophone Caribbean* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2006), p. 90.

<sup>99</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Contre la dépression nationale: un entretien avec Philippe Petit* (Paris: Éditions Textuel, 1998).

<sup>100</sup> Kristeva, *Contre la dépression nationale*, p. 67.

<sup>101</sup> Haigh, p. 240.

<sup>102</sup> Haigh, p. 242.

experienced great loss by being taken to France against her will.<sup>103</sup> While Haigh's analysis begins to identify the connection between war and exile in the text, her suggestion that a correlation exists between the psychological conditions of Julia and the French nation appears rather incongruous, or rather, it holds true only up to a point. It is France's refusal to accept Julia as an equal citizen that is partly responsible for Julia's depression, and so Pineau's text draws attention to marginalised experiences within the dominant French mainstream.

Julia's cultural difference 'mak[es] for several moments of poignant tragi-comedy which arise because she continues to behave in the same way as in Guadeloupe', as Hardwick observes.<sup>104</sup> One example of Julia's misunderstanding of metropolitan French social codes occurs when she wears Maréchal's military jacket and képi helmet to collect the children from school in the rain. This incident again reinforces the ostracising effects of the military and further intermeshes the military and exile, albeit in an unexpected manner. The fact that Maréchal brought his old military uniform with him to Paris is a likely indication of his pride in his own military achievements. For Julia, wearing Maréchal's large military jacket is a practical way to keep herself and the children dry; she is figured as a 'vieille manman-poule' who will take the children under her wing and protect them from the metropolitan rain (p. 71). However, for this she is scorned and chastised by the French, who regard her as a threat to their community and a danger to their country. As Dawn Fulton has remarked, it is as though the former colonies are seeking revenge on France and 'now infringing upon the internal terrain of the hexagon' in a reversal of the colonisation process: 'certains la tournaient en dérision. Mais d'autres portaient des mines contrites comme si la France venait d'être envahie

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<sup>103</sup> Haigh, pp. 245–46.

<sup>104</sup> Hardwick, *Childhood, Autobiography and the Francophone Caribbean*, p. 147.

par un de ses sempiternels ennemis' (p. 72).<sup>105</sup> This seemingly innocuous, eccentric moment rapidly escalates when Julia is then almost arrested for wearing military uniform. Civilians not enlisted in the French army can be punished by imprisonment of between six months and two years for wearing a uniform which falsely grants them military powers, as stipulated in article 259 of France's *Code pénal de 1810*.<sup>106</sup> Julia is taken to the police station where she is humiliated and embarrassed, but once more she does not understand what is happening because she cannot speak or understand French. She is also completely ignorant of more obscure metropolitan French laws. Again, the social framework is completely alien to her: she presumes God is punishing her for leaving Asdrubal and imagines that he must have written to the French government 'à sa recherche' (p. 72).

While Rachele Okawa reads this scene as one of subversion, arguing that 'these small acts of resistance aid Man Ya in both destabilizing the force of the French policemen and exerting control over her own self and body in exile',<sup>107</sup> this reading grants Julia more agency than the narrative really allows. Julia is quite unaware that she is being rebellious, and she is depicted as confused and disorientated, which undermines the potential for resistance in this episode. Rather, the incident underscores Julia's lack of understanding, power, and control over how she is treated by the metropolitan French, and their authorities. As Haigh argues, this key scene exposes 'the contradiction inherent in a Republic officially proud of its hospitality' but which discriminates against and segregates its 'undesirable, foreign elements'.<sup>108</sup> It demonstrates how even when Julia is living in mainland France, a supposedly

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<sup>105</sup> Dawn Fulton, 'The Disengaged Immigrant: Mapping the Francophone Caribbean Metropolis', *French Forum*, 32.1–2 (2007), 245–62 (p. 255).

<sup>106</sup> See 'Code pénal de 1810'

<[http://www.ledroitcriminel.fr/la\\_legislation\\_criminelle/anciens\\_textes/code\\_penal\\_1994/partie\\_legislative\\_2.htm](http://www.ledroitcriminel.fr/la_legislation_criminelle/anciens_textes/code_penal_1994/partie_legislative_2.htm)> [accessed 10 November 2015]. The *Code pénal de 1810* was in use in France until 1994.

<sup>107</sup> Rachele Okawa, 'Humour in Exile: The Subversive Effects of Laughter in Sam Selvon's *The Lonely Londoners* and Gisèle Pineau's *L'Exil selon Julia*', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 49.1 (2013), 16–27 (p. 25).

<sup>108</sup> Haigh, p. 240.

safer and more welcoming location for her, she is still physically and psychologically excluded from metropolitan society. A number of overlapping, rigid patriarchal hierarchies, from the military, to marriage, to the police, are the structures which engender and perpetuate her experiences of isolation and exclusion.

Julia's exile also manifests itself through language, an aspect of the text which can be read through Hron's work on the paradigm of translation. In metropolitan France, Julia becomes trapped within the Creole language, and this clash between French and Creole echoes the inherent tensions between the metropolitan French and the Antillean communities. Linguistic communication is essential for adaptation and integration, so Julia's linguistic troubles are symptomatic on the one hand of her failure to assimilate and integrate into French life. She struggles to become accustomed to France primarily because she does not speak or understand French and therefore cannot communicate with those around her, even her own family. Her grandchildren speak French rather than Creole, her native language. Julia describes French as 'RRRR dans leur bouche' (p. 65), demonstrating her negative attitude, and that of other Antilleans, towards the French language which she considers unnatural and exaggerated, since the 'r' phoneme is dropped in French Creole. Julia's issues with language are reminiscent of those Fanon discusses in *Peau noire, masques blancs*. Fanon begins with the ironic statement that 'le Noir Antillais sera d'autant plus blanc, c'est-à-dire se rapprochera d'autant plus du véritable homme, qu'il aura fait sien la langue française' in order to demonstrate the belief of the coloniser that colonised people are inferior, or even inhuman, because they do not speak French.<sup>109</sup>

These linguistic tensions are embodied by Julia, who is hindered even further by the intersection of language and gender. It is revealed that she never received an education in

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<sup>109</sup> Fanon, p. 14.

Guadeloupe, her mother being too poor to send all her children to school. Julia, as one of her oldest children, had to ‘rester à veiller les cadets’ while her mother returned to work in the sugar fields (p. 94). This episode reinforces gender stereotypes — women are expected to stay at home and look after children, thus reducing their life opportunities, while men are allowed to pursue an education. Julia’s grandchildren try to teach her to write her name but become frustrated with her lack of progress, and in turn, she is embarrassed to be ‘à l’école de ses petits-enfants’ (p. 93) because she feels it should be her duty to impart knowledge to them, rather than the reverse. The lessons soon stop, leaving Julia to become even more isolated.

In her work on the translation of pain in immigrant literature from North Africa, the Caribbean, and Eastern Europe, Hron argues that parallels can be drawn between the act of migration and the process of translation because both require the crossing of linguistic and cultural borders. Just as texts have to be reinterpreted and adapted for a different audience during translation, exiled people ‘must also translate themselves, changing, adapting, and recreating themselves in continua of transformation’ in order to integrate into their new society.<sup>110</sup> Hron recognises that this process is often difficult, but it is crucial for the exiled subject who must learn to negotiate new values, customs, and traditions, as well as a new linguistic code. Yet Julia is unable to translate herself, linguistically or culturally, which explains why she feels so isolated. Learning a new linguistic system is impossible for Julia; she is incapable of translating between French and Creole. She cannot replace her Guadeloupean customs and mannerisms with those of metropolitan France. In turn, however, this raises the question of whether it is fair or reasonable to expect all immigrants to shed their old identities, and become dynamic, adapting beings.

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<sup>110</sup> Hron, p. 40.

Julia does begin to overcome her exilic condition in France, however, as demonstrated when she finds her way, unaided, to Sacré Cœur, a location she had been desperate to visit since arriving in France because she is a devout Catholic. Although the journey is not without its problems — she gets lost, nobody helps her to find her way, and she is met with hostility because of her blackness and inability to speak French — she is proud and delighted when she reaches the basilica. Upon her return, the narrator notices that ‘une lueur étrange brillait dans les yeux de Julia’, and in a passage which appears to voice Julia’s internal monologue, the old lady declares to herself ‘j’ai cru, j’ai vaincu! Je suis parée pour les autres épreuves...’ (p. 92). Julia now seems more prepared for the trials and tribulations of her life in France, even if later she does fall back into depression because of her nostalgia for Guadeloupe.

Moreover, in an unpublished extract from the text, Pineau charts Julia’s evolution through a conversation with her old neighbour Xénia when she has returned to Guadeloupe.<sup>111</sup> Julia informs Asdrubal that she ‘ne prendrait plus ses manières animales, qu’elle avait vécu en France sans volée, ni coups de pieds’, while Asdrubal welcomes her back and swears that ‘leur vieillesse serait sans heurt’, her absence having softened his violent temper.<sup>112</sup> Asdrubal’s previous abusive behaviour towards his wife acts as a further reminder of the ongoing narrative impact of slavery within the French Antilles. Although in the published text Julia cannot translate herself fully into the target society, she can translate herself back to fit into the Antillean way of life, and she has gained in strength through this act of personal transformation. These glimpses of a more resilient, assertive Julia indicate that exile has, after all, been a process of learning, adaptation, and evolution for her. Exile has instilled a sense of agency in her and has equipped her with the confidence to cope with challenges in life.

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<sup>111</sup> Gisèle Pineau, ‘Extrait inédit de *L’Exil selon Julia* (1996)’ (1997) <<http://clicnet.swarthmore.edu/litterature/moderne/pineau/exil.html>> [accessed 20 November 2015].

<sup>112</sup> Pineau, ‘Extrait inédit de *L’Exil selon Julia* (1996)’, para. 5 of 8.

### Racial Hostility as War: ‘La peau noire comme une salissure’ (p. 80)

Does Julia pass down this emerging ability to cope and adapt to her granddaughter, as Thomas suggests,<sup>113</sup> or is the narrator overwhelmed by the racial prejudice she faces in the metropole? Her exile, like that of her mother and grandmother, occurs within patriarchal, military frameworks: she follows her family on her father’s military operations. She is very young when the family’s migration occurs — she is only four when they live in Africa, and five when they return to France — so she is clearly not old enough to have any input into the decision to live a life of displacement which centres around her father’s military career. Her experiences echo Said’s comments: ‘you are born into [exile], or it happens to you’.<sup>114</sup>

Moreover, warfare of a different kind also helps to explain her suffering. Beyond its literal meaning which denotes armed conflict between nations or rulers, the term ‘war’ can be applied in its figurative sense to refer to any kind of animosity, aggression, or violence towards individuals. The *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* gives the following definition: ‘applied *poet.* or rhetorically to any kind of active hostility or contention between living beings, or of conflict between opposing forces or principles’ [original emphasis].<sup>115</sup> Drawing on this definition of war, this section contends that the narrator of *L’Exil selon Julia* is fighting her own war against the hostility of racism, and the classroom is the location of her battleground. In her article on violence and war in Pineau’s writing, Harpin analyses the semantic field of war in the narrator’s reflections about the racist insults chanted by the schoolchildren, appearing at the beginning of the novel and recurring as a leitmotif throughout

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<sup>113</sup> In ‘Utopia and Dystopia in Gisèle Pineau’s *L’Exil selon Julia* and *Fleur de Barbarie*’, in *Nowhere is Perfect: French and Francophone Utopias/Dystopias*, ed. by John West-Sooby (Newark, NJ: University of Delaware Press, 2008), pp. 180–92, Bonnie Thomas argues that ‘Man Ya’s presence provides a contrast to the negative picture of the Caribbean painted by Pineau’s parents and the dystopia she experiences in France as a child’, giving her ‘an alternative [vision] that allows her to forge her own identity path’ (p. 185).

<sup>114</sup> Said, ‘Reflections on Exile’, p. 184.

<sup>115</sup> ‘War’, in *OED*, section 1.a.

<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/225589?rskey=M39tLb&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>> [accessed 7 March 2016].



the text: ‘négro/négresse à plateau/blanche-neige/bamboula/charbon/et compagnie’ (p. 11). Harpin argues that vocabulary such as ‘pistent’ and ‘pluie de roches’ (p. 11) ‘évoquent une guerre sale, de traîtresses embuscades, un harcèlement au quotidien’ and explicitly describes the narrator’s experiences as ‘cette guerre qui ne dit pas son nom’.<sup>116</sup> Following Harpin’s approach, the following section offers a more detailed analysis of the narrator’s various experiences of war.

As Lawrence Blum explains, ‘racism’ is a loaded term which can refer to sentiments of inferiority and/or antipathy; while the latter represents an ideology of hatred towards the racial other, the former is constructed on the premise that this racial other is inferior to one’s own race. Inferiorising racists may not necessarily hate their targets: they may display tolerance or kindness towards them which is ‘demeaning, because the other is not seen as an equal, or even as a full human being’.<sup>117</sup> At school, Pineau’s narrator becomes the target of both inferiorising and antipathetic racists. She is bullied by the other children and considered intellectually and linguistically inferior to them, in a manner reminiscent of France’s colonial project of the *mission civilisatrice*, constructed as it was on the premise that European civilisations were economically, socially, and culturally superior to other races, and they therefore had a moral duty to enlighten them. Blum also distinguishes between personal, social, and institutional racism and argues that each form ‘operates in complete interaction with the others’.<sup>118</sup> The narrator is testimony to this intertwining of the different forms of racism: she is targeted personally by individual children, and by institutions such as her school. Moreover, she endures social racism which is expressed through ‘religion, popular

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<sup>116</sup> Harpin, p. 102.

<sup>117</sup> Lawrence Blum, “I’m Not a Racist, But...”: *The Moral Quandary of Race* (Ithaca, NY; London: Cornell University Press, 2002), p. 10.

<sup>118</sup> Blum, p. 9.

entertainment, advertisements, and other media'.<sup>119</sup> The racism to which she is subjected brings about her psychological exile.

The narrator experiences personal racism at school, where she is constantly teased by her classmates because of her different physical appearance. They do not accept her into their friendship groups, leaving her lonely and confused. For instance, she remarks poignantly that only one or two of her classmates would walk alongside her 'sans honte' (p. 80), since most of the children do not even consider that she too is a human being whose thoughts and feelings have as much value as those of the white French children in the class. Some of the children slowly begin to include her, but as soon as an argument breaks out, she is insulted once again by their racist chants. She is particularly hurt when she is told to go back home. Ironically, she wants more than anything to return 'dans [s]on pays. Mais quel pays?' (pp. 139–40). She does not know where home is: France, Africa, or Guadeloupe? For her classmates, the narrator's black skin labels her as African, but she does not feel African, and can only remember the time spent there during her father's military service 'en déballages irréels' (p. 140). She does not know Guadeloupe, the land of her parents, as she was only four when she last visited; furthermore, Guadeloupe's DROM status means that her 'pays' is in fact France, despite the other children's insistence that she is not French. Her race and ethnicity are cruelly used by her classmates to exclude and belittle her.

As the narrator grows up, she begins to become more aware of just how deeply entrenched racial prejudice is in French society. Through these undercurrents of social racism which subtly pervade her favourite television programmes (p. 103), she realises that life in the metropole is not as utopian as she had been led to believe by her parents. Moreover, her initial pride and excitement at seeing black people become successful in the French media meets

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<sup>119</sup> Blum, p. 9.

with disappointment. This is symbolised by the fate of Sylvette Cabrisseau, the Martinican newsreader who became France's first black female television presenter for the national television agency the Office de Radiodiffusion-Télévision Française (ORTF) in 1969. The narrator is outraged when Cabrisseau is taken off television because of hostility from the French public. The narrator suffers alongside Cabrisseau in sympathy and solidarity: 'à la pensée de cette cabale qu'on avait déchaînée contre ta seule couleur, l'eau nous montait aux yeux' (p. 103). Moreover, she is physically affected by Cabrisseau's ill treatment: she cannot eat because she is so upset and begins to realise that the resentment she faces every day at school is mirrored on a larger scale across the country, demonstrating that racial prejudice continually threatens Antilleans' integration in France. The innocent narrator is unaware of the more complex events that caused Cabrisseau to leave the channel in 1970: she was sacked following an explicit photo shoot for the male fashion magazine *Adam* in November 1970, and although she had a short-lived career as a singer and an actress in the early 1970s, she quickly disappeared from the French cultural scene.<sup>120</sup> This series of events reveal the potent and harmful mixture of racism, sexism, and exploitation that proved destructive for Cabrisseau's career.

At school, the narrator also experiences institutional racism, defined by Blum as 'racial inferiorizing or antipathy perpetrated by specific social institutions such as schools, corporations, hospitals, or the criminal justice system as a totality'.<sup>121</sup> Her teachers represent the French educational establishment which is expected to promote values of respect, tolerance, and equality. On one occasion, a teacher humiliates her when she is learning to read and write. Initially the teacher praises her, but this praise is tinged with racism: the teacher's

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<sup>120</sup> 'Sylvette Cabrisseau, speakerine en 1969', *Le Parisien* (5 February 2012) <<http://www.leparisien.fr/tv/sylvette-cabrisseau-speakerine-en-1969-05-02-2012-1846613.php#xtref=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.co.uk%2F>> [accessed 14 January 2016].

<sup>121</sup> Blum, p. 9.

praise arises due to her surprise that a black girl should be able to write in French, presuming that French is not her mother tongue. She tells the other children that ‘la Noire a déjà fini sa copie! Alors, vous pouvez le faire aussi!’ (p. 60). This praise is double-edged, for the teacher is incredulous that a black girl can learn to write quicker than her white French classmates. Inferiorising racism is thus at work here: the narrator is reduced to her skin colour and expected to have a lower intellectual capability than the rest of the class simply because she is black. The same teacher then proceeds to scold her for writing with her left hand from right to left, telling her that ‘on n’est pas chez les Arabes ici!’ (p. 61).

When she is older, another teacher, Madame Baron, forces the narrator to hide under her desk for supposedly misbehaving. According to the narrator, however, she is really punishing her because ‘elle n’aime pas voir ma figure de négresse’ (p. 152). The narrator is ashamed and embarrassed; she feels like a dog trapped in a kennel and has to endure the sweaty odour of her teacher’s feet, while none of her classmates come to her defence. Celia Britton explores the ‘parallelism between the Jewish and the black situations’ in this incident, arguing that in certain texts of French Caribbean literature, *L’Exil selon Julia* being one example, comparisons can be drawn between the confinement and imprisonment of Antilleans living in French *cités* and the incarceration of Jews in concentration camps during the Second World War.<sup>122</sup> It is important to note the fundamental differences between these two historical situations, despite some physical overlap (for instance, during World War Two the Drancy Internment Camp, located in the northeastern suburb of Paris, was used as a detention camp before Jews and other minorities were deported to Nazi concentration camps; following the war, Drancy was converted into a *cité*). Yet the narrator herself explicitly associates these two

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<sup>122</sup> Celia Britton, ‘Exile, Incarceration and the Homeland: Jewish References in French Caribbean Novels’, in *Comparing Postcolonial Diasporas*, ed. by Michelle Keown, David Murphy, and James Proctor (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 149–67 (p. 154).

conditions because immediately after telling her grandmother about the incident in one of her letters, she compares herself to Anne Frank. They are both imprisoned against their will, both write their life stories, and both have to ‘vivre dans un pays qui [les] rejette’ (p. 153). They thus suffer a double exile, exiled from both their home and host countries. It is useful to read the narrator’s comments alongside Michael Rothberg’s notion of ‘multidirectional memory’ in order to gain a more nuanced understanding of her particular situation. In *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (2009), a seminal study which unites the disciplines of Holocaust Studies and Postcolonial Studies, Rothberg argues against the notion of collective memory, instead proposing that ‘we consider memory as *multidirectional*: as subject to ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing; as productive and not privative’ [original emphasis].<sup>123</sup> He posits that collective memories are not separate, discrete entities, but emerge in tandem with each other. For the narrator of *L’Exil selon Julia*, the collective memory of the Holocaust acts as a vehicle through which she is able to articulate her own suffering, albeit on a much less traumatic scale. Britton, however, does not engage with this episode’s potential to unlock violent collective memories. On the one hand, her claim that ‘representations of the holocaust provide a kind of template for representations of the early period of Caribbean exile’ — speaking here of Caribbean exile to Europe in the 1950s and 1960s — further develops the connection between war and exile and considers how confinement, imprisonment, and immobility can be perceived as another, very different form of exile to the mobility of migration.<sup>124</sup> On the other, her analysis does not sufficiently explore the anxieties that such a comparison provokes. The narrator’s humiliation at being ordered to sit under the desk operates on a very different scale to the trauma and horrors that Anne Frank, and the Jewish population, were forced to endure; the suggestion of

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<sup>123</sup> Michael Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 3.

<sup>124</sup> Britton, p. 155.

mass forced deportation evokes a parallel with transatlantic slavery, although this is not explored in detail by Pineau's novel. Through such instances, the narrator appears to be engaged in her own battle, her own daily war. Her grandmother, however, gives her the strength to become more resilient, and she eventually learns to embrace her Creoleness.

## **Conclusion**

*L'Exil selon Julia* provides a greater understanding of the complex role of war in exile and displacement, revealing the many indirect and often subtle consequences of warfare upon Antillean migration to metropolitan France during the twentieth century. Active military participation brings the Pineau family to the metropole; yet warfare also engenders the psychological exile of the soldiers and the women who accompany them because it forces them to engage with a new language and culture, isolating them when they struggle to adapt. It is poignant that the child narrator is conscious of how greatly war has impacted upon her life even at such a young age. Although she is only thirteen at the time, she remarks in one of her letters to Julia that 'si papa n'était pas entré en dissidence [...], où serions-nous à l'heure qu'il est?' (p. 161). She is aware of the causal relationship between war and displacement and realises that her father's involvement with the *dissidence* movement in the 1940s acted as the catalyst for his military career and her own exile, years later.

This chapter has approached Pineau's most well-known text from a new perspective, offering fresh insights on the intersection between war, exile, and gender within the context of the French Caribbean. Analysing the multi-layered impacts of war on the Pineau family's exile through the lens of 'forced choice' has revealed the anxieties which underlie notions of enforced and voluntary exile. The dichotomy between compulsion and choice presupposes

that enforced exile is more traumatic than a chosen or desired departure; ‘forced choice’ challenges this viewpoint because it demonstrates that individuals are often subconsciously exiled by external factors beyond their control. Taking into account the individual circumstances of each character, this chapter has argued that it is unproductive to conceptualise exile within the binary parameters of enforced and voluntary exile.

Although exile to France is extremely distressing for several members of the Pineau family, it is also, to some extent, a socially advancing condition. In a nod to Antillean patterns of constant migration from one side of the Atlantic to the other, the text ends with the family’s return to Guadeloupe.<sup>125</sup> Julia appears much more confident because of ‘l’épreuve de solitude’ she experienced in the metropole (p. 215); the young narrator, though, initially struggles to adapt to life in Guadeloupe because she is ‘d’ici sans en être vraiment’ (p. 210). However, the final scene of the text, in which the children enjoy learning about Creole plants, food, and medicine in their grandmother’s garden, suggests that they vehemently desire to make Guadeloupe their new home. The narrator admits that she did not cry when her grandmother died because Julia lives on through memories: ‘elle n’est jamais partie, jamais sortie de mon cœur. Elle peut aller et virer à n’importe quel moment dans mon esprit’ (p. 219). Julia’s death symbolises that regardless of the country in which the narrator subsequently lives, her grandmother’s Caribbean identity continues to live on. Throughout her experiences of exile, by engaging with the Creole heritage that Julia has imparted, the narrator is ultimately able to become increasingly resilient to racial discrimination and forge her own Creole feminine identity.

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<sup>125</sup> The structure of the end of the text is rather muddled. Before the family arrive in Guadeloupe, the family live in Plateau Fofu, in Martinique. Playing ironically with the title of Césaire’s seminal *Cahier d’un retour au pays natal*, 2nd edn (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1956 [1939]), the section entitled ‘les cinq plaies du retour au pays pas natal’ is structured around five of the Biblical plagues of Egypt. Through her description of cockroach infestations, outbreaks of boils, and plagues of frogs and other amphibians, the narrator does not equate her return to the Caribbean as a return to her native land. After this section, the text resumes its chronological sequence and narrates the family’s arrival in Guadeloupe.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RETURN AS EXILE IN VÉRONIQUE TADJO'S *LOIN DE MON PÈRE*

‘There’s no place like home’.

From L. Frank Baum’s famous children’s novel *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900) to a rock song by American band 4 Non Blondes, this emblematic phrase — so prevalent in Western popular culture — encapsulates humanity’s innate emotional connection to the idea of home. In *La Poétique de l’espace* (1957), philosopher Gaston Bachelard investigates affective responses to different parts of the house in both lived experiences and in literature.<sup>1</sup> He concludes that ‘la maison est notre coin du monde’, a space of safety and stability which

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<sup>1</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *La Poétique de l’espace* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1957). Bachelard undertakes a study he terms ‘une topo-analyse’ (p. 27) of spaces in the house which are emotionally charged, such as drawers, corners, chests, and wardrobes. He notes the importance of the childhood home, and the ways in which people continue to connect to it, long after they have left: ‘mais au delà des souvenirs, la maison natale est physiquement inscrite en nous’ (p. 32). Yet as Andrew Thacker observes in *Moving through Modernity: Space and Geography in Modernism* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2003), Bachelard’s exclusive focus on pleasurable spaces within the home means that he neglects to consider how the home ‘can quite easily contain many dramas of conflict and unease’ (p. 16), and how the history and architecture of the house can affect feelings of belonging (p. 16).



guards closely the thoughts, dreams, and memories of its inhabitants.<sup>2</sup> Reflecting on the emotional connotations of the phrase used as the epigraph of this chapter, Susan Stanford Friedman remarks that emphasising the word ‘place’ indicates that ‘home is *the* best, the ideal, everywhere that elsewhere is not’ because ‘places elsewhere can never bring the same happiness as home’ [original emphasis].<sup>3</sup> In other words, home symbolises familiarity and comfort.

Yet Stanford Friedman then inverts the phrase by placing emphasis on the word ‘no’, concluding that home can never really exist: ‘home is utopia — a no place, a nowhere, an imaginary space longed for, always already lost in the very formation of the idea of home’.<sup>4</sup> This questioning of the very meaning of home is a central trope in Véronique Tadjo’s autofictional narrative, *Loin de mon père* (2010).<sup>5</sup> For Tadjo’s Franco-Ivorian protagonist Nina, home is not a fixed and stable entity. Is her home Côte d’Ivoire, where she spent the formative years of her childhood? Or rather, is it France, the country in which she has chosen to settle as an adult? Is her return to Côte d’Ivoire, after living in the diaspora in Paris, a return home? In this chapter, I argue that on the contrary, Nina’s return to Côte d’Ivoire is a form of exile. Her return is dangerous because it occurs in the aftermath of the First Ivorian Civil War, fought between 2002 and 2007. Her former home thus does not offer her safety and security but plunges her into instability and violence. Her sentiments of alienation are heightened by her motives for return: she has come back to Abidjan, the largest city and economic capital of the country, to bury her Ivorian father, having already lost her French mother a few years previously. Nina also experiences a cultural exile because she is directly confronted with a

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<sup>2</sup> Bachelard, p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> Susan Stanford Friedman, ‘Bodies on the Move: A Poetics of Home and Diaspora’, *Tulsa Studies in Women’s Literature*, 23.2 (2004), 189–212 (p. 192).

<sup>4</sup> Stanford Friedman, p. 192.

<sup>5</sup> Véronique Tadjo, *Loin de mon père* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2010). All subsequent references to this text will appear in parentheses in the main body of this chapter.

whole array of religions, languages, customs, and traditions which are no longer familiar to her, having been absent from Côte d'Ivoire for so long because of her professional activities in Paris.

In *Loin de mon père*, Tadjou develops exile in a direction which is quite distinct from the projects of the authors considered in this thesis thus far; her text, paradoxically, suggests that exile can be experienced when migrating back to the birth country. The narrative reveals that while a return is possible, it is undoubtedly challenging and raises as many questions about identity and belonging as the initial departure. Gerise Herndon has explored this phenomenon of return as a form of 'double exile' in her analysis of returning home in French Caribbean literature, explaining that neither the country of origin nor the country of migration feel like home any more.<sup>6</sup> Paolo Bartoloni also asserts that the return is often bitter-sweet and can, in fact, be more problematic than the initial departure from the homeland.<sup>7</sup> He comments that 'the feeling of returning, of going back, and of being inescapably caught in exile, occurs when nostalgia, not so much for the origin as for the soon-to-be-left destination, catches us'.<sup>8</sup> For Bartoloni, it is the thought of leaving the country of migration, not the country of origin, which is most painful because this location has supplanted the country of origin as home. While resonating in *Loin de mon père* to a certain extent, these thoughts are complicated by Nina's longing for both France and Côte d'Ivoire but in different ways: she is nostalgic for the Abidjan of her youth, yet she also desires to return to the safety of her Parisian home. Nina has not been exiled to the metropole because of war, violence, or unrest, but is now living in the Ivorian diaspora in Paris of her own accord, a city which offers her better professional

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<sup>6</sup> Gerise Herndon, 'Returns to Native Lands, Reclaiming the Other's Language: Kincaid and Danticat', *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 3.1 (2001), 54–62 (p. 54).

<sup>7</sup> Paolo Bartoloni, *On the Cultures of Exile, Translation, and Writing* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Bartoloni, p. 102.

opportunities. As a cosmopolitan young woman living in the metropolitan capital, she has a more privileged status than many an exiled individual: she is able to come and go as she pleases and believes she has successfully integrated into French life. However, she does not seem to engage actively with the diasporic Ivorian community living there, rendering her experiences of diasporic life all the more complex. As Nico Israel points out, one way in which the paradigm of diaspora distinguishes itself from exile is in its ability to sustain a ‘minority group solidarity’ with others from the same diasporic community,<sup>9</sup> but Nina prefers to privilege the French over the Ivorian community, cutting herself off from the people, culture, and traditions of Côte d’Ivoire, her homeland where she grew up, even if not her birthplace. As this chapter argues, she reproduces French colonial perspectives in a postcolonial context. This enables a critique to be made of postcolonial theories of displacement which fail to break or challenge the power relations between France and its former African colonies and which in fact reinforce the imbalances between the former coloniser and colonised.

This chapter offers a new reading of *Loin de mon père* which focuses on both the overlaps and disparities between the paradigms of diaspora and exile and how they intersect with divisions of gender. As the text was published relatively recently, in 2010, *Loin de mon père* has attracted fewer critical analyses than the other autofictional narratives examined in this thesis. By addressing this research gap, this chapter attempts to advance scholarship on Tadjó’s writing, and on Francophone Ivorian literature more generally, a corpus which is currently understudied. To date, critical analyses of the text have tended to focus on Nina’s relationship with her father, and by extension with the historical and cultural reference points

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<sup>9</sup> Nico Israel, *Outlandish: Writing between Exile and Diaspora* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000), p. 3.

of Côte d'Ivoire (her father's homeland).<sup>10</sup> Other scholars, such as Pierre-Louis Fort, have explored the motifs of death and mourning within the text, arguing that the grieving process is key to Nina's reconciliation with her family and her native country.<sup>11</sup> This chapter, however, posits that it is Nina's diasporic experience in France which provokes her sentiments of estrangement and alienation when she returns to Abidjan, as she continuously compares the two locations, and this leads her to examine life in Abidjan from a Western, French perspective. Taking Anna-Leena Toivanen's 2013 article on 'diasporic romances' in African fiction as a starting point,<sup>12</sup> the analysis examines Nina's connection with both France and Côte d'Ivoire, arguing that her return from the diaspora to a country torn apart by conflict and violence is akin to exile. Here, exile is understood as both a gendered and cultural otherness.

The chapter takes as its guiding methodological framework the psychologist Peter Adler's five stage process of culture shock, developed in 1975 but still used by psychologists and psychotherapists today,<sup>13</sup> as a lens through which to consider Nina's complex emotional turmoil on arriving in Abidjan. Adler's framework is not a specifically postcolonial or gendered model of cultural exile, and the analysis also reveals its limitations. It is usually used to map the experiences of individuals encountering a new culture for the first time, rather than those returning to an already familiar location. Yet by analysing Nina's return alongside the various stages of culture shock, it appears that she experiences very similar sentiments of

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<sup>10</sup> See, for instance, Anna-Leena Toivanen, 'Daddy's Girls?: Father-Daughter Relations and the Failures of the Postcolonial Nation-State in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Véronique Tadjó's *Loin de mon père*', *Ariel: A Review of International English Literature*, 44.1 (2013), 99–126. In this article, Toivanen argues that the failed father-daughter relationship is representative of the failure of the postcolonial nation-state of Côte d'Ivoire.

<sup>11</sup> See, for instance, Pierre-Louis Fort, 'Les Secrets du deuil dans *Loin de mon père*', in *Écrire, traduire, peindre: Véronique Tadjó: Writing, Translating, Painting*, ed. by Sarah Davies Cordova and Désiré K. Wa Kabwe-Segatti (Paris: Présence Africaine, 2016), pp. 77–87. Fort suggests that for Nina, mourning the death of both her parents is a tragic yet simultaneously enriching experience.

<sup>12</sup> Anna-Leena Toivanen, 'Diasporic Romances Gone Bad: Impossible Returns to Africa in Myriam Warner-Vieyra's *Juletane*, Buchi Emecheta's *Kehinde* and Véronique Tadjó's *Loin de mon père*', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 49.4 (2013), 432–44.

<sup>13</sup> Peter Adler, 'The Transitional Experience: An Alternative View of Culture Shock', *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 15.4 (1975), 13–23.

bewilderment, albeit at different stages of the return process. *Loin de mon père* thus demonstrates that culture shock is not only experienced when individuals leave the homeland to settle in a new country, but also when they return to their country of origin following a long absence. Indeed, her sentiments of alienation on experiencing this culture are all the more acute because Côte d'Ivoire was once her home, a home she no longer recognises. In light of these reflections, Adler's framework is an appropriate tool of analysis here, and one which sheds light on both Nina's long-lasting severance from African culture and her exile from France. The chapter questions what it means to return from the diaspora to the homeland, what is at stake in this migration, and how gender affects this return. Do Nina's memories of Côte d'Ivoire live up to reality? Does the fact that Nina initially regards her return to Abidjan as a temporary migration render her experiences more or less traumatic than if she were forced to come back permanently? Nina's experiences act as a reminder of one of the key overarching arguments of this thesis: exile is not only a territorial displacement but also a state of mind. In Bartoloni's words, 'exile is not the topography of lands but the topography of individuals'.<sup>14</sup>

*Loin de mon père*, written in Tadjó's characteristically simple and direct prose, stands apart from the other autobiographical narratives studied throughout this thesis: it is the only one to be written in the third person and to feature a protagonist with a different name to that of the author. Chapter One, however, explained in detail the many similarities between Tadjó and her literary heroine, on the one hand; and Tadjó's own acknowledgment of the fictional nature of the work in textual and paratextual material, on the other.<sup>15</sup> I therefore read *Loin de*

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<sup>14</sup> Bartoloni, p. 103.

<sup>15</sup> See Chapter One for a detailed analysis of narrative voice in *Loin de mon père*, and for a thorough explanation of my autobiographical reading of the text.

*mon père* as an autofictional narrative of gendered exile, which corresponds in theme and genre with the rest of my corpus.

Tadjo also breaks with other contemporary Francophone African women writers who focus directly on life in metropolitan France for their diasporic characters, in texts such as *Le Petit Prince de Belleville* (1992) by the Cameroonian author Calixthe Beyala,<sup>16</sup> and *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* (2003) by the Senegalese writer Fatou Diome.<sup>17</sup> These two texts can be interpreted through Jacques Chevrier's critical framework of *migritude*.<sup>18</sup> Chevrier's neologism, which he coined in 2002, combines themes of mobility and migration with the ideological and aesthetic concerns of *négritude*. For Chevrier, *migritude* encompasses literature produced by African postcolonial, often women, writers living in exile in Europe who privilege the hardships of African immigrants in Paris and the racial prejudices they face over the situation of those still living on the African continent. Tadjo's focus on a return to the African continent after living in the diaspora in metropolitan France means that her work does not fit neatly within Chevrier's model, as Désiré K. Wa Kabwe-Segatti helpfully points out.<sup>19</sup> Yet *Loin de mon père* does not adhere to Wa Kabwe-Segatti's own neologism, *dé-migritude*, either.<sup>20</sup> He proposes that *dé-migritude* encompasses a group of authors from Francophone Africa, although he only names Tadjo explicitly, who have made a conscious decision to return their literary gaze to Africa and who focus on the daily struggles of postcolonial African life. However, his concept does not entail an undoing of *migritude*, like the term implies, but rather he seems to be proposing a term for the next generation of female

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<sup>16</sup> Calixthe Beyala, *Le Petit Prince de Belleville* (Paris: Éditions Albin Michel, 1992).

<sup>17</sup> Fatou Diome, *Le Ventre de l'Atlantique* (Paris: Éditions Anne Carrière, 2003).

<sup>18</sup> Jacques Chevrier, *Anthologie africaine volume 1: le roman et la nouvelle* (Paris: Éditions Hatier International, 2002).

<sup>19</sup> Désiré K. Wa Kabwe-Segatti, 'De la migritude à la "dé-migritude": l'exemple de Véronique Tadjo', in *The Changing Face of African Literature/Les nouveaux visages de la littérature africaine*, ed. by Bernard de Meyer and Neil ten Kortenaar (Amsterdam; New York: Éditions Rodopi, 2009), pp. 83–94 (p. 84).

<sup>20</sup> Wa Kabwe-Segatti, p. 85.

Francophone African writers. It is an inappropriate analytical tool for *Loin de mon père* because although the text does advocate a focus on issues affecting postcolonial Africa, it also addresses other important, universal themes such as grief, betrayal, and infidelity. Rather, Tadjó's novel fits more broadly within the trend of texts by male Francophone authors who write about a return to the homeland as a form of exile, a practice begun by Aimé Césaire with his seminal extended poem *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* (1939)<sup>21</sup> and continued to this day with texts by contemporary Francophone authors, such as the Haitian novelist and journalist Dany Laferrière<sup>22</sup> and the Congolese author and academic Alain Mabanckou.<sup>23</sup> Importantly, in writing return as exile, Tadjó breaks this gendered literary pattern, which could be interpreted as a method of challenging gender inequalities through her writing.

### **Exile and Culture Shock**

First defined by Finnish anthropologist Kalervo Oberg in 1960 as 'the anxiety that results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse' in a new culture,<sup>24</sup> the scope of culture shock has become widened in recent years to refer to any new situation of which an individual has no prior knowledge, rendering him or her anxious and uneasy, as Paul Pedersen remarks.<sup>25</sup> Among the many theories of culture shock are 'stage theories', in which cultural adjustment is viewed as a gradual process, beginning with the initial encounter with the new culture and culminating in total familiarity with this cultural framework. Adler's

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<sup>21</sup> Aimé Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*, 2nd edn (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1956 [1939]).

<sup>22</sup> In *L'Énigme du retour* (Montreal: Éditions du Boréal, 2009), Dany Laferrière narrates the ordeals of a man returning to Haiti after thirty years to bury his father. This text offers a similar plot to *Loin de mon père*, as both texts describe returning to their birth country as an 'enigma'.

<sup>23</sup> Alain Mabanckou's *Lumières de Pointe-Noire* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2013) is, like Tadjó's text, an autobiographical account of his return to the Republic of the Congo which he left in 1989.

<sup>24</sup> Kalervo Oberg, 'Culture Shock: Adjustment to New Cultural Environments', *Practical Anthropology*, 7 (1960), 177–82 (p. 177).

<sup>25</sup> Paul Pedersen, *The Five Stages of Culture Shock: Critical Incidents around the World* (Westport, CT; London: Greenwood Press, 1995), p. 1.

five-stage process is the most widely-recognised theory because, according to Pedersen, it conceives culture shock as an ‘educational and developmental process with positive as well as negative consequences’.<sup>26</sup> Other models compare culture shock to a curable disease, including Kristin A. Juffer’s 1986 framework, in which culture shock is explained in clinical terms as a psychological inability to cope with a threat to the displaced person’s physical and emotional well-being.<sup>27</sup>

Despite arguing that culture shock is universal, regardless of geographic location, and is most habitually experienced through cross-cultural exchange, Adler does concede that ‘one need not sojourn outside one’s own country to experience culture shock’.<sup>28</sup> Even as early as 1975, then, the reach of the phenomenon was beginning to expand. While he defines culture shock in predominantly negative terms as ‘a form of alienation’, he also argues that it can facilitate personal development and growth, providing a deeper understanding of a new culture in addition to a greater awareness of the self.<sup>29</sup> Adler’s transitional framework, also termed a *U*-curve model, begins with the ‘contact’ phase, in which the individual still remains deeply rooted within the home culture but views the new culture with excitement and euphoria. The individual then moves into the stage of ‘disintegration’, feeling bewildered and confused by the new culture in which differences suddenly become more prominent. The third stage, ‘reintegration’, initially provokes anger and anxiety as the individual rejects this new culture, but for Adler, these negative sentiments are evidence of ‘healthy reconstruction in that there is a growing cultural awareness and an increasing ability to act on feelings’.<sup>30</sup> The fourth and fifth stages, ‘autonomy’ and ‘independence’, occur when the individual displays

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<sup>26</sup> Pedersen, p. 3.

<sup>27</sup> Kristin A. Juffer, ‘The First Step in Cross-cultural Orientation: Defining the Problem’, in *Cross-cultural Orientation: New Conceptualizations and Applications*, ed. by R. Michael Paige (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986), pp. 100–20.

<sup>28</sup> Adler, p. 13.

<sup>29</sup> Adler, p. 14.

<sup>30</sup> Adler, p. 17.



increasing sensitivity to the host culture. Although the final stage suggests a complete biculturalism and successful integration into the new culture, Adler does recognise that ‘the independence stage delineated in the model is not conceived of as a culmination’, and that the core attitudes, values, and traditions of the individual continue to be challenged and questioned throughout the period of interaction with a particular cultural framework.<sup>31</sup>

Several criticisms can be levied against Adler’s model. His reliance on the *U*-curve prototype to indicate transition towards a greater self-awareness and cultural understanding erroneously presumes that each individual approaches the five stages in the same order, and while he acknowledges that some stages are not applicable to everyone, he does not concede that in some cases, an individual may recede to a previous stage before being able to move forward. Moreover, as Pedersen remarks, culture shock is ‘subjectively complex’,<sup>32</sup> and so it is not possible for one model to represent each individual’s experiences accurately. Nevertheless, Adler’s emphasis on the gradual acceptance of a new culture, and his insistence that time periods cannot be attached to a particular stage, enable this framework to be a useful point of analysis for Nina’s cultural exile in *Loin de mon père*.

### **Contact: ‘Un gouffre nous sépare’ (p. 11)**

Adler argues that in the initial stage of ‘contact’ upon arriving in a new location, ‘the individual may be captivated and enchanted’ with the unfamiliar culture and may be eager to experience something new, while still ‘view[ing] the new environment from the insularity of his or her own ethnocentrism’.<sup>33</sup> However, *Loin de mon père* demonstrates the limits of

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<sup>31</sup> Adler, p. 18.

<sup>32</sup> Pedersen, p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> Adler, p. 16.

Adler's model because Nina's initial encounter with Abidjan within the space of the text is not her first experience of the city or its culture: she is returning to her childhood home after a period of six years in metropolitan France. This cultural re-encounter is not exciting, as Adler would claim, but unsettling and troubling. She is not enthralled by the customs and traditions of Abidjan which are now unfamiliar to her, having spent so long living in France. Rather, she views her return with extreme sadness and confusion because of the tragic and highly personal motives for her return to Côte d'Ivoire, and because of her bewilderment at her country's demise. She even dreams on the plane in the novel's opening that she is not allowed to enter the country, so great are her fears and anxieties about her return: 'pour qui te prends-tu? tu n'es rien. Ta maison a été rasée. Tes parents n'existent plus. Personne ne veut de toi, ici. Va-t'en!' (p. 14). In a departure from the detached voice of the omniscient narrator, the reader learns of Nina's heightened emotional response towards her return; this rapid change in narrative voice is indicative of the sudden cultural and emotional upheaval experienced by the protagonist.

Nina feels estranged from Abidjan, then, and no longer recognises the city which has been ravaged by civil war. Marzia Caporale points out that Nina describes her return in more neutral language as coming back 'à la maison' (p. 13) rather than 'chez elle', suggesting an acute 'sense of estrangement from a now foreign territory'.<sup>34</sup> Caporale also observes this estrangement in Nina's choice of clothing for her trip: her long-sleeved top and socks which 'lui collaient à la peau' (p. 17) because of the intense heat 'are hardly the garments of choice for a tropical climate and visually label her as "other" from the local population'.<sup>35</sup> Nina thus wears her estrangement very visibly. In *Étrangers à nous-mêmes* (1988), Julia Kristeva offers

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<sup>34</sup> Marzia Caporale, 'Language and Discourse in the Narrative of the Postcolonial Self in *Loin de mon père*', in *Écrire, traduire, peindre: Véronique Tadjo: Writing, Translating, Painting*, ed. by Sarah Davies Cordova and Désiré K. Wa Kabwe-Segatti (Paris: Présence Africaine, 2016), pp. 157–72 (p. 160).

<sup>35</sup> Caporale, p. 160.

a rigorous theorisation of estrangement, drawing on Freudian psychoanalysis.<sup>36</sup> For Kristeva, individuals must accept their own strangeness, before being able to confront the strangeness of their surroundings and of other people. She argues that ‘à reconnaître *notre* inquiétante étrangeté, nous n’en souffrirons ni n’en jouirons de dehors’ [original emphasis].<sup>37</sup> If, then, ‘l’étrange est en moi’, as Kristeva suggests, ‘nous sommes tous des étrangers. Si je suis étranger, il n’y a pas d’étrangers’.<sup>38</sup> Initially, though, Nina does not recognise her own internal strangeness. She feels estranged from life in Côte d’Ivoire, where she struggles to find her place because of her previous spatial and cultural distance from Abidjan, not because of her own innate strangeness, as Kristeva would indicate. Her attitude of finding Abidjan strange and unfamiliar reveals her Eurocentric positionality towards French and Ivorian culture, which will be analysed in detail later in this chapter. Éloïse Brezault appears to disagree with this analysis, remarking that the tearing apart of the country is echoed in the splitting of Nina’s identity which is ‘tout aussi fracturée’.<sup>39</sup> She attributes Nina’s estrangement to her Franco-Ivorian hybridity, a mixed cultural identity which she struggles to accept. Nina, however, seems at ease with her French identity and initially wants to return home to her boyfriend Frédéric and her comfortable life in Paris which ‘faisait partie d’un autre temps’ (p. 31); it is her Ivorian identity with which she is uncomfortable because, she realises, ‘elle était partie depuis trop longtemps’ (p. 14).

In a striking difference to Adler’s model, and in contrast to works studied in previous chapters of this thesis, the narrative focus of Tadjó’s text remains predominantly within Ivorian borders; that is, within the borders of the country of origin. Although Nina’s initial

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<sup>36</sup> Julia Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes* (Paris: Éditions Fayard, 1988).

<sup>37</sup> Kristeva, p. 284.

<sup>38</sup> Kristeva, p. 284.

<sup>39</sup> Éloïse Brezault, ‘Identité réelle et fantasmée dans *Loin de mon père* de Véronique Tadjó: l’écrivain entre filiation et déterritorialisation’, in *The Contemporary Francophone African Intellectual*, ed. by Christopher Hogarth and Natalie Edwards (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), pp. 119–34 (p. 128).

departure to France during her early adulthood to become a professional photographer is evoked implicitly when she regrets her long absence from Côte d'Ivoire (p. 14), the lack of explicit discussion of the reasons behind this migration and its psychological implications suggests that paradoxically, she perceives her return to Côte d'Ivoire as more distressing than her original departure. France is now her home, and her exile, interpreted metaphorically as an extreme sentiment of otherness, occurs on returning to Abidjan, not on moving to France. Nina's acute state of anxiety is evident from the outset of the text, and it becomes increasingly clear that she is apprehensive that the realities of civil war will betray her memories of Côte d'Ivoire: 'le pays n'était plus le même. La guerre l'avait balaféré, défiguré, blessé' (p. 13). Here, her country of origin is personified as being slashed and wounded by war; this personification demonstrates the enormous human costs of the conflict which will irreparably alter the future course of the country. The emotive verbs of violence, 'balafrer', 'défigurer', and 'blesser', underscore Nina's own concern for and affection towards her birth country, even though it is simultaneously unfamiliar to her. The complexity of Nina's situation, for whom Côte d'Ivoire is both foreign and familiar, is also underlined when her return is explicitly described as exile of a violent and unexpected kind: 'l'exil la gifla de plein fouet et se jeta sur elle' (p. 14). Here, exile adopts the position of the subject of the sentence, taking full control of Nina, the powerless object who has no agency over her situation. The personification of the condition of exile, which has the ability to slap Nina with full force, demonstrates its confrontational and aggressive manner as Nina is unexpectedly assaulted by exile which pounces on her. She is taken by surprise by these sentiments of exile from France.

As *Loin de mon père* was published in 2010, it is clear that any reference to civil war in the text denotes the First Ivorian Civil War, rather than the Second, which was fought

between November 2010 and April 2011.<sup>40</sup> Indeed, as Amy Baram Reid observes in her afterword to her English-language translation of the text, published in 2014 as *Far from my Father*, the narrative is located in a very specific timeframe: remembering her final conversation with her father before his death, Nina references ‘the negotiations that led to a 2007 cease-fire between the government and rebel forces’, but which did not eradicate the very real threat of reprisals;<sup>41</sup> indeed, the country did relapse into another civil war following disputed elections in November 2010.

The First Ivorian Civil War broke out on 19 September 2002 following a decade of political unrest after the death in 1993 of Félix Houphouët-Boigny, Côte d’Ivoire’s first president since independence. The country had been colonised by France in 1893 during the European ‘Scramble for Africa’, was governed as part of l’Afrique Occidentale Française (AOF), and was granted independence in 1960 in a mostly-peaceful political transition.<sup>42</sup> It is interesting to note that until the electoral crisis of the 1990s, Côte d’Ivoire was considered a model of economic and political stability for other former French colonies in Africa. The struggle for power between Henri Konan Bédié, a popular member of the governing party, the Parti démocratique de Côte d’Ivoire (PDCI), and Alassane Ouattara, the prime minister at the time, brought about many strikes and protests as political reforms were abolished, and popular disaffection began to rise during a period of economic difficulty. In 1995, Bédié won a five-

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<sup>40</sup> The Second Ivorian Civil War broke out in November 2010 as struggles between forces loyal to Laurent Gbagbo, president of Côte d’Ivoire at the time, and those who supported Alassane Ouattara, former prime minister and current president, escalated into a military conflict. Over three thousand people were killed during the conflict, and thousands more were displaced. See Nancy Annan, ‘Violent Conflicts and Civil Strife in West Africa: Causes, Challenges and Prospects’, *Stability: International Journal of Security and Development*, 3.1 (2014), 1–16 (p. 4).

<sup>41</sup> Amy Baram Reid, ‘Afterword: Near or Far: Places of Translation in *Far from my Father*’, in Véronique Tadjó, *Far from my Father: A Novel*, trans. by Amy Baram Reid (Charlottesville, VA; London: University of Virginia Press, 2014 [2010]), pp. 133–48 (p. 138).

<sup>42</sup> David Murphy, ‘Sub-Saharan Africa’, in *A Historical Companion to Postcolonial Literatures: Continental Europe and its Empires*, ed. by Prem Poddar, Rajeev S. Patke, and Lars Jensen (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), pp. 184–88 (p. 184). As Murphy notes, optimism following decolonisation soon gave way to ‘a sense of anger and disillusionment at the corruption of many of the new regimes, as well as at the continued interference by the French in African affairs: the era of neo-colonialism had begun’ (p. 186).

year term, but the country was not stable for long: on 24 December 1999, General Robert Guéï overthrew Bédié in a military coup and called for new elections to be held in 2000. Guéï rigged the election campaign so that only he and Laurent Gbagbo, leader of the centre-left Front populaire ivoirien (FPI), were eligible to stand for re-election in a bid to guarantee his success, but in fact he lost out to Gbagbo who became president in October 2000.<sup>43</sup> However, tensions between the two politicians came to a head on 19 September 2002 when officers from Guéï's administration revolted in protest over their demobilisation and subsequent loss of pay. This coup escalated into a civil war fought on linguistic, religious, and ethnic lines between the Muslim north and the Christian south.<sup>44</sup> As Siddhartha Mitter comments, 'Ivory Coast's civil war became a war over *ivoirité*' [original emphasis],<sup>45</sup> a label invented by Bédié in 1995 to create 'a new taxonomy of belonging' and to distinguish between 'Ivoiriens de souche multiséculaire' and immigrants in order to segregate the population.<sup>46</sup> *Ivoirité* also took on a political dimension as debates proliferated around the ideas of national identity: Bédié passed a law in 1995 which barred anybody whose parents were not born in Côte d'Ivoire from running for presidency. As Kathrin Heitz observes, these debates about national identity were further complicated by France's involvement in attempting to curb the violence, revealing that Franco-Ivorian tensions were far from being resolved, decades following independence.<sup>47</sup>

War and violence loom heavily throughout *Loin de mon père*, rendering Abidjan dangerous, unfamiliar, and foreign. For instance, upon arriving in Abidjan, Nina is met by her

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<sup>43</sup> Abu Bakarr Bah, 'Democracy and Civil War: Citizenship and Peacemaking in Côte d'Ivoire', *African Affairs*, 109.437 (2010), 597–615 (p. 603).

<sup>44</sup> Daniel Chirot, *Contentious Identities: Ethnic, Religious, and Nationalist Conflicts in Today's World* (New York; Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), p. 18.

<sup>45</sup> Siddhartha Mitter, 'Ebony and Ivoirité: War and Peace in Ivory Coast', *Transition*, 12.4 (2003), 30–55 (p. 51).

<sup>46</sup> Mitter, p. 35.

<sup>47</sup> Kathrin Heitz, 'Through the Prism of the *Cinquantenaire*: Côte d'Ivoire between *Refondation* and Houphouët's Legacy', in *Francophone Africa at Fifty*, ed. by Tony Chafer and Alexander Keese (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2013), pp. 219–32 (p. 219).

cousins, and on the journey back to the family home she is shocked to encounter chaos: military checkpoints cause a standstill on the roads (p. 20), and her cousin Hervé suspects that the soldiers are armed (p. 21). Moreover, during the family meeting to discuss the funeral arrangements, Nina witnesses first-hand how the war is directly affecting the family. Fighting has even taken place on their own street, as Nina tells her family: ‘papa m’a dit que des rebelles se sont battus avec des militaires, juste devant la maison. Il y a eu des échanges de coups de feu et des poursuites’ (p. 26). The civil war, which pitted different ethnic and religious groups against each other, succeeded in tearing Côte d’Ivoire apart to such an extent that in *Loin de mon père*, Nina no longer finds the harmonious, peaceful, and economically prosperous country where she had spent a happy childhood. Her homeland has been transformed from a place of stability to one of fragmentation where greed, corruption, and exploitation are rife, and violence pervades daily life. She cannot believe how rapidly Abidjan has spiralled out of control, wondering, according to the third-person narrator, ‘était-ce bien là Abidjan, cette ville dans laquelle elle s’était toujours sentie en sécurité?’ (p. 21). This sentiment is also shared by Tadjou who admitted in an interview for TV5Monde in June 2012 that each time she returns to Côte d’Ivoire, she has ‘l’impression d’avoir perdu quelque chose, un pays qu’[elle] connaissai[t] qui a changé radicalement’ because of the civil war.<sup>48</sup> Tadjou’s comment acts as a further indication of the autobiographical status of *Loin de mon père*, and as a reminder that war is often a catalyst of exile and displacement, a central argument of this thesis.

Here, the narrative resonates with Herndon’s analysis of the return to the homeland, which involves a similar ‘recasting of identity’ to the one which had to be undertaken on

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<sup>48</sup> Véronique Tadjou, ‘L’Afrique au long cours’, *Journal télévisé*, TV5Monde (15 June 2012) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DHsN4XSMZ6c>> [accessed 29 August 2016] [my transcript].

arriving in the country of migration.<sup>49</sup> Nina has to undergo a process of adaptation and transformation when she goes back to Côte d'Ivoire, and although the text does not explicitly mention the precise circumstances surrounding her initial departure to France, it can be presumed that she went through a similar process of modification, adapting her identity to conform to French life. Moreover, Herndon argues that 'on returning home, the native undergoes a re-migration, not home, but to a state of liminality', as both the returnee and the country of origin have changed so greatly that they no longer fit together.<sup>50</sup> This is the case for Nina: Côte d'Ivoire has been transformed by war and conflict into a country which is totally alien to her, which greatly exacerbates her feelings of exile. She wonders where she belongs: 'ai-je vraiment perdu mon pays?' (p. 15). It is interesting that despite her long absence, and the many transformations the country has undergone, she still wants Côte d'Ivoire to be '[s]on pays'; the possessive adjective reinforces her underlying emotional connection to her homeland. Yet she has changed too, becoming more in tune with the Parisian way of life than with life in Abidjan. In Paris, she lives with her French boyfriend, Frédéric, and enjoys participating in cultural events and exhibitions in the capital (p. 107). As Toivanen remarks, 'Nina is made to realise that her diasporic life has distanced her from the local realities',<sup>51</sup> which causes her to live in a 'state of liminality' upon her return, to use Herndon's terminology, because she does not feel at home in Abidjan. It is only upon her return that she begins to question her diasporic existence and her comfortable, successful life in Paris, a city in which she has been able to put down roots. Furthermore, she is confronted with an array of conflicting cultures and traditions from all across the county, rendering her return even more bewildering. In email correspondance to Antonia Wimbush, Tadjó describes

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<sup>49</sup> Herndon, p. 54.

<sup>50</sup> Herndon, p. 54.

<sup>51</sup> Toivanen, 'Diasporic Romances Gone Bad', p. 441.



Abidjan as ‘un melting-pot, un creuset d’idées et d’influences venant de partout’.<sup>52</sup> At the same time, though, Nina is also required to negotiate very specific Akan customs: the reader learns from her father’s diary in the text that his family belong to the Akan ethnic group — the predominant ethnic group of Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire — from the rural village of Krô in the south east of the country (p. 43). The fact that Nina must learn to readapt to both the local and the national spheres accentuates her sentiments of exile.

For Nina, then, living in the diaspora is not as emancipatory as she had perhaps initially expected; it in fact limits her to a very restrictive and reductive understanding of Ivorian culture and therefore heightens her sentiments of estrangement when she does return to Abidjan. Her specific experiences of diasporic life differ to theoretical discussions which exalt its positive potential. She neither ‘shares a common belonging to a homeland’ which she has left behind, as Peggy Levitt claims diasporans do,<sup>53</sup> nor does she ‘regard [herself] as being [one of many] participants in nations that have common ethnic and national traits, identities, and affinities’, in Gabriel Sheffer’s definition of the diaspora.<sup>54</sup> She does not actively seek out other members of the Ivorian community in Paris and does not enjoy the camaraderie of such a community. Nina’s experience of living in France thus has a greater resonance with the paradigm of exile than she first realises. It engenders a sentiment of non-belonging, but she only realises that she has effectively been living in exile in France later in the text, when she starts to consider staying in Abidjan permanently. At the beginning of the text, Nina still regards Paris as her home. Although, paradoxically, she realises that her diasporic life has in fact distanced her from her family, her desire to return to France becomes stronger. Her sentiments thus stand in contrast to Herndon’s claim that return is problematised by the fact

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<sup>52</sup> Véronique Tadjó, Email to Antonia Wimbush, 6 June 2016. See Appendix, p. 295.

<sup>53</sup> Peggy Levitt, *The Transnational Villagers* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001), p. 15.

<sup>54</sup> Gabriel Sheffer, *Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 10.

that the returnee ‘is in fact homeless, neither here nor there, for you can’t go home again’.<sup>55</sup> Nina believes she will return home to Paris: when the immigration officer asks her for how long she will stay in the country, it is apparent that she will return to France as soon as the funeral ceremonies are over (p. 17). As Elisabeth Snyman comments, the hostility of the “gardiens du pays” [...] ne fait que renfoncer le sentiment qu’elle éprouve d’être devenue étrangère dans son pays d’origine’.<sup>56</sup> The officer adopts a more hospitable tone when he realises she is the daughter of his friend Kouadio, handing over her passport ‘avec un large sourire qu’il voulait complice’ and welcoming her into the country (p. 17). This episode suggests that Nina’s Ivorian identity only gains legitimacy through her father; without him, she no longer has any ties to her former homeland. Gender issues are at play here: as a young woman arriving in the country, Nina is treated with condescension, and it is only her filial connection to Kouadio which facilitates a more welcoming exchange with the male officer. Nina is taken aback by such an open display of patriarchy, hesitating before replying to him ‘car elle n’arrivait pas à savoir où il voulait en venir avec toutes ses questions’ (p. 17). This gender disparity which is so visible in Côte d’Ivoire, and yet so unexpected to Nina, adds to her sentiments of exile and non-belonging. Until now, she has led an independent life in France, where patriarchy is undoubtedly latent but is manifested less explicitly than in Côte d’Ivoire. Her diasporic experiences in France render her cultural and gendered exile on returning to her homeland even more pronounced.

While Nina yearns to return to France, then, she is also nostalgic for the Côte d’Ivoire of her childhood. Bartoloni points out that the nostalgia and longing that exiled people feel towards their country of origin is not specifically aimed at the country itself, but rather at their

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<sup>55</sup> Herndon, p. 54.

<sup>56</sup> Elisabeth Snyman, ‘*Loin de mon père* de Véronique Tadjo: la transformation du biographique en fiction porteuse d’espoir’, *French Studies in Southern Africa*, 45 (2015), 217–36 (p. 225).

memories of their country, and their participation in daily life there. He asserts that ‘it is not the return to a present, actual home without us that we crave, but the return to a home that *already contains us* and in which we are already present’ [original emphasis].<sup>57</sup> He thus argues that it is the return to the past for which the individual yearns, in which he or she enjoyed a stable place surrounded by love and familiarity, rather than a return to a specific location. He perceives this movement as a ‘product of memory’ which cannot actually take place because political, economic, and cultural structures in the homeland will inevitably have altered greatly during the period of exile.<sup>58</sup> The return will therefore never truly be a return home. This yearning for her childhood memories of the homeland certainly rings true for Nina in *Loin de mon père*. The text is punctuated by flashbacks to her childhood. Her parents did not always provide a model of a stable family relationship: for instance, her father became depressed and withdrawn after his shock dismissal from his position as Head of the Institute of Stomatology in Abidjan when he was replaced by someone loyal to the new regime (pp. 74–80). Nina also remembers the arguments that took place between her parents about her father’s irresponsible attitude towards money (pp. 81–82). Overall, however, it appears that she lived a carefree childhood among a close-knit, middle-class family, and that her early years in Abidjan were safe and enjoyable. Yet Baram Reid appears to disagree, instead claiming that it would be inaccurate to suggest she experienced ‘a prior, idyllic sense of belonging’ as a child because her Frenchness set her apart from the other local children and her extended Ivorian family.<sup>59</sup> While Nina did experience some discomfort as a mixed-race child who was taunted by the other children and called ‘bôfouè’, a Baoulé-language insult which refers to her pale skin (p. 126), most of her childhood memories are happy ones.

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<sup>57</sup> Bartoloni, p. 102.

<sup>58</sup> Bartoloni, p. 102.

<sup>59</sup> Amy Baram Reid, ‘A Daughter No More: (National) Identity and the Adult Orphan in *Loin de mon père* by Véronique Tadjo’, in *Women’s Lives in Contemporary French and Francophone Literature*, ed. by Florence Ramond Jurney and Karen McPherson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 121–34 (p. 124).

Looking through family albums while sorting through her father's belongings, she finds photographs of her and her sister Gabrielle playing, and she remembers games of hide-and-seek and outings to the cinema with her father who would spoil them and 'ne leur refusait rien' (p. 29). It is these memories of Ivorian life which Nina desires on her return: she wants to return to her family, and more specifically, to a time when her father was an idealised image. In the novel, she must come to terms with the reality: he was a complex and flawed man.

She must also accept Gabrielle's decision to cut herself off from the family. After falling in with the wrong crowd in Côte d'Ivoire, Gabrielle left home aged seventeen. Nina was profoundly upset by Gabrielle's decision and felt she had been abandoned: 'à partir de ce moment-là, Nina devint fille unique' (p. 30). Gabrielle's self-imposed exile into a debauched life certainly has important consequences for Nina now that their parents have both passed away: she feels overwhelmed with the burden of being the only person who can continue the family traditions (p. 30). Gabrielle refuses to compromise her own beliefs and participate in a cultural system which she deems archaic and outdated. She does not attend her father's funeral ceremonies as she does not believe in the ways in which the Akan people bury the dead. In an email to Nina at the end of the book, an additional structural layer and an example of Tadjó's textual assemblage, Gabrielle describes the funeral ceremonies as 'des événements pompeux' which only serve to comfort the people who have been left behind (p. 178). She prefers to honour her father by remembering him while he was alive, rather than mourning his death. While Nina feels lonely and isolated by Gabrielle's absence, she also envies her sister and wishes she could be as determined, as honest, and as 'sûre de ses convictions' as Gabrielle (p. 111).

Gabrielle, like Nina, rejects the culture of her homeland but does not endeavour to impose her own Western values and ideals onto her family; Nina, on the contrary, constantly reveals her disapproval of traditional Ivorian customs and traditions, as will be explored in the following section. Gabrielle prefers to stay silent and disappear from the family. The reader is given very little information about Gabrielle's current situation — there is no mention of where she is living, or of her state of mind — and so it is unclear whether she has succeeded in finding another country to call home. She seems to live a nomadic existence, telling Nina in an email that she is 'toujours en voyage' when her sister questions her whereabouts (p. 177). Perhaps her reluctance to settle down is a direct consequence of her experiences of culture shock in Côte d'Ivoire as a child: she rejects the notion of being rooted in a specific location because of her inability to adapt to life in Abidjan when she was younger, an indication of her vulnerability and fragility. She now prefers to travel aimlessly from place to place and refuses to be tied down. Here, the text passes comment on how exile begets further exile: Gabrielle is unable to come back from exile because she has become addicted to her nomadic lifestyle. It is noticeable that both Gabrielle and Nina are strong, independent women who have become emancipated through their Western education and are now able to make a place for themselves in 'otherwise previously male-reserved spaces', according to Namatai Takaindisa.<sup>60</sup> Nina is a successful photographer, and although Gabrielle's profession is never explicitly stated in the text, she is certainly more financially privileged than the other female characters living in Abidjan, as she has the opportunity to travel. This financial success does not bring the sisters happiness and stability, though: Gabrielle refuses to have any relationship at all with her extended family, while Nina's re-encounter with Côte d'Ivoire is highly traumatic because she has adopted an entirely Western perception of the country, although her

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<sup>60</sup> Namatai Takaindisa, 'A Study of the Representation of Women in Véronique Tadjo's *Le Royaume aveugle* and *Loin de mon père*' (unpublished master's dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 2014), p. 83.

attitude does change as she slowly readapts to Ivorian life. *Loin de mon père* thus indicates the problems associated with the postcolonial model of diasporic life, particularly for women. Nina and Gabrielle have both improved the material conditions of their lives by living away from Côte d'Ivoire. Yet their success has been achieved at the expense of maintaining relationships with their family back in Abidjan, heightening sentiments of cultural and emotional exile when they do return.

### **Disintegration and Reintegration**

Adler defines 'disintegration' as 'a period of confusion and disorientation', in which 'differences become increasingly noticeable as different behaviours, values, and attitudes intrude into the perceptual reality of the sojourner'.<sup>61</sup> He argues that as individuals are forced to confront these differences, they become withdrawn, depressed, and alienated, since they can no longer rely on their own cultural background to understand this new way of life. They thus begin to interrogate their own identity and question how they will ever be able to adapt to this new cultural framework.

Culture shock in Tadjou's *Loin de mon père* does not mirror Adler's paradigm exactly. For Nina, the first two stages of culture shock, 'contact' and 'disintegration', overlap considerably, since she displays increasing bewilderment and frustration towards the way of life in Abidjan as soon as she arrives. While she does feel that 'her own cultural understandings are no longer appropriate', to quote Adler's definition of 'disintegration',<sup>62</sup> these sentiments are present as soon as she steps off the plane, rather than a little later during

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<sup>61</sup> Adler, p. 16.

<sup>62</sup> Adler, p. 16.

her stay, demonstrating that in fact, these stages are not as fixed and rigid as Adler would suggest.

Nina's complex exilic situation manifests itself most strongly in her bewilderment at the complex funeral arrangements which test her emotionally and demonstrate the extent of her cultural estrangement. She struggles to understand the complex funeral rituals because the family's strong Catholic beliefs stand in sharp contrast to their dedication to the local customs of the Akan community. Moreover, overcome with grief, her need to question everything is further aggravated. She is shocked to find that without telling her, her aunts Affoué and Aya have made an altar in the lounge to commemorate Kouadio, placing his photograph in the middle of the room and decorating it with fabric, candles, a Bible, and rosary beads. When Nina admits that 'ce spectacle la désola' (p. 54), her aunts reply that they have simply acted in keeping with Akan tradition. They also tell her, much to her confusion, that her father's room must remain open so that his spirit can leave (p. 55). While Nina is perplexed by what she perceives as a clash between Catholic and indigenous belief systems, in fact, in many West African communities, indigenous practices play a fundamental role in everyday life, even though the majority of the population has already converted to Islam or Christianity, as Insa Nolte notes,<sup>63</sup> and so it is not unusual for Nina's aunts to turn to both religious practices in a time of turmoil. The fact that the protagonist struggles to understand this demonstrates the extent of her cultural and emotional exile: she has forgotten during her long absence that these indigenous beliefs are a fundamental part of Akan culture. Moreover, she is so overcome with her own grief that, rather selfishly, she does not even think about her family's suffering.

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<sup>63</sup> Insa Nolte, 'Spirit: Histories of Religion and the World', in *West Africa: Word, Symbol, Song*, ed. by Gus Casely-Hayford, Janet Topp Fargion, and Marion Wallace (London: The British Library, 2015), pp. 48–71 (p. 70).

Nina's exasperation continues to rise when she is told that Kouadio's funeral will have to be postponed because it clashes with a local yam festival, during which it is forbidden for any funeral ceremonies to take place. The 'Fête des Igname', a three-day festival of music, processions, and dancing as the Akan people celebrate the beginning of the new year and pay homage to the yam which saved them from famine during their flight from the Anoh people, an invading tribe, during the seventeenth century,<sup>64</sup> is of great significance to the family and to the village elders. Yet Nina cannot understand why nobody had thought about this festival before, angrily exclaiming 'interdit, par qui? Enfin, soyons sérieux, dans quel siècle vivons-nous?' (p. 104). Her perspective here is rather alarming, as it echoes a pro-colonialist stance which disregards local African traditions as primitive. She dismisses Akan religious practices as unimportant and considers them to be less significant than her own personal loss. The intersection between her cultural and emotional exile is revealed once again: she refuses to let anyone interfere with her own bereavement and does not stop to consider the importance of these cultural traditions to her family. She accuses the family of being stuck in the past, feeling alienated from the culture into which she has been suddenly thrown as a modern, cosmopolitan young woman who has lived in France for many years. Here, it is Nina's western-style individualism and her metropolitan French outlook which clashes with Akan tradition. She thinks that she should have the right to make decisions about her own father's funeral and fails to understand that in Akan culture, the village elders have primary responsibility for the arrangements because, as one of the family members reminds her during a family meeting, 'Kouadio, paix à son âme, nous appartient biologiquement, mais pas socialement. C'est une figure publique qui a beaucoup fait pour son pays' (p. 27), such as improving the sanitary facilities in rural areas (p. 49). Toivanen helpfully comments on the

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<sup>64</sup> Dominique Auzias and Jean-Paul Labourdette, *Côte d'Ivoire* (Paris: Petit Futé, 2015), p. 112.



intersection between the nation and the family in this incident. She points out that Nina fails to understand that because her ‘father was a prominent national figure, the funeral is not simply a private event’.<sup>65</sup> Nina struggles to accept that the village elders have such a significant influence in the organisation of her father’s funeral ceremonies because funeral ceremonies are very private events in metropolitan France. She becomes frustrated with these unfamiliar traditions and does not see how she would ever find her place back in Abidjan, in a phase similar to Adler’s second stage of ‘disintegration’.

The title of the narrative also reveals the nuances of Nina’s exile: she realises that not only has she been geographically ‘loin’ from her father, thousands of miles away from him in another continent, but she has also been emotionally distant from him throughout her life because of her own Eurocentric stance towards her homeland. Franco Arato emphasises the narrator’s emotional turmoil and describes the text as fundamentally a ‘book of mourning’.<sup>66</sup> This description is rather reductive, however, because while Nina does grieve for her father, she is also confronted with significant political, cultural, and gender issues which complicate her return to Côte d’Ivoire.

*Loin de mon père* thus provides an opportunity to problematise and criticise Eurocentric perceptions of Africa, through Nina’s blinkered and judgemental views of Ivorian life. A cosmopolitan, socially mobile, and independent young woman, Nina continuously examines local culture from a Western perspective, demonstrating that she experiences exile from France, rather than from Africa. She imposes a colonialist viewpoint on these local traditions which her family endeavour to protect at all costs, regarding them as exotic, primitive, archaic, and ‘backwards’ in comparison to French ‘superior’, ‘modern’ traditions.

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<sup>65</sup> Toivanen, ‘Daddy’s Girls?’, p. 121.

<sup>66</sup> Franco Arato, ‘Memory and Mourning: Tadjou’s *Loin de mon père*’, *Percorsi*, 5 (2014), 131–42 (p. 131).

Within a postcolonial context, she therefore reproduces the colonial mentality of the *mission civilisatrice*, which underpinned the French colonial project, and which the French used to justify colonial rule in Africa and the Caribbean, because they believed that it was their duty to enlighten and westernise the indigenous peoples.<sup>67</sup> Rather than breaking down barriers between the former coloniser and the colonised by bringing the two cultures into contact, as scholars such as Homi K. Bhabha, who praise the positive potential of postcolonial models of identity, suggest, Nina's diasporic experience in fact recreates these barriers. Whereas Bhabha regards the merging of two cultures through his theory of hybridity as a positive process of empowerment and enrichment,<sup>68</sup> Nina experiences an alienating clash between French and Ivorian culture. Her attitude prevents her from feeling at home in Abidjan because she constantly compares the two cultures, criticising local traditions and holding up France as a model for the people to look towards, thereby perpetuating a relationship of dependency between Côte d'Ivoire and France. It appears, then, that these postcolonial theories of displacement are no more liberating or progressive than colonial paradigms because the metropole remains the central focus point within Ivorian identity politics.

The Eurocentric attitude of her aunts is even more problematic. The text gives no indication that they have ever lived among the Ivorian diaspora in France; yet, like Nina, they idolise metropolitan French life and strive to become more Western. They talk with other family members about the benefits of sending their children to Europe for a more prosperous and financially-secure life. Affoué even asks Nina to help her cousin settle in France and find a job there, although Nina is reluctant: 'dis-moi, après les funérailles, il faudra aider ta cousine à venir en France. Si tu te portes garante, je suis sûre que ça marchera...' (p. 118). Even though they have no personal experience of living in France, the aunts fully subscribe to

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<sup>67</sup> See Chapter Three for a more detailed discussion of the *mission civilisatrice*.

<sup>68</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 2nd edn (Abingdon: Routledge Classics, 2004 [1994]), pp. 1–27.

attitudes prevalent during the colonial era: only the West could offer a good education and decent job prospects. Their neo-colonial stance is countered, though, by other instances in which they adhere rigidly to Akan tradition. They begrudgingly allow Nina to make decisions about Kouadio's funeral which contradict local traditions, such as allowing her to choose the outfit in which he will be buried, despite being 'ennuyée' by her choice because it goes against everything in which they have ever believed (p. 162). They are thus 'déboussolées' by this rift between tradition and modernity, in Tadjó's own words, unsure whether they should continue to be influenced by the local elites and carry out the funeral rites according to ancient traditions, or try to adapt to what they perceive as a more modern, transnational society.<sup>69</sup> They perhaps also wish to retain the traditional Akan customs out of fear of losing their authority and position in society as the sisters of an influential elite. It is important to note here, though, that their status is governed entirely by their relationship with their brother Kouadio, so they too, like Nina, are unable to escape the patriarchy which is deeply embedded in Ivorian society.

The Western outlook on life which Nina shares with her aunts also brings about her increasing isolation from her deceased father. Early in the text, she is stunned to learn from her cousin Hervé that her father has a nine-year-old son named Koffi (p. 35) and becomes even angrier when she finally discovers from her aunts — who are reluctant to reveal the family's shameful secret and betray the memory of their deceased brother, the head of the family — the existence of her three other siblings (p. 122). Adolescents Cécile and Roland live locally, whereas Amon, who is closer to her age, has settled in Montreal, Canada, with his wife and young daughter. Here, the text makes another important statement about gender issues in Côte d'Ivoire: Nina's older brother, who has a good job in an Information

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<sup>69</sup> Tadjó, Email to Wimbush. See Appendix, p. 294.

Technology company, is much more financially successful than the rest of the siblings, and it was Kouadio who helped to pay for his studies in Bordeaux (p. 172). It becomes apparent from Nina's emotional and frustrated email to Gabrielle, when she reveals the family secret, that their father also paid for Roland's training to become an electrician (p. 175), but Nina does not mention whether Cécile was given any financial support. It can thus be inferred that for Kouadio, it was more important to educate his illegitimate sons than his daughters. Although Nina, his legitimate daughter, became emancipated through education, it is unclear how her own education was funded. Her distance from her father had therefore already begun before she discovered about his secret life because her gender signified that her father treated her differently to his other male children. Her gender perhaps also explains her linguistic exile: Kouadio never taught his daughter his mother tongue of Baoulé, an Akan language of the Niger-Congo family.<sup>70</sup> Nina wonders whether this was a deliberate act on his part to keep her 'coupée de ce qui se passait dans son entourage' (p. 122), which was dominated by men. She was raised to speak to her family in standard French, the language of the elite which is currently only spoken by one percent of the Ivorian population,<sup>71</sup> intensifying her sentiments of being exiled from her family and perpetuating her position as an elite outsider who identifies with France, rather than with Côte d'Ivoire.

While secret lovers and illegitimate children are clearly a global rather than an African phenomenon, Tadjo presents a nuanced version of polygamy in Côte d'Ivoire — an issue

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<sup>70</sup> As Anne Moseng Knutsen observes in 'Ivory Coast: The Supremacy of French', in *Language and National Identity in Africa*, ed. by Andrew Simpson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 158–71, 'the Ivory Coast is one of the most linguistically diverse states in West Africa' (p. 158). Approximately sixty indigenous languages are spoken in the country, and they can be divided into four main groups: 'the *Gur* languages of the northeast (Senofé, Kolango, Lobiri), the *Kru* languages of the southwest (Bete, Dida, Wobe-Guere), the *Kwa* languages of the southeast (Baule, Agni), and finally the *Mande* languages, which separate into two branches, the north Mande languages of the northwest (Maukan, Wodjenekan, and the vehicular trade language Diula) and the south Mande languages in the west of the country (Yacuba, Gagu, Goro)', [original emphasis], p. 162. Although Baoulé, as one of the most widely-spoken indigenous languages, is a national language, it has no legal status. The only official language of Côte d'Ivoire is French.

<sup>71</sup> Remi Sonaiya, 'Issues in French Applied Linguistics in West Africa', in *French Applied Linguistics*, ed. by Dalila Ayoun (Amsterdam; Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2007), pp. 425–49 (p. 433).

which is also of great concern to the author herself — to shed light on Western representations of Africa and to emphasise the stark gender inequalities in Côte d’Ivoire. In an interview for the literary supplement of *Les Dépêches de Brazzaville* in 2010, Tadjou remarked that ‘l’incertitude pèse sur l’avenir des enfants issus de cette polygamie de fait’ because, in contrast to traditional polygamous arrangements, in which the children of each wife have a neatly-defined status, these new relationships are much more precarious, and the children have no rights or financial stability.<sup>72</sup> In *Loin de mon père*, Kouadio takes several black African women as his ‘concubines’, giving them no social or financial responsibility. In a telling narrative decision, they are also not granted any visibility in the text: Nina catches a glimpse of Koffi’s young mother when she goes to meet her young brother for the first time (p. 41), but the other women are entirely absent, suggesting that these women are relegated to the home where they are forced to assume a domestic role. Nina is angry that her father, and indeed the rest of the family, had hidden this secret from her to preserve his reputation. The civil war perhaps also allowed certain family secrets to remain concealed because Nina’s aunts were more concerned with their own safety and preserving their own position in society than revealing the truth about her father (p. 122). Although, as Baram Reid remarks, ‘what is at stake is not an African tradition per se, [...], but shifting paradigms of family and of personal responsibility both in Africa and in the West’,<sup>73</sup> for Nina, her father’s betrayal is rooted in his African beliefs from which she feels far removed. It is a consequence of the patriarchal society of Côte d’Ivoire in which Kouadio could take numerous lovers, regardless of the consequences, simply because he was a prosperous male. Nina therefore regards her father’s unfaithfulness as an ‘African tradition’: he had been ‘cloîtré dans son rôle de patriarche’, refusing to tell the truth about his family situation and allow himself to be judged

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<sup>72</sup> Véronique Tadjou, ‘Funérailles, questionnement et retrouvailles’, Interview by Vincente Clergeau, *Les Dépêches de Brazzaville*, 13 (June 2010), 4.

<sup>73</sup> Baram Reid, ‘Afterword’, p. 146.

by others (p. 38). The fact that she refuses to consider how infidelity has a detrimental effect on families in the West is a further indication of her exile; she reduces all her problems to a dichotomy between Africa and Europe, even if, in reality, these differences are not as pronounced as she thinks. In fact, by deceiving her own partner Frédéric by having a sexual relationship with Kangha, her former lover from Abidjan whom she has not seen for six years, she is guilty of the same mistake for which she condemns her father. Brezault thus concludes that 'le mensonge occupe une part importante du récit', as every character is deceitful in some way.<sup>74</sup> Nina and Kangha have an affair, and Gabrielle lies to Nina by telling her that she will attend her father's funeral, even though she clearly has no intention of doing so. Deceit should not solely be associated with Ivorian life, as Nina appears to believe.

Nina rejects Ivorian life in a phase reminiscent of 'reintegration', Adler's third stage of culture shock. She 'is hostile to that which is experienced but not understood', in Adler's terms,<sup>75</sup> becoming very critical about Abidjan culture from her Eurocentric stand-point. For instance, when she is clearing out her father's bedroom, she is disconcerted to find a book which claims to protect against witchcraft, entitled *La Sorcellerie et ses remèdes, guide pratique à l'intention de ceux qui veulent se libérer*. She tries to convince herself that Kouadio would not have read this manual; the torn and tatty pages, however, indicate otherwise. She begins to cry, wondering 'dans quel monde son père avait-il vécu?' (p. 69). She would never have anticipated that her father, a highly educated, influential elite, would believe in what she perceives as dangerous and threatening superstitions, and she dismisses the book as 'sinistre' (p. 69), a further indication of her position as an outsider, and a suggestion that she has internalised metropolitan French norms about 'primitive' African cultures. As Nina has been away from Côte d'Ivoire for so long, she does not seem aware that

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<sup>74</sup> Brezault, p. 126.

<sup>75</sup> Adler, p. 17.

witchcraft plays an important role in contemporary Ivorian society; it survived French colonial contact and post-colonial modernisation and is practised by elites as well as by the less-well educated of society.<sup>76</sup> Nina dismisses her new cultural framework as undeveloped and outdated, although she does not recede into the familiar, like Adler's model states. Adler predicts that in this stage, 'the individual may regressively seek out relationships with only those of his or her own culture'.<sup>77</sup> During her absence from Côte d'Ivoire, Nina has fully assimilated into French society and has adopted the French representation of Africa. Her 'own culture' is thus synonymous with metropolitan France, as she has had no contact with Ivorian life. Now, the reverse occurs: she is surrounded by Kouadio's family and so has no physical contact with anybody from France — the country which has become her home — alienating her even further from her own multifaceted identity.

Adler argues that the rejection of the host culture can be helpful because it 'becomes the basis for new intuitive, emotional, and cognitive experiences' as the individual begins to show a greater awareness of this new culture.<sup>78</sup> This is the case in *Loin de mon père*: Nina's negative feelings begin to demonstrate a possibility of reconciliation with the now seemingly unfamiliar culture of Côte d'Ivoire. Nina's turning point is the argument she has with Kangha. She becomes torn between Kangha and her French boyfriend Frédéric, another symbol of the confusion she experiences in her identity struggle, similarly torn between belonging to Côte d'Ivoire and belonging to France. Kangha suggests that Nina should consider returning to Abidjan permanently after the funeral ceremonies, but she immediately rejects this proposition, describing the country as chaotic and violent, void of all hope and future

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<sup>76</sup> Lauren M. MacLean, *Informal Institutions and Citizenship in Rural Africa: Risk and Reciprocity in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 76–77.

<sup>77</sup> Adler, p. 17.

<sup>78</sup> Adler, p. 17.

prospects: ‘mais pourquoi prendrais-je une telle décision? [...] Cela n’a pas de sens, c’est le chaos ici’ (p. 101).

This permanent return looms over the text, leading the reader to speculate what Nina will eventually decide to do. Here, Toivanen reminds us of Nina’s ‘cosmopolitan privilege’ of being able to decide if and when she will return to France, given that ‘she is at no point at the mercy of her old homeland’s hospitality’.<sup>79</sup> She certainly is privileged: she has the financial independence and determination to be able to leave Côte d’Ivoire and return whenever she wants, as the daughter of an important doctor and former member of the elite. Yet despite the social inequality she enjoys, and the means and freedom to travel between France and Côte d’Ivoire that this privilege brings, her family obligations hinder her flexibility. She finds herself financially responsible for her newly-discovered siblings and is required to sort out her father’s accounts after his death as his oldest child present (p. 107), so in fact she has more ties to Ivorian life, and fewer opportunities to benefit from her cosmopolitan status, than Toivanen suggests. Caporale observes that within the family ‘Nina occupies a still undefined space and can only assume the peripheral status of bystander’, noting that that she passively stands at the window and watches when soldiers march past her house (p. 128), refusing to participate in the main family action.<sup>80</sup> Yet as has been argued, she does actively help with the funeral arrangements — in fact, she is the only one of Kouadio’s children who takes her family responsibilities seriously, as Gabrielle refuses to return, Amon only arrives the day before the final ceremony, and the others are too young to help organise the ceremonies. She is therefore perceived by the other family members as being an integral part of the community, even if, at this point, she considers her own position to be on the margins.

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<sup>79</sup> Toivanen, ‘Diasporic Romances Gone Bad’, p. 442.

<sup>80</sup> Caporale, p. 165.



While in the argument with Kangha she appears to dismiss the idea of staying completely, snapping at him and proclaiming that ‘il existe beaucoup d’autres pays plus accueillants. Pourquoi gâcher ma vie ici?’ (p. 101), it is the first time that she talks about staying in Côte d’Ivoire permanently. She is beginning to reintegrate into life in Abidjan, demonstrating ‘a growing cultural awareness’, to quote Adler,<sup>81</sup> but also an increasing sense of belonging within her own family.

### **Autonomy and Independence**

Towards the end of the text, then, Nina moves into the stage of culture shock that Adler terms ‘autonomy’. This phase ‘is marked by a rising sensitivity and by the acquisition of both skill and understanding of the second culture’ as the individual becomes increasingly more comfortable in the new surroundings, employing coping strategies in order to adapt to this second culture.<sup>82</sup> In *Loin de mon père*, Nina becomes more adept at negotiating the cultural framework of Abidjan as she actively participates in local customs and traditions and reintegrates into family life in her country of origin, although she has not quite reached the stage of ‘independence’ and never feels completely at ease with this second culture. For instance, she prepares her father’s body according to local traditions, choosing an additional pinstriped suit for him and placing some money in his coffin for his next life, even though this action is an afterthought which she only remembers ‘tout à coup’ (p. 163), after arguing with her aunts about the colour of the suit. They wanted him to be dressed in white, the colour of mourning in Côte d’Ivoire, but this seems too sad for Nina, who instead dresses him in midnight blue (p. 162), demonstrating her inability — and indeed refusal — to conform

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<sup>81</sup> Adler, p. 17.

<sup>82</sup> Adler, p. 17.

completely to Akan traditions. She is beginning to understand the importance of ritual for her family and the comfort it provides them in times of despair, but this is a slow and gradual process (and one which she is not prepared to embrace completely). In an unpublished interview with Wimbush in 2016, Tadjó refuted the idea that Nina's relationship with her homeland changes throughout the text, explaining that 'le retour est impossible, pour la bonne raison que le pays [Côte d'Ivoire] a changé complètement'.<sup>83</sup> I have demonstrated, however, that for Nina, a return to Côte d'Ivoire is more complex than Tadjó suggests here: it is possible because by the end of the text she is seriously considering living in Abidjan permanently, but nevertheless, it is a very difficult experience, for the reasons Tadjó outlines above.

Nina's attitude towards her father also alters throughout the text, and this can be read as a further symbol of her changing relationship with Côte d'Ivoire. She learns to accept his weaknesses, and although she still feels betrayed by his infidelities, she takes solace in her newly-discovered family. She realises that her siblings give her roots in Abidjan which she thought she had lost and which 'la plantaient fermement dans la terre' (p. 170); she felt alone and isolated when Kouadio died, having already lost her mother, but she now understands that she has 'plus d'attaches qu'avant' to help her to come to terms with her grief (p. 170). Fort argues that 'la nouvelle fratrie participe par ailleurs pour Nina du travail du deuil en lui permettant de dépasser l'absence de son père'.<sup>84</sup> While it is problematic to propose that Nina's new family are simply able to replace her father's position in her life and help her to overcome his death more quickly, when in fact they complicate her understanding of her family and Ivorian culture, their existence is a positive discovery for Nina. She realises that

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<sup>83</sup> Véronique Tadjó, Unpublished telephone interview with Antonia Wimbush, 6 July 2016 [my transcript]. See Appendix, p. 300.

<sup>84</sup> Fort, p. 85.

she has now become closer to her father through her new siblings than she ever had been while he was still alive. She also begins to understand the transformations her father underwent towards the end of his life as he lost his status as an important elite and well-respected doctor and retreated to the domestic sphere (p. 55); his downfall is representative of the ‘national turmoil’ of Côte d’Ivoire during the mid-2000s, as Toivanen notes.<sup>85</sup> The novel ends poignantly with her father’s coffin being lowered into the ground while Nina thinks about him, admitting that ‘elle l’aimerait toujours’ (p. 189), regardless of the pain he had caused her. The close bond between her father and his nation implies that if she is able to overcome her disapproval of his life choices and forgive him, in time she will be able to consider Côte d’Ivoire her home once again.

Furthermore, she begins to view her difficult relationship with her mother in a new light. As a child, she blamed her mother for all her problems, and ‘lui avait même reproché la couleur de sa peau’ (p. 136). She thought her cultural difference and subsequent inability to integrate into the Ivorian community was her mother’s fault; discovering her father’s secret life makes her realise, though, the hardships her mother had to tolerate, and so she remembers her in a more forgiving and loving manner. This complex maternal relationship is undoubtedly a reflection of patriarchal Ivorian society, which instilled in her from a young age the need to idolise her father, and view him as a role model. It is only with the maturity that her adulthood has granted her that she is able to realise how these gender inequalities affected her relationship with her mother. As Fort observes, ‘si la mère resurgit à ce point dans ce texte, c’est que Nina fait également le deuil de celle-ci dans ce livre’.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Toivanen, ‘Daddy’s Girls?’, p. 115.

<sup>86</sup> Fort, p. 83.

Although Nina initially envisages her displacement to Abidjan as a short-term trip, by the end of the novel, she does contemplate returning permanently, having reached some level of reconciliation with herself, with Côte d'Ivoire, with her father, and with her former lover Kangha. The fact that Nina possesses agency over the nature of her return suggests that Kate Averis's preferred term of 'forced choice' in exile, in which Averis proposes that exile should be understood as a set of 'forced choices', one of which must be taken,<sup>87</sup> is as applicable to the return from exile as it is to the original departure. Averis draws attention to the lack of possibility for more nuanced, complicated choices. In *Loin de mon père*, Nina's initial decision to return to Abidjan is limited because she feels obliged to return to bury her father, although she does have the choice of whether to stay in Abidjan or to return to Paris at the end of the text. Moreover, she could choose not to return, as her sister Gabrielle does who refuses to have any kind of relationship with her Ivorian family because she disapproves of their lifestyle.

It is not until chapter fifteen of the second part of the book that this resolution begins, just before her father's final funeral ceremonies are held. Nina is not completely convinced about staying permanently in Abidjan, admitting that 'si elle choisissait de revenir, beaucoup de choses allaient devoir changer' (p. 167): she must learn to accept her father's past, as she believes that it does not negate the love he had for her and Gabrielle. She is determined to try and engage in a world with which she is no longer completely familiar, even though she realises that this will be challenging. The hesitation she encounters, which is apparent in the sentence's conditional structure, in fact makes her desire for a permanent return more believable, since she is unlikely to come to a decision about such an important event so quickly. Her gender continues to play a part in her exile, however. Her discussions with

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<sup>87</sup> Kate Averis, *Exile and Nomadism in French and Hispanic Women's Writing* (London: Modern Humanities Research Association and Maney Publishing, 2014), p. 17.

Kangha have given her the opportunity to reflect on what home means for her, and just when she is considering remaining permanently in Abidjan, he announces that he has been given a researcher post at the University of Michigan. Nina is upset that he is leaving Abidjan, but he simply replies ‘c’est une opportunité que je ne peux pas refuser, tu comprends?’ (p. 161). This episode reveals the salient gender disparities at the heart of Ivorian society: it is acceptable for Kangha to be ambitious and career-driven, but Nina’s priority must be her family’s well-being. It seems almost impossible for Nina to be fully reconciled with Côte d’Ivoire when her ideals and values are so widely different from those held by many people in her homeland.

According to Baram Reid, Nina’s reconciliation with Ivorian life does indeed occur, but in an earlier chapter, when her half-sister Céline, who aspires to be a storyteller, tells Nina a traditional folktale (pp. 149–52).<sup>88</sup> Nina claims that she has understood the moral of the story, exclaiming ‘tu es très forte! J’ai compris...’ (p. 152). While the reader remains unsure of the exact moral of the story, because no dialogue takes place between the siblings which could explain what Nina has understood, for Baram Reid, the wider significance is Nina’s realisation that:

she must come to terms with the consequences of her inability to adequately interpret the stories told and the truths played out all around her, exchanges that would have let her understand sooner not only her father’s life story, but also the cultural codes of the larger community.<sup>89</sup>

This interpretation recognises Nina’s own role in the culture shock she has experienced and suggests that she is not entirely blameless in her own alienation, an argument sustained throughout this chapter. This episode with Céline, however, is then followed by Nina’s exasperation at her Ivorian friends who are reluctant to organise an artistic event without the

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<sup>88</sup> Amy Baram Reid, ‘When the Storyteller Speaks: The Significance of Opacity in *Loin de mon père*’, in *Écrire, traduire, peindre: Véronique Tadjo: Writing, Translating, Painting*, ed. by Sarah Davies Cordova and Désiré K. Wa Kabwe-Segatti (Paris: Présence Africaine, 2016), pp. 285–99.

<sup>89</sup> Baram Reid, p. 295.

support of the government (p. 156), leading her to exclaim 'je perds vraiment mon temps' (p. 158). It seems, then, that at this stage, Nina is still troubled by the cultural codes of Ivorian society.

A more genuine reconciliation occurs at her father's burial. Toivanen argues that 'her father's funeral represents the burial of the hopes which, from the perspective of the contemporary crisis, seem illusory and provides space for a more realistic way of conceiving the future in conjunction with the past'.<sup>90</sup> For Toivanen, this episode is above all a positive step for Nina, assisting her in coming to terms with the realities of life in Côte d'Ivoire, and with her father's death. Toivanen's analysis corresponds to the argument sustained throughout this chapter: Nina moves slowly through Adler's model of culture shock, although her reconciliation with Côte d'Ivoire is on-going and incomplete. She examines her new location from a more realistic perspective, learning to accept the triumphs and failures of her country, as well as her father's strengths and weaknesses.

By the end of the novel, Nina's greater understanding of her father and of Côte d'Ivoire contradicts Bartoloni's assertion that nostalgia for home increases the longer the exiled person remains in the host location, if Nina's home is still considered to be France. Bartoloni claims that the exiled person's relationship with the country of origin is determined by both spatial and temporal parameters and contends that 'the longer a journey and the longer the sojourn in another place become, the more acute is the feeling of nostalgia (that gnawing reminder that something essential to being and identity is missing)'.<sup>91</sup> In other words, according to Bartoloni, the greater the spatial difference between the country of origin and the country of migration, and the longer the time spent in exile away from the homeland, the

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<sup>90</sup> Toivanen, 'Daddy's Girls?', p. 122.

<sup>91</sup> Bartoloni, p. 103.

greater the feeling of nostalgia for the homeland. Tadjó's novel complicates Bartoloni's analysis by demonstrating that in some cases, the longer a person lives in a new country away from the homeland, the greater the possibilities for integration into that society, because the language and culture become increasingly familiar, and so the country of migration eventually replaces the country of origin as home. This is the case for Nina in Tadjó's narrative: while she does not quite succeed in making Abidjan her home again by the end of the text, her reconciliation with her homeland is in progress. Nina has already undergone one process of adaptation when she moved to France as a young adult, successfully creating a home for herself in Paris; perhaps her proven cultural fluidity and capacity to adapt mean that, in time, she will be able to call Côte d'Ivoire home once more. Moreover, Bartoloni's insistence on the temporal constraint of exile implies that he dismisses short-term, temporary displacements as relatively unproblematic when compared with more permanent journeys of migration. Following his argument, Nina's exile back to Abidjan for Kouadio's funeral ceremonies would be less traumatic than being exiled permanently, but this fails to take into account the emotional complexities of her return.

Nina recognises that she needs to continue learning about herself and her country in order to reintegrate into life in Abidjan. She tells herself that 'il faut que [...] [elle] accepte de reconnaître ce qui est arrivé et qu[']elle retrouve [s]a vie' (p. 168). Yet she lacks the ability to become fully at ease in this culture. Although she does eventually come to terms with her father's memory, the narrative concludes in an ambiguous manner: the reader does not know where she eventually decides to live, nor what will happen to her relationship with Gabrielle, with her aunts, and with her newly-discovered siblings. Nina is unable to completely 'accept

and draw nourishment from cultural differences and similarities', in Adler's terms,<sup>92</sup> suggesting that she never quite reaches the final stage of culture shock, 'independence'.

For Adler, 'independence' is characterised by an appreciation of social, cultural, and psychological differences within the host culture; the individual draws on these differences to be humorous, creative, and expressive, and is able to trust others completely.<sup>93</sup> This is never entirely possible for Nina. She is grieving for her father and so is unable to enjoy the differences which surround her, nor is she fully able to adhere to this second cultural framework. Adler's final stage is thus inappropriate for Nina, as she remains haunted by questions of belonging and identity. Her readaptation remains incomplete: she does not know where she truly belongs, whether to Abidjan or to Paris, to Côte d'Ivoire or to France. Yet Brezault reads the conclusion of the text as confirmation of Nina's total reconciliation with her country of origin. She argues that 'le retour à la normale ne pourra être complet qu'à la fin des funérailles qui fonctionnent dès lors, pour elle, comme un rite cathartique qui la guérit à jamais de ses peurs les plus profondes, l'absence d'appartenance'.<sup>94</sup> The reader, however, does not witness Nina's return to normality because the text ends with Kouadio's burial. Although the funeral ceremony is cathartic for the protagonist on one level, because it allows her to begin to come to terms with her father's death and to accept her own transcultural identity, it is also depicted as painful and bewildering: 'tout s'était passé trop vite, cela n'avait pas de sens' (p. 189). The verb 'guérir' in Brezault's statement deserves further comment: the term compares Nina's experiences of culture shock to an illness or injury, and it implies that she is now cured 'à jamais' from her sentiments of alienation. This analysis overlooks the profound confusion and grief Nina encounters throughout the text. Moreover, equating Nina's

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<sup>92</sup> Adler, p. 18.

<sup>93</sup> Adler, p. 19.

<sup>94</sup> Brezault, p. 127.



difficult return to an illness or injury suggests that what she experiences is an unusual and abnormal reaction to a new cultural and emotional environment, which may be ‘cured’. Yet this chapter has demonstrated that her culture shock is a natural and inevitable reaction to a different cultural experience, which requires exploration and understanding rather than a ‘cure’. What renders her culture shock more unique and complex is that she is not experiencing a completely new culture. *Loin de mon père* calls into question the understanding of home as a fixed, stable location which grants stability and security, as Nina has felt culturally exiled in the location which used to be her home. Even if, as the end of the text suggests, she may be able eventually to call Côte d’Ivoire her home once again, her experiences of culture shock cause her to wonder whether she ever truly belonged there at all, and whether it ever was her home.

## **Conclusion**

*Loin de mon père*’s presentation of the return to the homeland, in the midst of a violent and turbulent civil war, reveals the struggles faced by Nina and her family on attempting to reintegrate into life in Abidjan, a difficulty Tadjou herself also encountered on her return to Côte d’Ivoire following the brutal conflict. The autofictional narrative underscores that returning to the country of origin is not always a utopian, idealistic solution which eradicates sentiments of being excluded and isolated from the host society; rather, it can cause a fracture for returnees as they continuously question what it means to live in a land which no longer feels like home. This chapter has demonstrated *Loin de mon père*’s significance for the intersection between gender and exile, and has argued that Nina’s cultural exile is rendered more acute because of underlying gender disparities in Côte d’Ivoire, which serve to reinforce

Nina's estrangement from her birth country. Nina shares similarities with those who experience culture shock on arriving in a completely unfamiliar location. Her alienation is, in part, caused by a lack of understanding of the customs and traditions of Abidjan due to a long period of absence away from the city; in part, by the grief the family suffer after the death of Kouadio; and in part, by the civil war which has completely undermined the people's solidarity, camaraderie, and patriotism, driving Ivorians to question their loyalty to a country which turned very rapidly 'from economic miracle to violent nightmare'.<sup>95</sup>

Culture shock destabilises Nina, then, and forces her to reflect on her relationship with her father and with Abidjan, but it also acts as a process of self-discovery. As Patrick Kabeya Mwepu comments, it is through 'sa découverte de l'Autre', in Nina's case the discovery of her father, that she is able to understand her own identity better.<sup>96</sup> Paradoxically, while *Loin de mon père* is a melancholic and at times pessimistic text about exile, grief, loss, and non-belonging, it is also a novel about hope and optimism. Through this re-acquaintance with Abidjan culture she learns more about herself and her ability to cope with difficult situations. Moreover, as Tadjó pointed out in an interview in 2013 for Sud Plateau TV, Nina's Ivorian heritage 'devient une richesse' because it makes her realise that 'elle n'est pas seule, mais en fait le tissu social est beaucoup plus élargi qu'elle ne le pensait'.<sup>97</sup> Her newly-discovered siblings provide her with a sense of community which she never thought she had, and she wonders whether this support network is actually 'l'héritage de son père' which he wanted to pass down to her (p. 170).

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<sup>95</sup> Brian Klass, 'From Miracle to Nightmare: An Institutional Analysis of Development Failures in Côte d'Ivoire', *Africa Today*, 55.1 (2008), 109–26 (p. 123).

<sup>96</sup> Patrick Kabeya Mwepu, 'Entre vacuité et plénitude: *Loin de mon père* de Véronique Tadjó', *The French Review*, 88.4 (2015), 33–46 (p. 34).

<sup>97</sup> Véronique Tadjó, 'Véronique Tadjó pour *Loin de mon père*', Interview by Réassi Ouabonzi, *Les Lectures de Gangoueus*, Sud Plateau (25 August 2013) <<http://www.sudplateau-tv.fr/2013/11/04/veronique-tadjo-pour-loin-de-mon-pere/>> [accessed 25 August 2016] [my transcript].

Nina's cultural otherness is aggravated further by her own Western, Eurocentric perspective of Côte d'Ivoire which she has developed while living a diasporic life in France. While her family endeavour to preserve traditional values and beliefs, Nina prefers to move away from tradition and embrace Western modernity, feeling exiled on recognising the gulf between the two attitudes. Tadjó's text challenges notions of what it means to live in the diaspora, and what it means to return to the homeland.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### EXILE, *MÉTISSAGE*, AND FAMILY ESTRANGEMENT IN KIM LEFÈVRE'S AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL NARRATIVES

‘Tout en moi heurtait mes proches: mon physique de métisse, mon caractère imprévu, difficile à comprendre, si peu vietnamien en un mot’ (*Métisse blanche*, p. 20).

This searing quotation from the opening pages of *Métisse blanche* (1989) powerfully articulates the narrator Kim's sentiments of exile within her own family.<sup>1</sup> It encapsulates the difficulties of growing up in colonial Vietnam as an illegitimate girl of mixed French and Vietnamese origins. The emotive verb ‘heurter’ suggests that her physical difference is a particularly visceral affront to her family, while the repetition of the possessive adjective ‘mon’ implies an embodiment of this otherness by Kim herself. Furthermore, the quotation recreates Orientalist paradigms, as critiqued by Edward W. Said, by suggesting a stark contrast between the complex, unpredictable, and headstrong French race, and the knowable,

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<sup>1</sup> Kim Lefèvre, *Métisse blanche, suivi de Retour à la saison des pluies* (Paris: Éditions Phébus, 2008 [1989; 1990]). All subsequent references to these texts will appear in parentheses in the main body of this chapter.

placid Vietnamese people.<sup>2</sup> For Kim's Vietnamese family, she is simply not Vietnamese enough.

This chapter examines how family relationships are affected by exile in Franco-Vietnamese author Kim Lefèvre's autobiographical narratives. *Métisse blanche* and its sequel, *Retour à la saison des pluies* (1990),<sup>3</sup> are analysed through the lens of gender, with particular attention to the relationships the narrator sustains with her mother and sisters. The analysis is based on the assumption that the narrator is Lefèvre herself, given the noticeable connections between bibliographic information offered in interviews and textual details about her life, and the fact that each edition of both texts carries the subtitle 'autobiographie'. There is, however, considerable ambiguity at work: as discussed in Chapter One, Lefèvre has commented that she manipulated her life story for greater aesthetic effect.<sup>4</sup>

It is Kim's *métissage*, and the forms of exile and estrangement within her own family that her mixed-race, gendered identity provokes, that this chapter sets out to examine. Kim is obsessed with the impurity of her blood. In a poignant early passage of *Métisse blanche*, Lefèvre's first novel which looks back on her traumatic childhood in Vietnam,<sup>5</sup> she describes her blood as 'maudit' (p. 20). Furthermore, in *Retour*, in which the narrative time mirrors the

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<sup>2</sup> In *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), Edward W. Said defines Orientalism as 'the ineradicable distinction between Western superiority and Oriental inferiority' (p. 42). He charts how the Orient has been perceived as the 'other', as threatening, barbaric, and unintelligent, in a range of Western historical and contemporary literature, political discourse, ideology, and language itself. Indeed, as Said argues, 'it is Europe that articulates the Orient' (p. 57). He connects these stereotypes and misrepresentations of the Orient to an imperialist discourse which underpinned all knowledge production about the Orient.

<sup>3</sup> *Retour à la saison des pluies* will be referred to as *Retour*.

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter One for a detailed account of the books' history, and for a further explanation of my autobiographical reading of the texts.

<sup>5</sup> Following the success of her autobiographical narratives, in 1991, Lefèvre published her first translated text, a French-language translation of a novel by Vietnamese author and political dissident Duong Thu Huong, entitled *Histoire d'amour racontée avant l'aube* (La Tour d'Aigues, France: Éditions de l'Aube, 1991 [1986]). She has since translated six other texts into French by important Vietnamese writers Nguyen Huy Thiep and Phan Thi Vang Anh. See Kim Lefèvre, 'Une parole francophone: Kim Lefèvre', *L'Assemblée Parlementaire de la Francophonie* (25 June 2010) <<http://apf.francophonie.org/Une-parole-francophone-Kim-Lefevre.html>> [accessed 15 September 2016] (para. 3 of 34). Chapter One offers a more detailed discussion of Lefèvre's activities as a translator.

period in which Lefèvre was writing in the late 1980s, she reflects on the difficulties she faced as a girl ‘de sang mêlé’ (p. 469). This preoccupation with pure blood is deeply influenced by colonial thought in Indochina. As Emmanuelle Saada explains, the term *sang-mêlé* was synonymous with *métis* throughout colonial Indochina and carried the same pejorative connotations.<sup>6</sup> Connections can be made to Nina Bouraoui’s literary heroine who also talks of embodying the coloniser through her mixed French and Algerian blood. In *Garçon manqué* (2000), the narrator describes how her ‘différence de sang’ makes her guilty, by association, of the colonial violence inflicted on Algerians.<sup>7</sup> Yet in the same text, she actively reclaims the term *métis*, using it to define herself and her friend Amine (p. 29). In West Africa too, the term was used by indigenous peoples themselves in both colonial and postcolonial periods.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, in Véronique Tadjo’s *Loin de mon père* (2010), Nina refers to herself without any hesitation as ‘métisse’,<sup>9</sup> and while she comments that as a girl, she was offended by the local village children who insulted her lighter skin, her privileged upbringing in urban Abidjan kept her at a considerable distance from racial prejudice. Lefèvre’s situation, however, is exceptional: the specific socio-political context of colonial Indochina in which Kim is born and raised means that she has espoused the French thinking which associates *métissage* with inferiority. Her *métissage* not only lies at the root of her linguistic alienation but also constitutes one of the multiple causes of her exiles, both literal and metaphorical, across Vietnam, and then in France. In its analysis of *Métisse blanche* and *Retour*, the chapter challenges Edward W. Said’s theory of exile in ‘Reflections on Exile’, which suggests that

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<sup>6</sup> Emmanuelle Saada, *Les Enfants de la colonie: les métis de l’Empire français entre sujétion et citoyenneté* (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 2007), p. 25.

<sup>7</sup> Nina Bouraoui, *Garçon manqué* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 2000), p. 10. All subsequent references to this text will appear in parentheses in the main body of this chapter.

<sup>8</sup> In *Children of the French Empire: Miscegenation and Colonial Society in French West Africa 1895–1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), Owen White explains that “‘métis’ was the term most commonly used in French West Africa in the colonial period, by the subjects themselves as much as by other Africans or the French’ (p. 5). In contrast, according to White, Eurasians in colonial Indochina took offense at the term.

<sup>9</sup> Véronique Tadjo, *Loin de mon père* (Arles: Actes Sud, 2010), p. 126.

exile, a rupture from people's 'roots, their land, their past', inherently involves a crossing of national borders:<sup>10</sup> in the case of Lefèvre, as it will be seen, exile can occur within the boundaries of a single nation.

Engaging with Hamid Nacify's conceptualisation of exile as a banishment within and from the home,<sup>11</sup> the chapter also demonstrates that Kim's exile is particularly traumatic because she is kept at a distance by her own family, the very people whose duty it is to protect her, according to social convention. Because she is a *métisse*, she is effectively exiled and sent away to a French colonial orphanage, and then later to French colonial boarding schools across the country. This negative interpretation of *métissage* appears specific to Lefèvre's generation who lived in colonial Indochina. Younger Francophone Vietnamese writers, such as Linda Lê, are not troubled by their composite identities;<sup>12</sup> Lê, in contrast, seems to embrace what Gillian Ni Cheallaigh calls the 'exilic, *apatride* identity', referring to the author's statelessness and loss of *patrie*, which Lê writes into her literature [original emphasis].<sup>13</sup> Since these writers did not experience French colonisation themselves, their personal understanding of *métissage* is not conditioned by an ideology of inferiority.

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<sup>10</sup> Edward W. Said, 'Reflections on Exile', in *Reflections on Exile: And Other Literary and Cultural Essays* (London: Granta Books, 2001), pp. 173–86 (p. 177).

<sup>11</sup> Hamid Nacify, 'Phobic Spaces and Liminal Panics: Independent Transnational Film Genre', in *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary*, ed. by Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake (Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 119–44 (p. 123).

<sup>12</sup> In 'The Disillusion of Linda Lê: Redefining the Vietnamese Diaspora in France', *French Forum*, 35.1 (2010), 59–74, Lise-Hélène Smith remarks that Lê 'refuses to identify as a Vietnamese or Vietnamese French writer, [...] voluntarily resist[ing] national and literary categorisations' (p. 59). This quotation suggests that Lê does not feel compelled to prove either her Frenchness or her Vietnamese identity. Born in 1963 in Dalat to a French mother and Vietnamese father, Lê received a French education (like Lefèvre and Anna Moï). Lê left for France with her mother and sisters in 1979, following the fall of Saigon in 1975; her father did not speak French so he stayed behind. She published her first novel, *Un si tendre vampire* (Paris: Les Éditions de la Table Ronde) in 1987. She has since written many fictional and non-fictional works, winning the Prix Renaudot du livre de poche in 2011 for *A l'enfant que je n'aurai pas* (Paris: Éditions NiL, 2011).

<sup>13</sup> Gillian Ni Cheallaigh, 'Linda Lê's Antigonal Refusal of Motherhood', in *Women's Lives in Contemporary French and Francophone Literature*, ed. by Florence Ramond Jurney and Karen McPherson (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 61–76 (p. 62).

The present analysis engages with postcolonial theories of *métissage* which have been offered as predominantly productive models of resilience by scholars such as Édouard Glissant, François Lionnet, and François Vergès. For these intellectuals, *métissage* is a dynamic process of opposition against hegemonic practices because it undermines dichotomies of identity and privileges multiplicity and convergence. Glissant was one of the first cultural critics to adopt the term in *Poétique de la relation* (1990), distinguishing between three methods of conceptualising cultural encounters: *métissage*, creolisation, and Relation.<sup>14</sup> Lionnet, in contrast, focuses on the racial implications of *métissage*, before adopting it as an aesthetic concept and reading practice.<sup>15</sup> Vergès also examines *métissage* as both a biological and ideological phenomenon but within the context of the Indian Ocean island of Réunion. She privileges the concept over other postcolonial identity constructions because *métissage* developed in the colony itself ‘as a response to European racism and the discourse of mono-ethnicism, of blood and nation’.<sup>16</sup> Vergès argues that *métissage* demonstrates the inherent complexity of human nature because belonging to two divergent cultures ‘means to accept that one can have conflicting desires and wishes’.<sup>17</sup>

While Glissant, Lionnet, and Vergès construct paradigms which exalt the positive potential of *métissage*, this chapter, in contrast, draws on Roger Toumson’s *Mythologie du métissage* (1998)<sup>18</sup> and offers a critical approach to the term by highlighting the problems arising from the association between *métissage* and resistance in the case of Lefèvre’s narrator. *Métisse blanche* has attracted significant scholarship for Lefèvre’s depiction of the

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<sup>14</sup> Édouard Glissant, *Poétique de la Relation* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1990).

<sup>15</sup> Françoise Lionnet, ‘The Politics and Aesthetics of Métissage’, in *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader*, ed. by Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Madison, WI; London: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), pp. 325–36.

<sup>16</sup> François Vergès, *Monsters and Revolutionaries: Colonial Family Romance and Métissage* (Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press, 1999), p. 9.

<sup>17</sup> Vergès, p. 11.

<sup>18</sup> Roger Toumson, *Mythologie du métissage* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998).



mixed-race Eurasian woman in colonial Indochina; Ching Selao, among other critics, notes that the narrator's mixed blood is the primary source of her alienation because it represents 'colonial contamination and humiliation' and 'is experienced by the narrator as a form of invasion'.<sup>19</sup> However, to date no critical analysis has examined how her intersectional racial and gendered otherness, which originates in a specific colonial context, is perpetuated in postcolonial, independent Vietnam, and this forms an important narrative arc to both her autobiographical texts. Studies of Lefèvre's work tend to focus on only one of the texts, either examining *métissage* in colonial Indochina in *Métisse blanche*,<sup>20</sup> or the narrator's reconciliation with Vietnam in *Retour*.<sup>21</sup> When critics do consider the texts together, as Selao does in the aforementioned article, they often differentiate between the child narrator-protagonist of *Métisse blanche* and the adult narrator-protagonist of *Retour*. This has resulted in a critical failure to analyse how themes of isolation and alienation span the two autobiographies. The novels can function separately, as *Retour* repeats key events already described in *Métisse blanche* in sufficient detail to avoid disorientating a reader unacquainted with her life. This chapter, however, posits that a more complete representation of Kim's exile

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<sup>19</sup> Ching Selao, 'Tainted Blood: On Being Impure in Kim Lefèvre's *Métisse blanche* and *Retour à la saison des pluies*', in *Immigrant Narratives in Contemporary France*, ed. by Susan Ireland and Patrice J. Proulx (Westport, CT; London: Greenwood Press, 2001), pp. 213–21 (p. 214). Selao focuses on Kim's alienation from Vietnamese society (pp. 214–15), rather than on the effects of her *métissage* on her position within her own family.

<sup>20</sup> See, for instance, Nathalie Huynh Chau Nguyen, 'Eurasian/Amerasian Perspectives: Kim Lefèvre's *Métisse blanche* (White Métisse) and Kien Nguyen's *The Unwanted*', *Asian Studies Review*, 29.2 (2005), 107–22; and Jack A. Yeager, 'Blurring the Lines in Vietnamese Fiction in French: Kim Lefèvre's *Métisse blanche*', in *Postcolonial Subjects: Francophone Women Writers*, ed. by Mary Jean Green, Karen Gould, Micheline Rice-Maximin, Keith L. Walker, and Jack A. Yeager (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), pp. 210–26. Yeager argues that the narrator challenges the conventional binary relationship between France and Vietnam through her subtle manipulation of gendered and sexual roles.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Siobhán Shilton, 'Contemporary Travel to Vietnam: Jean-Luc Coatalem's *Suite indochinoise* and Kim Lefèvre's *Retour à la saison des pluies*', *Studies in Travel Writing*, 13.4 (2009), 345–55. However, in *Vietnamese Voices: Gender and Cultural Identity in the Vietnamese Francophone Novel* (DeKalb, IL: Southeast Asia Publications, 2003), Nathalie Huynh Chau Nguyen offers an original perspective on *Retour*. She reads the text as one of four Francophone Vietnamese novels which draw heavily on *The Tale of Kieu*, an epic Vietnamese poem written in 1820 by Nguyen Du (pp. 12–44). For Nguyen, Lefèvre's mother's overt identification with the heroine Kieu reveals that the condition of women has not altered dramatically over the last centuries, although women now find themselves 'unable to reconcile the expectations of traditional morality with the demands of modern life' (p. 44). Nguyen offers a productive analysis of gender debates in *Retour*, but her analysis of Lefèvre's mother brings the focus away from the narrator. *Retour* is explicitly autobiographical, so it is surprising that Nguyen chooses to focus her analysis on the mother figure, rather than on Kim.

can only be formed when the two texts are read in parallel because this reading generates new insights into how racial and gendered exile shapes both the colonial era and the postcolonial period.

In an attempt to advance scholarship on Lefèvre's writing, and on Francophone Vietnamese literature more generally, the chapter connects themes of exile and alienation across the two autobiographies, arguing that the narrator's *métissage* is doubly problematic as it remains the cause of her rejection in Vietnam and France, as a child and as an adult. In France, she intentionally cuts herself off from her birth country, her Vietnamese culture, and her family, as a form of revenge for her own rejection when she was a child. She struggles to readapt to family life on her return to Vietnam because of her linguistic, cultural, and physical otherness. In both countries, she is forced to reject one element of her identity in order to integrate into the society in which she is living. Lefèvre's writing thus facilitates an active and critical engagement with both colonial and postcolonial models of identity and displacement. In this thesis, Lefèvre acts as a final counter-example in order to demonstrate the progress made by the other authors in deconstructing colonial paradigms and working within a new, postcolonial framework. Although Lefèvre writes her autobiographies in the postcolonial period, her work remains embedded within colonial, Orientalist models.<sup>22</sup>

### **Contextualising Lefèvre: War, Exile, and Internal Displacement**

Exile, in Lefèvre's writing, is a complex and interweaving mesh of internal displacement, overseas migration, familial alienation, and racial and linguistic difference. Like the other texts studied here, Lefèvre's narratives are set against a backdrop of war and violence, since

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<sup>22</sup> At the time of submission, an edited and abbreviated version of this chapter has just been published in *Bulletin of Francophone Postcolonial Studies*. See Antonia Wimbush, 'Métissage and Exile in Kim Lefèvre's Autobiographical Narratives', *Bulletin of Francophone Postcolonial Studies*, 8.2 (2017), 13–20.

her own story of exile occurred while Vietnam was engaged in a brutal war of decolonisation against France from 1946 to 1954. However, Lefèvre is older than the other authors: she was born at the end of the 1930s, while Bouraoui, Pineau, and Tadjó were not born until the 1950s and 60s. Contrary to them, then, Lefèvre witnessed and experienced the struggle against the French colonial power first-hand. She was also still living in the country at the outbreak of the Vietnam War between North and South Vietnam in 1955; she left for France in 1960. These personal encounters with war have marked Lefèvre's life-story profoundly. She, more than any of the authors examined throughout this thesis, produces literature imbued with a first-hand experience of the effects of violent conflict on a country and its people. In *Métisse blanche*, the narrator describes war as 'la vie interrompue', equating it with insurmountable loss, fear, and flight: 'c'est perdre d'un seul coup ce qu'on a mis toute une vie à construire' (p. 114).

War and occupation have defined Vietnamese history from the country's origins to the present day: China occupied the country until 939, after which the Vietnamese Ly and Tran dynasties fought for power.<sup>23</sup> The Portuguese were the first Europeans to arrive in 1516. From the nineteenth century, Vietnam was ruled as part of French Indochina, a colonial expanse formed over thirty years. In 1887, the French colony of Cochinchine — the southern third of the country — was formally united to the French protectorates of northern Tonkin and central Annam in Vietnam, along with the protectorates of Laos and Cambodia, through the creation of the 'Union indochinoise'. For Nicola Cooper, Indochina was an abstract grouping of territories which existed in a liminal, 'undesigned "in-between" space, between India and China'.<sup>24</sup> Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hémerly, in contrast, challenge such readings of the colonial period as an artificial stage in Vietnam's history and argue that the creation of French

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<sup>23</sup> Patrick J. Hearden, *The Tragedy of Vietnam*, 4th edn (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2016 [1991]), p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> Nicola Cooper, *France in Indochina: Colonial Encounters* (Oxford; New York: Berg Publishers, 2001), p. 1.

Indochina was the result of strategic planning on France's part to gain more power and prestige in Southeast Asia.<sup>25</sup> Panivong Norindr explores this conflation between the political entity of the Union indochinoise and the term 'Indochine', which, he argues, was 'a nineteenth-century French fiction, a *fantaisie* [*sic*] or geographic romance, created by France to elicit desire for its Far Eastern colonies'.<sup>26</sup>

France imposed a Western-style administration on the region, making vast improvements to health care and educational facilities through the policy of *mise en valeur*.<sup>27</sup> According to Brocheux and Hémery, 'with colonization, Indochina inserted itself into the world economy';<sup>28</sup> yet these socio-economic improvements did not benefit the local rural population, which began revolting against colonial rule. The rise of nationalist movements was aided by the global economic depression, French defeat in World War Two, and Japan's subsequent occupation of Vietnam in September 1940. Before Japan took control of the country, though, vast numbers of Indochinese contingents were forced either to serve on the

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<sup>25</sup> In *Indochina: An Ambiguous Colonization, 1858–1954*, trans. by Ly Lan Dill-Klein, with Eric Jennings, Nora Taylor, and Noémi Tousignant (Berkeley, CA; London: University of California Press, 2009 [1994]), Pierre Brocheux and Daniel Hémery explain that French colonisation arose for four principal reasons: 'the Chinese factor, the internal tensions of the region, and the entrance upon the scene of French imperialism in East Asia', in addition to the ongoing competition between France and Great Britain (p. 9). They go on to explain that France wanted to gain access to Chinese markets, compete with Britain for trade, and control the Vietnamese shore of the South China Sea. Moreover, tensions within Asia meant that resistance to French rule was relatively weak; France was thus able to gain control of the region relatively easily (pp. 9–10).

<sup>26</sup> Panivong Norindr, *Phantasmatic Indochina: French Colonial Ideology in Architecture, Film, and Literature* (Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 17. Norindr examines the colonial phantasmatic, a term borrowed from psychoanalysts Jean Laplanche and J. B. Pontalis, in a range of architectural, literary, and cinematic sources about Indochina in order to deconstruct the exotic myth of Indochina in French cultural production. He argues that Indochina was considered a backwards, voice space in comparison with the modernity and progress of France; 'to supplement this aporia, an identity for the region had to be invented, one that would conjure up fantasies of colonial life and promote the benevolent role of an enlightened France' (p. 5).

<sup>27</sup> *Mise en valeur* refers to the economic, moral, and cultural development of Indochina. For a more detailed account of the propagandist value of this policy, see Cooper, pp. 29–42.

<sup>28</sup> Brocheux and Hémery, p. 116. They argue that Indochina experienced greater economic growth than any other part of the French empire, apart from Algeria and Morocco (p. 116).

battlefields in France, or work as part of the Ouvriers non spécialisés (ONS), fabricating weapons for the French army.<sup>29</sup>

After Japan surrendered in August 1945, the leader of the Vietnamese Communist Party, Ho Chi Minh, took control of the country, renaming it ‘the Democratic Republic of Vietnam’. France retaliated in a bid to hold on to power. As Kathryn Robson and Jennifer Yee observe, the First Indochina War was extremely unpopular in mainland France because it symbolised ‘the possibility of independence to all of France’s colonies’.<sup>30</sup> The war lasted seven and a half years, killing approximately seventy-six thousand French soldiers, a considerably higher number than the total French losses in the Algerian War of Independence.<sup>31</sup> The Viet Minh, the national independence coalition, lost almost three times as many soldiers.<sup>32</sup> Once French troops had retreated in 1954, the country was divided into two zones at the seventeenth parallel north, the line of latitude seventeen degrees north of the Equator. North of that line, the communist People’s Army of Vietnam was in control, supported financially and militarily by the Soviet Union and China, while South Vietnam was assisted by the United States of America, South Korea, and Australia.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> In ‘Préface’, in Nguyen Van Thanh, *Saïgon-Marseille, aller simple: un fils de mandarin dans les camps de travailleurs en France* (Bordeaux: Elytis Édition, 2012), pp. 3–7, Pierre Daum estimates that twenty thousand Vietnamese men were forced to work in appalling conditions in labour camps in France to assist the war effort (p. 4). As Daum explains, Vietnamese labourers were not allowed to return to Vietnam until 1952. Some, like Van Thanh, decided to stay in France. *Saïgon-Marseille, aller simple* is an autobiographical account of Van Thanh’s life. Born in 1921 in Hue, he enlisted in the French army when he was only 17 and ended up working in labour camps in France. A journalist for *Libération*, Daum discovered Van Thanh’s manuscript after researching the role of Indochinese labourers in World War Two and was instrumental in getting the book published.

<sup>30</sup> Kathryn Robson and Jennifer Yee, ‘Introduction’, in *France and “Indochina”: Cultural Representations*, ed. by Kathryn Robson and Jennifer Yee (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2005), pp. 1–11 (p. 8).

<sup>31</sup> Bernard B. Fall, *Street without Joy: Insurgency in Indochina, 1946–63*, 3rd edn (London; Dunmow: Pall Mall Press, 1963 [1961]), p. 367.

<sup>32</sup> James A. Tyner, *The Killing of Cambodia: Geography, Genocide and the Unmaking of Space* (Aldershot, Hampshire; Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2008), p. 38. As Tyner explains, the number of Vietnamese losses remains unconfirmed. An additional hundred and fifty thousand Vietnamese civilians were killed in the war (p. 38).

<sup>33</sup> Although officially the war was fought between North and South Vietnam, internal fighting in South Vietnam between anti-communist forces and the communist group the Viet Cong complicated matters further.

The Vietnam War finally ended on 30 April 1975 with the fall of Saigon to the communist Viet Cong and the People's Army of Vietnam, and on 2 July 1976, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam was proclaimed. In the aftermath of the war, almost one-and-a-half million Vietnamese refugees fled by boat to Southeast Asia, the United States of America, Britain, and France between 1975 and 1992 because they were faced with economic hardship, Western isolation, and a new threat of warfare against Cambodia.<sup>34</sup>

Vietnam's economic, political, and social conflicts during the twentieth century are poignantly depicted in Lefèvre's writing. *Métisse blanche* is a first-person narrative and describes Kim's childhood and adolescence in Vietnam during the 1940s and 50s, plagued by poverty, violence, and constant displacement because of the Vietnamese hostility towards her mixed-race identity. To this society, she embodies her mother's betrayal of the Vietnamese community. As Kim learns through letters written by her mother years later and inserted into *Retour*, her mother had an illicit sexual relationship with a French officer. The affair arose because her own father, grieving for his wife, had sent her away to the garrison town of Son Tay, near Hanoi (pp. 401–04). While they had a romantic liaison, the narrator's mother was forced to hide in the army barracks because their relationship was strictly forbidden by the French army. The officer then abandoned her without any explanation; Kim's mother does not reveal whether he knew that she was pregnant, but Kim suspects this to have been the case. Her mother may not have experienced their relationship as sexual exploitation by the officer, but she was emotionally manipulated by him: as Kim surmises, he had always known that

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<sup>34</sup> Charles E. Neu, *America's Lost War: Vietnam, 1945–1975* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005), p. 225. As Chloé Szulzinger explains in *Les Femmes dans l'immigration vietnamienne en France: de 1950 à nos jours* (Paris: Éditions L'Harmattan, 2009), Vietnamese migrants (known as 'boat people') arrived in France in three different waves during this period (p. 21). From 1975 to 1977, there were 5270 Vietnamese migrants; this number increased to 14,146 from 1978 to 1980; and the largest wave occurred after 1981, with approximately 23,278 arriving in France; many settled in Paris (p. 24).

‘leur histoire était placée sous le signe de l’éphémère’ (p. 404) but nevertheless had seduced her.

Kim’s early recollections are overwhelmed by ‘ce sentiment très tôt ressenti d’être partout déplacée, étrangère’ (*Métisse blanche*, p. 20). Rejected before she is even born by her father, she is also abandoned by her mother, who sends her away at the age of six because her mixed-race identity makes her eligible to live in a colonial French orphanage in Hanoi, run by Catholic nuns and funded by the French state. Her mother considers that there, Kim will receive a French education, a tool of social mobility. A few months later, the escalation in fighting between the French and Viet Minh forces means that Kim returns to her family because Hanoi is no longer safe. Yet she continues to be educated in French schools, a fact which alienates her from her half-siblings; they are not of French blood and therefore cannot attend the same institutions. Indeed, so great are her sentiments of alienation that by the end of the text, she is delighted to leave Vietnam for France in her early adulthood, having won a prestigious scholarship to continue her studies in Paris. *Métisse blanche* attracted significant media attention at the time of its publication, and Lefèvre was invited to discuss the gendered and racial humiliation she had endured during her life on Bernard Pivot’s *Apostrophes* on 7 April 1989,<sup>35</sup> the most influential French literary television programme of the era.<sup>36</sup>

*Retour* jumps forward to Kim’s return to Vietnam, after thirty years spent working as a teacher and actor in Paris (p. 366). In the first section, ‘Le passé resurgi’, the narrator begins to reacquaint herself with the Asian community which she has neglected for so long. Moreover, she rebuilds an epistolary relationship with her family in Vietnam as she discovers

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<sup>35</sup> The title of this particular episode was ‘L’Humiliation’, and Lefèvre spoke about the humiliation she endured as a mixed-race child alongside other important authors, including French novelist and essayist Jean-Marie Rouart and French poet, playwright, and novelist Charles Juliet. See Bernard Pivot, ‘L’Humiliation’, *Apostrophes*, France 2, 7 April 1989.

<sup>36</sup> Édouard Brasey, *L’Effet Pivot* (Paris: Éditions Ramsay, 1987). As Brasey explains, *Apostrophes* ran from 1975 to 1990 and attracted over three million viewers each week (p. 297).

traumatic details of their lives during her absence. For instance, Dung, the oldest of her three sisters, explains that her husband was sent to a reeducation camp, a euphemism for a prison camp, for two years, following the fall of Saigon to the Viet Cong on 30 April 1975 (pp. 416–17). As a teacher from South Vietnam, he was considered a threat to the communist regime. He was therefore interned and indoctrinated in communist philosophy, along with between fifty thousand and three hundred and fifty thousand South Vietnamese citizens.<sup>37</sup> The second section, ‘Le retour’, depicts the narrator’s physical return to Vietnam. As Kate Averis remarks, ‘her return is progressively, almost hesitantly realised’.<sup>38</sup> This part is much shorter, symbolising, according to Averis, that the return project is as much about a return to the past as the physical return to Vietnam.<sup>39</sup> Indeed, I would develop Averis’s argument further and would suggest that Kim’s return to Vietnam is dealt with brevity and trepidation because, despite her personal conviction that she has overcome her sentiments of racial and cultural inferiority, she remains haunted by the exile to which she was previously subjected in Vietnam. Rediscovering emblematic places of her childhood, such as the Couvent des Oiseaux, a prestigious and bourgeois French colonial school in Dalat, north Vietnam,<sup>40</sup> she finally reconnects with Vietnam. The text, however, confirms the impossibility of Kim regarding the country as home. Her return is narrated as a ‘touriste’ (p. 434) revisiting a

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<sup>37</sup> Kelly Evans-Pfeifer, ‘Reeducation Camps’, in *Encyclopedia of the Vietnam War*, ed. by Stanley I. Kutler (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1996), pp. 468–69 (p. 468). More than fifty camps holding approximately four thousand prisoners were set up across Vietnam. The camps were located in remote mountainous and jungle areas, and many prisoners died from starvation and disease. As Evans-Pfeifer explains, ‘camp inmates were forced to dig canals, build dams, clear jungles, and, in a few cases, build more camps’ while also forced to read about Vietnamese nationalism and write about their supposed crimes (p. 468).

<sup>38</sup> Kate Averis, ‘Neither Here nor There: Linda Lê and Kim Lefèvre’s Literary Homecoming’, *Women in French Studies*, Special Issue ‘Women in the Middle’ (2009), 74–84 (p. 79).

<sup>39</sup> Averis, p. 80.

<sup>40</sup> Dalat was used as a summer seat for the French government and a retreat for metropolitan settlers because of its cool, refreshing climate. As Robert Templar explains in *Shadows and Wind: A View of Modern Vietnam* (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), Dalat was designed by the French for the French; ‘the Vietnamese needed permission to live there and were confined to a few areas on the edges of the town’ (p. 10). The narrator’s segregation from her family is thus reflective of a wider separation between French and Vietnamese peoples in colonial Indochina.



forgotten location, who ultimately will return to her present life in France once her journey into the past is complete.

### ***Métissage: Cross-Cultural Encounters***

In postcolonial discourse, identity is posited as fluid and unstable, always in perpetual transformation as cultures unite across national borders. While Glissant acknowledges that all cultural encounters are enriching, he in fact prefers the notion of creolisation to *métissage*. As he notes:

si nous posons le métissage en général comme une rencontre et une synthèse entre deux différents, la créolisation nous apparaît comme le métissage sans limites, dont les éléments sont démultipliés, les résultats imprévisibles. La créolisation diffracte, quand certains modes du métissage peuvent concentrer une fois encore.<sup>41</sup>

While *métissage*, according to Glissant, is the point of contact between two cultures which ultimately converge to form a single culture, creolisation is a more dynamic and open process of cultural exchange and difference, a constant *métissage*. Glissant defines Relation, the final element of his conceptual triad, as ‘totalité en mouvement’: all cultures and identities are related to each other in absolute totality, equally and simultaneously.<sup>42</sup> Relation is thus an essence, an ideal form of being which is grounded on a relationship of equality with the Other.<sup>43</sup> Glissant’s work has frequently been criticised for its abstract, intangible nature.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Glissant, p. 46.

<sup>42</sup> Glissant, p. 147.

<sup>43</sup> As Roxana Nydia Curto explains in *Inter-tech(s): Colonialism and the Question of Technology in Francophone Literature* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2016), Relation, for Glissant, does not advocate a total understanding of the Other. Rather, it implies ‘the right *not* to be understood, to interact with peoples and become aware of their presence in the world, without seeking a complete (and potentially reductive) understanding of them’ [original emphasis], p. 178.

Nevertheless, many scholars have also been inspired by Glissant's work which regards culture and identity as products of interwoven historical, cultural, and linguistic circumstances.

Lionnet's critical analyses offer a more positive interpretation of *métissage*, a phenomenon which, as Srilata Ravi explains, operates on different levels.<sup>45</sup> Drawing on anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss's idea of thought as a form of *bricolage*,<sup>46</sup> Lionnet defines the concept as one which 'brings together biology and history, anthropology and philosophy, linguistics and literature',<sup>47</sup> and points out its etymological roots: the term stems from the Latin *mixtus* and refers to cloth made from different fibres.<sup>48</sup> She explains that the term *métis(se)* emerged in the French colonial period and is culturally and geographically specific. In Canada, the word historically referred to a person of French and Native American descent; in Senegal, to people of French and African descent; and in the island colonies of the French Caribbean and the Indian Ocean, to a variety of cultural mixings.<sup>49</sup> Lionnet does not focus on the situation in Indochina, although the term was in use there to refer to people of mixed French and Vietnamese races, as Ravi points out.<sup>50</sup> Lionnet retains this term in French in her

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<sup>44</sup> In 'Francophone Studies/Postcolonial Studies: "Postcolonializing" through *Relation*', in *Postcolonial Theory and Francophone Literary Studies*, ed. by Anne Donadey and H. Adlai Murdoch (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2005), pp. 224–34, Anjali Prabhu and Ato Quayson remark that his persistence on *Relation* as a totality, rather than a concrete entity, 'makes Glissant's work seem removed from reality' (p. 227). They note that the harshest criticisms have emerged from Glissant's fellow Martinican créolité critics with whom he continued to collaborate until his death in 2011, such as Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant (p. 227).

<sup>45</sup> As Srilata Ravi notes in 'Métisse Stories and the Ambivalent Desire for Cultural Belonging', *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 28.1 (2007), 15–26, *métissage* 'is normally understood in Francophone studies at three levels: as a historical fact, as an ideology and as a literary trope' (p. 16). Taking inspiration from Michel Laronde, Ravi distinguishes between 'métissage as severance', a concept she terms 'métissage **around the text**', and its empowering aesthetic representation, which she terms 'métissage **in the text**' [original emphasis] (p. 17). She analyses these contrasting understandings of *métissage* in Francophone novels by Lefèvre, the Mauritian Creole writer Marie-Thérèse Humbert, and the Vietnamese-Senegalese author Anne-Marie Niane.

<sup>46</sup> See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *La Pensée sauvage* (Paris: Plon, 1962). Lévi-Strauss used the term as an analogy to define the characteristics of mythical thought, which differs from modern Western science.

<sup>47</sup> Lionnet, p. 326.

<sup>48</sup> Lionnet, p. 328.

<sup>49</sup> Lionnet, p. 327.

<sup>50</sup> Srilata Ravi, 'Métis, Métisse and Métissage: Representations and Self-Representations', in *Asia in Europe, Europe in Asia*, ed. by Srilata Ravi, Mario Rutten, and Beng-Lan Goh (Singapore; Leiden, The Netherlands: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies Publications, 2004), pp. 299–321 (p. 302).

work, arguing that there is no neutral English equivalent.<sup>51</sup> Terms such as ‘half-breed’, ‘mixed-blood’, and ‘mulatto’ carry negative connotations because ‘they imply biological abnormality and reduce human reproduction to the level of animal breeding’.<sup>52</sup> However, she nonetheless persists in using the term *métis*, thereby choosing to overlook these same negative colonial implications: the label *métis* carries very specific historical and moral judgments. Toumson focuses on this problematic aspect of *métissage* in *Mythologie du métissage*, in which he traces the colonial mythology surrounding the term. As he notes, in the colonial period *métissage* symbolised ‘animalité, hybridité, stérilité’, and other images associated with ‘la dégénérescence physiologique, intellectuelle et morale’.<sup>53</sup> He explains these negative connotations by conceptualising *métissage* in Freudian terms of totem and taboo. For Freud, the master-slave relationship mirrors that between a father and his child, in which sexual relations are forbidden; sexual relations between a master and his slave, and between members of a group who share the same totem, are also taboo. The *métis* born from such a relationship becomes ‘un mélange d’attraction et de répulsion’.<sup>54</sup> Indeed, in colonial Indochina, most mixed-race peoples were born from an unequal, subservient relationship between a French officer, or a white French male in another position of power, and an indigenous woman. These anxieties surrounding the term remain deeply embedded within the consciousness of formerly colonised communities. It is problematic, therefore, to associate *métissage* with an empowering and enriching cultural exchange for these groups without any consideration of specific historical contexts.

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<sup>51</sup> Ravi suggests ‘cultural cross-braiding’ as a possible English translation because it retains ‘the visual image contained in the term “métissage”’ (‘Métis, Métisse and Métissage’, p. 300). While ‘cultural cross-braiding’ does preserve the image of interweaving cultures, it loses the racial element contained in the French term.

<sup>52</sup> Lionnet, p. 327.

<sup>53</sup> Toumson, p. 94. Before the arrival of the colonisers, the term referred to animals, humans, plants, languages, and even metals that were made up of two separate species or elements (pp. 88–89).

<sup>54</sup> Toumson, p. 106.

In *Postcolonial Representations: Women, Literature, Identity* (1995), Lionnet distinguishes between Cuban poet Nancy Morejón's preferred term of 'transculturation',<sup>55</sup> which Lionnet regards as the end product of cultural intercourse and exchange, and *métissage*, the process by which this interweaving of different cultures and traditions occurs.<sup>56</sup> She then uses *métissage* as a lens with which to read texts which 'interweave traditions and languages'.<sup>57</sup> Cultural and literary critics, such as Mark Zuss, have adopted Lionnet's formation of *métissage* as a metaphorical reading practice,<sup>58</sup> while Vergès situates the concept within its historical context.

Vergès examines the *métis* figure in the French colonial period on her native island of Réunion. Adopting an interdisciplinary approach, she charts the history of the term from its first introduction into the French vocabulary in the thirteenth century.<sup>59</sup> Her historical contextualisation seems to contradict Lionnet's assertion in 'The Politics and Aesthetics of Métissage' that the label originated in the French colonial era. Vergès is aware of some of the problems of *métissage* in contemporary cultural studies — she notes that Turkish writer Yachar Kemal criticises the untranslatability of the term, and that he prefers the concept of

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<sup>55</sup> In 'Race and Nation', in *AfroCuba: An Anthology of Cuban Writing on Race, Politics and Culture*, ed. by Pedro Perez Sarduy and Jean Stubbs (Melbourne: Ocean Press, 1993), pp. 227–37, Nancy Morejón defines transculturation as a 'constant interaction, transmutation between two or more cultural components whose unconscious end is the creation of a third cultural whole — that is, culture — new and independent, although its bases, its roots rest on preceding elements' (p. 229). The term was first suggested by Fernando Ortiz in *Contrapunteo Cubano del tabaco y azúcar* (Havana, Cuba: Jesus Montero Editor, 1940).

<sup>56</sup> In *Postcolonial Representations: Women, Literature, Identity* (Ithaca, NY; London: Cornell University Press, 1995), Françoise Lionnet notes that 'rejecting the binarism of self and other, nationalism and internationalism, Africa and Europe, women writers like Morejón point to a third way, to the *métissage* of forms and identities that is the result of cross-cultural encounters and that forms the basis for their self-portrayals and their representations of cultural diversity' (p. 12).

<sup>57</sup> Lionnet, *Postcolonial Representations*, p. 18. Lionnet analyses autobiographies by a range of Anglophone and Francophone female writers, including Michelle Cliff, Suzanne Dracius-Pinalie, Ananda Devi, Maryse Condé, Gayl Jones, and Myriam Warner-Vieyra. According to Lionnet, these authors adopt the strategy of *métissage* to represent their individual cultures.

<sup>58</sup> In 'Autobiography as a Politics of Métissage: A Pedagogy of Encounter', *Education and Culture*, 12.2 (1995), 26–34, Mark Zuss argues that reading life writing through the lens of *métissage* as formulated by Lionnet 'offers a critical intervention through which narratives of identity may be composed and revised' (p. 27).

<sup>59</sup> Vergès, pp. 28–29. Vergès uses a range of novels, iconography, and legal and medicinal texts in her analysis of *métissage*. In the thirteenth century, the term simply referred to something made from two different materials; in contrast, in the sixteenth century, it was used 'to describe an ambivalent position, a moral flaw' (p. 28).

‘grafting’ which demonstrates how cultures have ‘impregnated each other’,<sup>60</sup> while Cuban novelist and essayist Antonio Benítez-Rojo equates *métissage* with ‘reduction’ and ‘synthesis’.<sup>61</sup> Vergès is also sceptical about the positive ‘marketing’ of hybrid cultures which are presented as mysterious and exotic, and available for consumption by a largely white audience. In ‘Post-Scriptum’ (2002), she argues that urban centres are advertised and promoted in terms of their hybridity, which is celebrated as a marker of the contemporary transnational world which is no longer divided by race, class, or ethnicity.<sup>62</sup> She comments scathingly that ‘one cannot spend a week in Paris without being reminded of the high value of hybridity and *métissage*’ [original emphasis]:<sup>63</sup> yet there is an evident gap between marketing and social realities for the groups being depicted. She also warns against creating hierarchies of *métissage*, in which some mixed identities are favoured over others. Vergès chooses to employ the concept throughout her study, however, because of its historical importance within the French empire, and because, she claims, it was appropriated by colonised people themselves as a form of resistance.<sup>64</sup>

Conceptualising mixed-race identities as *métissage* is, then, fraught with tensions. While some postcolonial writers view mixed-race identities as a source of cultural and political enrichment,<sup>65</sup> it must be stressed that historically, *métissage* focuses on duality rather than multiplicity and implicitly carries colonial undertones of impurity and abnormality.

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<sup>60</sup> Yachar Kemal, ‘Entretien avec Altan Gökalp’, *Le Monde*, 13 July 1993, p. 2.

<sup>61</sup> In *The Repeating Island: The Caribbean and the Postmodern Perspective*, trans. by James E. Maraniss (Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press, 1992 [1989]), Antonio Benítez-Rojo argues that *mestizaje* (the Spanish equivalent term) is a ‘form of nationality that would resolve the deep racial and cultural conflicts by means of a reduction or synthesis’ (p. 126).

<sup>62</sup> Françoise Vergès, ‘Post-Scriptum’, in *Relocating Postcolonialism*, ed. by David Theo Goldberg and Ato Quayson (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), pp. 349–58.

<sup>63</sup> Vergès, ‘Post-Scriptum’, pp. 356–57.

<sup>64</sup> Vergès, *Monsters and Revolutionaries*, p. 9.

<sup>65</sup> Ravi explains that postcolonial writers from a range of geographic and linguistic backgrounds, such as Kwame Anthony Appiah and Maryse Condé, perceive mixed-race identities as ‘valuable border crossers, negotiators and mediators not only between races but also between nations, cultures and linguistic communities’ (‘Métis, Métisse and Métissage’, p. 301).

Moreover, the rift between academic discourses of identity politics, which overuses concepts of hybridity and *métissage* while only referring to the privileges associated with these terms, and, in contrast, the realities of everyday experiences, means that the individuals who suffer from their status as *métis* are often overlooked. Lefèvre's autobiographical writing, in which *métissage* equates to exile or otherness, offers a counter-argument, challenging the views of critics whose understanding of the concept is one of inherent contestation and resistance, by presenting an altogether more complex, and deeply troubled, lived experience of being mixed race.

#### **Lefèvre as Counter-Model of *Métissage*: *Métisse blanche***

In *Métisse blanche*, even as a young child, the narrator is aware of her difference. Her French blood is figured as a symbol of her mother's transgression of Vietnamese social norms by pursuing a sexual relationship with a French officer, and thereby colluding with the colonial enemy: 'on mettait tout ce qui était mauvais en moi sur le compte du sang français qui circulait dans mes veines' (p. 20). As this quotation demonstrates, colonial Vietnamese society was deeply marked by race, and any character traits seen as negative are regarded as French. While the French scorned mixed-race individuals because they posed a threat to the purity of the French race, the Vietnamese population regarded them as a useful scapegoat who could be blamed for the inequalities of colonial society. Initially, in *Métisse blanche*, Kim shares this hatred of the French race to such an extent that she dreams about having an accident which would drain her of her French blood so that she can be 'pure Vietnamiennne, réconciliée avec [s]on entourage et avec [elle]-même' (p. 20). As a child, she feels Vietnamese, not French: she feels at home in the lush Vietnamese landscape and enjoys

running around with her friends in ‘les rizières, les haies de bambous verts, les mares’ (p. 20). She fails to identify with France, even though legally, she is French, after a decree published on 8 November 1928 granted French citizenship to *métis* children in Indochina who had been abandoned by their French father.<sup>66</sup> Despite being a French citizen, the child despises France because she associates the country with her French father, a man she loathes for having abandoned her at birth. Though not illegal, interracial relations were discouraged by the colonial authorities, and it was common for French officers to abandon their offspring when they returned to France.<sup>67</sup> Kim knows nothing about her father. Even though on leaving the orphanage she learns briefly about her mother’s own difficult life (*Métisse blanche*, pp. 82–83), it is only when she finally returns to Vietnam as an adult in *Retour* that her mother reveals her father’s name at last. Even then, it is unlikely that her mother’s memory is entirely accurate, as she confuses Jean Tiffon, the narrator’s father, with Jean-Marcel Guillaume, another French officer who broke his promise to look after the family after Jean had abandoned her (p. 483). When Jean-Marcel was called back to France in 1938, he wanted the narrator’s mother and their young son to accompany him but refused to take Kim too, expecting his lover to choose between her two children and abandon Kim. She desperately wanted to live a stable life with her lover and son, but she knew that nobody would look after her mixed-race daughter if she were abandoned. As she writes to Kim, ‘le plus difficile a été de renoncer à mon fils’ (p. 407), with whom neither Kim nor her mother have since had any contact. This additional information in the sequel, which does not appear in *Métisse blanche*, helps to explain why Kim is so troubled by her status as *métisse*, because she is aware of the specific, tragic hardships and rejections it has inflicted on herself, and on her mother. This

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<sup>66</sup> Saada, p. 13. The decree was published in the *Journal officiel de la République française*. As Saada explains, this was the first explicit use of the French term ‘race’ in a legal decree since the abolition of slavery in 1848, when France declared that people would not be defined by race (p. 13).

<sup>67</sup> Saada, p. 75.

important detail is further evidence of the need to read the two texts together in order to gain a better understanding of Kim's anxieties surrounding her mixed-race identity.

Although Lionnet maintains that the term *métis* does not contain any adverse biological or sexual implications,<sup>68</sup> in Lefèvre's writing, it is a loaded term which does signal inferiority. For Yeager, 'as a child, the narrator is not really aware of her physical difference' in *Métisse blanche*.<sup>69</sup> While it is true that she has no idea what she really looks like, having avoided looking at her reflection in mirrors or puddles of water (p. 106), Kim certainly understands, by the ways in which she is taunted and scorned as a young child, that her status as *métisse* sets her apart from the other, 'pure' Vietnamese children: 'je désirais farouchement oublier que j'étais métisse' (p. 106). This quotation suggests that she is very much aware that her facial features are different to those of her mother and sisters, with negative consequences.

Kim's early childhood is characterised by abandonment and displacement as she spends the first few years of her life away from her mother and living in Hanoi with a wet-nurse, for whom she quickly becomes 'un fardeau' (p. 21). The family cannot afford to pay for the services of the wet nurse; indeed, the narrative does not state how this arrangement operated financially. Karl Ashoka Britto explicitly equates the narrator's abandonment by her mother with her status as *métisse*, arguing that Kim's *métissage* 'provokes anxious and often violent reassertions of difference', as 'her aberrant body is suppressed, humiliated, disciplined' by her mother.<sup>70</sup> Britto's reading of the mother's departure as simply a reaction towards her daughter's *métissage* appears a little reductive, however, because there are other reasons motivating this departure: she is destitute and urgently needs to find work or a husband for financial security. Indeed, her mother's economic instability was highlighted by

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<sup>68</sup> Lionnet, 'The Politics and Aesthetics of Métissage', p. 328.

<sup>69</sup> Yeager, p. 212.

<sup>70</sup> Karl Ashoka Britto, *Disorientation: France, Vietnam, and the Ambivalence of Interculturality* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004), p. 2.



Lefèvre to Pivot on *Apostrophes*.<sup>71</sup> Yet Kim's racial difference certainly plays a part in the troubling way in which her mother treats her. Her exile within her family continues when, aged four, she stays with her great-aunt and her fifteen-year-old male cousin. He sexually abuses her in the bed they share, making Kim feel disgusted and ashamed: 'un froid mortel courait dans mes veines, je souhaitais mourir' (p. 24). Her great-aunt tires of looking after her, and so Kim returns to Saigon to live with her mother and her mother's new husband. Kim recalls her loneliness during this period of her life: 'cette période de ma vie avait une dominante: le vide' (p. 27). She constantly feels unwanted: her Chinese stepfather resents her because she is a bodily reminder of her mother's sexual encounter with the colonial enemy, and her mother, afraid of her husband and his 'rancune tenace' towards her and her daughter, is complicit in propagating this resentment through her silence (p. 28). Kim's mother is financially dependent on her husband and is trapped in a perpetual cycle of poverty and fear: she can either send money to relatives for her daughter to be looked after away from her, or can keep her close by and care for her herself, but reduce her capacity to earn money and risk angering her volatile husband.

The mother is eventually persuaded by her family to send Kim to a French colonial orphanage. As Tri, the mother's half-brother (their father had several wives, with whom he had numerous children), declares, France has a financial and moral responsibility towards Kim, and 'le futur Vietnam indépendant n'aurait pas besoin de ces enfants bâtards' (p. 45). James R. Lehning explains that it was common practice for the French colonial government to target *métis* children actively from rural areas in Vietnam and persuade their families to entrust them to French educational institutions, for France to create "des Français d'âme et de

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<sup>71</sup> Lefèvre explains on *Apostrophes* that her birth was 'une catastrophe' for her mother who struggled to cope emotionally and financially with a young child. She thus left her to rebuild her life in the south of the country [my transcript].

qualité”<sup>72</sup>. In Kim’s case, though, it is her family who wish to rid themselves of the burden of looking after her, further demonstrating her subordinate position within her own family. This episode also reveals how her status as an illegitimate child and her *métissage* are closely intertwined. Before her family can send her to the orphanage, they must prove that her father is French. However, Kim does not have a birth certificate and therefore has no official legal status. When the paperwork has eventually been organised, she is taken to the orphanage in Hanoi, where she is forced to shed her Vietnamese identity and embrace a French identity. She is given a French name — Éliane Tiffon — and is not permitted to speak in Vietnamese. She struggles to adapt to an entirely different linguistic and cultural context because, aged six, she is old enough to have already established an identity. Moreover, she feels bewildered on realising that all the other girls are *métisses* too. Rather than feeling comforted by living among young girls who share cultural and racial affinities with her, she feels ‘désorientée devant l’énigme de leur regard’ (p. 52) because she does not self-identify as an individual of mixed race, but rather as Vietnamese.

The narrator’s national affiliation is questioned further when she learns about the possibility of being sent to France to escape the threat of war. Here, Lefèvre plays on the notion of ‘la mère patrie’, which linguistically combines the maternal symbolisation of France with the *fatherland*. Kim is instructed to conceive of France as her ‘mère nourricière’ (p. 67), whose duty it is to defend and protect its citizens; yet for her, France is a cold, distant, hostile country about which she has no knowledge. As Yeager comments, ‘the narrator associates

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<sup>72</sup> James R. Lehning, *European Colonialism since 1700* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p. 145. As Lehning explains, boys would be useful to France as civil servants and mediators, whereas girls would receive preparation ‘for their crucial future maternal role’ (p. 145). In *The Uprooted: Race, Children, and Imperialism in French Indochina, 1890–1980* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press, 2016), Christina Elizabeth Firpo estimates that more than ten thousand *métis* children were sent to these educational institutions across Indochina from 1890 to 1980 (p. 2). In her view, colonial authorities removed *métis* children in order to ‘minimise the threat of rebellion’ because the children ‘might come to resent the French government for denying them the rights of French men and women’ (p. 5).

Viet Nam with her mother, France with her father’;<sup>73</sup> it thus seems counterintuitive for her to associate the colonial power with a maternal, protective role because for Kim, it is Vietnam which has a duty to act as a mother figure and educate her, not France. Young Kim, therefore, does not subscribe to colonial ideology, and nor does she seek the kind of identity promoted by the ‘mission civilisatrice’. Although some girls are sent to the metropole, the narrator is eventually reunited with her mother and remains in Vietnam.

Kim’s cultural *métissage*, then, is a direct cause of her early peregrinations across Vietnam, and her experiences can be interpreted as forms of exile. Lefèvre’s *Métisse blanche* expands understandings of exile as posited by Said. From Lefèvre’s writing, it emerges that exile does not always involve the crossing of national borders; rather, it arises due to gendered and racial factors and can occur within the homeland in the form of internal displacements. In contrast, according to Said, exiled individuals are always displaced from one country to another. Although he opens his essay ‘Reflections on Exile’ (2001) with a broad definition, defining exile as a movement from an individual’s native place,<sup>74</sup> the examples he uses are all male figures who were banished from their country and forced to seek a new life beyond national borders.<sup>75</sup> Said then associates his discussion of exile with nationalism, claiming that the two concepts cannot ‘be discussed neutrally, without reference to each other’.<sup>76</sup> He seems to suggest that exile always involves a move from one nation to another because exiled individuals are always forced to adapt to a new national culture. While internal displacement does not equate to exile for Said because it does not evoke the same uprootedness and sense

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<sup>73</sup> Yeager, p. 215.

<sup>74</sup> Said, ‘Reflections on Exile’, p. 173. For instance, Said examines the case of Urdu poet Faiz Ahmad Faiz, who was exiled from his native Palestine to Lebanon.

<sup>75</sup> Said, ‘Reflections on Exile’, p. 174.

<sup>76</sup> Said, ‘Reflections on Exile’, p. 177.

of loss, it certainly does for Kim, who lives her childhood as a ‘nuit d’exode’ (p. 20), in perpetual movement across Vietnam, and between French and Vietnamese cultures.

In contrast, Nacify’s broader conceptualisation of exile focuses on different groups in society. While still associating exile with banishment, Nacify suggests that it is not always a top-down condition imposed on an individual by the state and does not necessarily imply a movement across national borders. Using William Rowe and Teresa Whitfield’s definition of exile as the ‘deprivation of means of production and communication, exclusion from public life’,<sup>77</sup> he goes on to discuss the internal manifestations of exile, demonstrating how ‘these deprivations may be social or economical’.<sup>78</sup> In a reading which explores the metaphorical potential of exile, he maintains that unemployment, incarceration, and confinement within the home could all be incorporated within understandings of exile because, like geographic exile, these three conditions restrict participation in society.<sup>79</sup> While never equating exile with all kinds of oppression without any consideration of the loss of critical value, Nacify’s approach to exile as a confinement within the home is particularly useful in this analysis of *Métisse blanche*. In a development of Nacify’s ideas, the analysis below demonstrates how gender operates as a further catalyst for exile within the home.

Kim’s internal imprisonment becomes a reality when the family move to her mother’s native village of Van Xa, south-east of Hanoi. She is even physically imprisoned, for her own protection, when her mother forces her to hide in the large earthenware jar used to collect rainwater after the Viet Minh army arrive in the village. The Viet Minh are seeking revenge for the massacres carried out on their communities by the French forces, making her mother believe Kim is in danger because she is half-French. As Nathalie Nguyen remarks, ‘the jar, in

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<sup>77</sup> William Rowe and Teresa Whitfield, ‘Thresholds of Identity: Literature and Exile in Latin America’, *Third World Quarterly*, 9.1 (1987), 229–45 (p. 233).

<sup>78</sup> Nacify, p. 123.

<sup>79</sup> Nacify, p. 123.

times of peace an ordinary household item, became a place of refuge but also a prison'.<sup>80</sup> This episode is particularly traumatic for Kim; her fear is exacerbated by the fact that she experiences this imprisonment as another abandonment by her mother. Home is not a location of safety and security for the narrator but one of confinement and captivity. Furthermore, her confusion about why she is considered an enemy offers poignant internal reflections on the arbitrary nature of identity. She cannot understand why she must hide, as she identifies with the Vietnamese community, not the French: 'comment leur expliquer que j'étais d'abord vietnamienne, que les rares affections qu'on m'avait témoignées jusqu'ici étaient le fait de Vietnamiens?' (p. 88). While the mother's intentions are commendable, since she is trying to protect her daughter from being targeted by the Vietnamese communist forces, she simultaneously reinforces the dominant colonial ideology: Franco-Vietnamese mixed blood is a source of anxiety to be concealed, not embraced. This emotion is certainly shared by Kim's Chinese stepfather, who simply ignores her presence; even when Kim steals money from him in a bid to gain his attention, he 'posa sur [elle] un regard qui exprimait tout le dégoût qu'il éprouvait pour [s]a race bâtarde', and then orders his own children, *métis* themselves, to avoid all contact with her (p. 108). Interestingly, his children do not suffer from racial discrimination, even though they are of mixed (Chinese and Vietnamese) race too; it is thus the French colonial system that underpins these negative connotations of *métissage*. Even

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<sup>80</sup> Nathalie Huynh Chau Nguyen, 'Landscapes of War: Traumascape in the Works of Kim Lefèvre and Phan Huy Duong', in *Land and Landscape in Francographic Literature: Remapping Uncertain Territories*, ed. by Magali Compan and Katarzyna Pieprzak (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), pp. 88–103 (p. 92). In this chapter, Nguyen borrows the term 'traumascape' from Maria Tumarkin's *Traumascapes: The Power and Fate of Places Transformed by Tragedy* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Publishing, 2005), demonstrating how works by Lefèvre and Huy Duong reflect Vietnamese traumascape on a personal and collective level. She argues that there are three stages in *Métisse blanche*'s reconstruction of war: 'a distant and abstract concept far removed from her personal experience' (p. 90); 'suffering and isolation against a background of conflict and community tensions' (p. 91); and 'her eyewitness account of war as a civilian among many other civilians' (p. 92).

though the stepfather is Chinese, and therefore part of a minority group,<sup>81</sup> his attitude mirrors that of the French. As Vergès explains, French colonial society at large was afraid of the ‘degeneration of the white race’ and the ‘transgression of the social colonial order’ by male *métis*, deemed potential revolutionaries who could climb the social hierarchy because of their ‘white’ blood.<sup>82</sup> Women of mixed race, in contrast, were defined as being ‘deviant, sexually loose, and perfidious’.<sup>83</sup>

Lefèvre skilfully intersects issues surrounding *métissage* with wider gender debates in traditional Vietnamese society. As Yeager helpfully observes, ‘to the narrator’s Vietnamese relatives in a society that prizes its sons, she is [...] the useless daughter’.<sup>84</sup> Narrating their stay in her stepfather’s village in Tuy Hoa on the south coast, Kim explains that her stepfather’s aversion to her is compounded by the fact that she is a girl. He himself longs for a male descendant to continue his lineage, even considering taking a second wife to ensure he would have a son (p. 104). Historical accounts of Vietnam indicate that in both Chinese and Vietnamese communities in the early 1900s, boys were preferred to girls. Neil L. Jamieson explains that, as in all patriarchal societies, girls had to live with their husband’s family once they were married, whereas boys would typically stay close to their own family.<sup>85</sup> As he

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<sup>81</sup> As Micheline Lessard notes in *Human Trafficking in Colonial Vietnam* (Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2015), anti-Chinese sentiment was widespread among both the Vietnamese and French communities because ‘many Vietnamese and *colons* saw the presence of Chinese businesses as a threat to their own enterprises and chances at economic success’ [original emphasis] (p. 103). Most of the successful businessmen who held the monopoly over trade in Indochina were Chinese; indeed, Kim’s stepfather is a businessman who sells cigarettes to the French (pp. 260–61). As Kim explains when Madame N., her benefactor at the Couvent des Oiseaux, asks about the nationality of her stepfather, mixed marriages between Chinese and Vietnamese communities were frowned upon, but they were not as shunned as Franco-Vietnamese alliances: ‘non que les mariages mixtes entre Chinois et Vietnamiens fussent plus encouragés; du moins n’étaient-ils pas entachés du rapport de colonisateur à colonisé, de maître à esclave’ (p. 254). Anti-Chinese sentiment is prevalent in other Francophone Vietnamese narratives. For instance, in Marguerite Duras’ autobiographical novel *L’Amant* (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1984), the Chinese lover is shunned by the young French girl’s family because of his ethnicity: the brothers refuse to speak to him when he invites them out to dinner ‘parce que c’est un Chinois, que ce n’est pas un Blanc’ (p. 65). Rather, they take advantage of his wealth.

<sup>82</sup> Vergès, *Monsters and Revolutionaries*, p. 29.

<sup>83</sup> Vergès, *Monsters and Revolutionaries*, p. 30.

<sup>84</sup> Yeager, p. 213.

<sup>85</sup> Neil L. Jamieson, *Understanding Vietnam* (Berkeley, CA; London: University of California Press, 1995).

pithily observes, ‘a woman was supposed to be submissive to her father when young, to her husband when married, and to her oldest son when widowed’.<sup>86</sup>

Kim is indeed subservient in her early relationships with men during her adolescence. When she is fifteen, the family move to Nha Trang, a city on the south-central coast. Kim joins the local choir, and she quickly becomes infatuated with the Vietnamese choirmaster Duc, who later becomes her music teacher at school. Although he is married and much older than her — he is thirty-five — they begin an affair. Kim is eager to preserve her virginity at all costs — she is constantly told by her mother, who wants to prevent her daughter from making the mistakes that she did, that ‘une femme n’a qu’un trésor, c’est celui de sa virginité’ (p. 110). Yet she craves affection so badly that she allows herself to be manipulated by Duc. Vulnerable and bewildered by her first experience of love, she allows him to advance their affair very quickly, although the sexual nature of their relationship is unclear.<sup>87</sup> While she believes she loves him, she also feels intimidated: at the beginning of their relationship she is ‘incapable de proférer le moindre son’ (p. 202). She returns to this affair in *Retour*, when her sister Dung shows her a photograph of Duc; she remembers him with affection, but also with shame because of the scandal she caused for her family (p. 468).

In *Métisse blanche*, a small altercation between Kim and Duc is particularly illuminating for its insights into how *métissage* is perceived by men. One day he teases her about her racial difference. Realising he has upset her, he quickly explains that he is attracted to her precisely because she is not completely Vietnamese: ‘quand je te regarde, tu m’es à la fois familière et étrangère. Et j’aime ça’ (p. 218). While Duc is not scornful towards or

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<sup>86</sup> Jamieson, p. 18.

<sup>87</sup> Yeager describes their affair as ‘platonic’ (p. 218), but this is not an entirely accurate representation of their relationship. Even if Kim does not lose her virginity to Duc (*Métisse blanche*, p. 212), the relationship is physical: she describes how he undresses her: ‘ses doigts traçaient de lentes arabesques sur mon corps, effleurant le sein, la cuisse. J’apprenais le plaisir’ (p. 207).

mistrustful of her racial otherness, like her stepfather, he too is unable to see past her racial difference. He treats her differently to the other schoolgirls because she is both familiar and different. Her *métissage* becomes an exotic fantasy for him. This bodily objectification and exoticisation is undoubtedly as damaging to the narrator as her rejection by her family: on both occasions, she is reduced to her racial components and denied an individual subjectivity. Kim is deeply hurt when her lover articulates his fascination for her Eurasian beauty, asking him bewilderedly, ‘mais si je ne suis pas une Vietnamiennne, comment pourrais-je te plaire?’ (p. 218). She cannot understand how her mixed Franco-Vietnamese identity can be a source of attraction for her lover, implying that she does not draw strength from her *métissage* but is rendered more vulnerable by it. While Kim’s lover is attracted to her racial otherness, this is not always the case in other Francophone Vietnamese narratives. For instance, in Marguerite Duras’s autobiography *L’Amant* (1984), while the older Chinese man is simultaneously intrigued and intimidated by the young girl’s pale skin, the French girl does not perceive her lover’s Chinese heritage as an exotic fantasy. Colonial dynamics are at play here: despite her young age and her femininity, she wields power over her lover because she is French.

Kim’s mother is also obsessed with her daughter’s racial heritage. While Kim’s Frenchness is initially a humiliating reminder of the mother’s own sexual transgression, following Kim’s return from the orphanage it becomes a marker of superiority. One year, the narrator is chosen to transport the family’s share of meat back to the house for the annual Tet festival to celebrate the New Lunar Year (*Métisse blanche*, p. 87).<sup>88</sup> She feels extremely proud to have been given such a great responsibility but struggles to carry the heavy basket.

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<sup>88</sup> In *Culture and Customs of Vietnam* (Westport, CT; London: Greenwood Press, 2001), Mark W. McLeod and Nguyen Thi Dieu explain that Tet Nguyen-dan (commonly abbreviated to Tet) is the most important festival in the Vietnamese calendar; in fact, it is a national holiday across Vietnam (p. 153). The date coincides with the traditional Chinese New Year, usually in January or February. Celebrations last approximately seven days and families gather together to pray, eat, remember their ancestors, and celebrate the beginning of the new year.



Horrified at the sight of her daughter with such an enormous load, her mother sighs pityingly: ‘une fille de ta race n’est pas une paysanne! [...] Si tu étais élevée en France, tu recevrais une éducation au lieu de vivre comme les gens d’ici!’ (pp. 87–88). This pivotal moment eventually leads to her social progression because her mother then decides to enrol her in the French education system which grants her greater career prospects.<sup>89</sup> Yet these actions segregate her from the rest of Vietnamese society because her mother continuously places emphasis on her racial difference and insists upon her status as merely half-Vietnamese. Selao uses this incident to suggest a positive interpretation of *métissage* in the novel, arguing that the narrator’s blood ‘elevates her to this higher level rather than leading to degeneration’,<sup>90</sup> thus departing from associations of mixed-race identities with impurity and depravity.<sup>91</sup> Yet it is not any *métissage*-induced multiplicity of identities which raises Kim’s social status in her mother’s eyes, but rather the fact that she represents France. Her mother subscribes entirely to colonial stereotypes of the French as the ‘superior’, ‘enlightened’ race; the local Vietnamese people, however, are unworthy of a decent education, in her mother’s opinion, and must be content with their lot as uneducated peasants. Lefèvre’s text continuously attaches negative associations to the concept of *métissage*. For Kim and her family, upholding and observing *métissage* means choosing between two rigid colonial stereotypes, rather than resisting them through the celebration of a more hybrid alternative.

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<sup>89</sup> The mother’s attitude towards French education is shared by the majority of Vietnamese citizens who attended French colonial schools. As Thy Phng Nguyn explains in her doctoral thesis ‘L’École française au Vietnam de 1945 à 1975: de la mission civilisatrice à la diplomatie culturelle’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, Université René Descartes-Paris V, 2013), ‘si l’apport de la scolarité française dans la construction identitaire des témoins laisse parfois place à des regrets rétrospectifs, les témoignages décrivent unanimement l’école française comme le véritable tremplin de leur existence ultérieure, tant sur le plan de la carrière professionnelle que sur celui de la construction de leur personnalité intellectuelle et morale’ (p. 556).

<sup>90</sup> Selao, p. 215.

<sup>91</sup> As Szulzinger observes, ‘les Eurasiens sont associés, dans la réalité coloniale, à la délinquance, à l’émeute, au vol. Ils représentent donc un milieu de déclassés dangereux, capables d’organiser des actions subversives’ (p. 51).

This duality is mirrored in social structures: Kim attends French school, which separates her from her siblings who, because they are not of French blood, are ineligible for a French education. They thus go to schools designed by the French for the Vietnamese.<sup>92</sup> Her half-sisters do not even attend school until they are teenagers because, according to Kim's stepfather, a bastion of patriarchal society, 'la place d'une fille était à la cuisine' (p. 169). Kim attends a Vietnamese village primary school before she is sent to the orphanage, but she soon gets bored and plays truant (p. 41), suggesting that a traditional Vietnamese education is not appropriate for her. The mother is determined to give Kim the French education to which she feels her daughter is entitled, even sending her to live with her cousin Odile so that Kim can attend a prestigious French school run by the Catholic missionary society 'les Sœurs blanches' in Saigon (p. 152).<sup>93</sup> Kim is reluctant to attend a school run by people with whom she cannot identify at all. On seeing the uniform her mother has made for her, she screams that she 'préférerai[t] mille fois rester annamite et ignorante que de [s]e montrer dans un accoutrement aussi ridicule' (p. 152). The European style of dress does not sit well with Kim, who considers it a betrayal of Annamite tradition which she holds so dear. Her mother is seen desperately attempting to teach her to associate being French with sophistication and

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<sup>92</sup> In *French Colonial Education: Essays on Vietnam and West Africa*, ed. by David H. Kelly (New York: AMS Press, 2000), pp. 3–25, Gail Paradise Kelly explains that the French established a school system in Vietnam alongside their own French schools to curb Vietnamese resistance to colonial rule, avoid Chinese and Japanese intervention in the education system, and remove Vietnamese pressure on French schools (p. 5). Traditional Vietnamese schools were thus shut down. The curriculum of these new schools was oriented towards the Vietnamese population: national history, Sino-Vietnamese literature, and Chinese language were taught (although most of the schooling occurred in French). As Kelly explains, the 'school system was planned not as a replica of French schools or a diluted version but rather as a distinct system that would be appropriate not merely to the colonised but to *Vietnamese* who were colonised' [original emphasis], p. 8. In *Métisse blanche*, the students who attend school in Nha Trang berate Kim for studying French literature rather than learning about her own culture: 'tu as tort de faire des études en français au lieu de t'imprégner de notre langue et de notre culture' (p. 234). This quotation suggests that Kim's friends study at a colonial school designed by the French for the Vietnamese population because their studies are focused on Vietnamese culture.

<sup>93</sup> In 'A Colonial Sacred Union? Church, State, and the Great War in Colonial Vietnam', in *In God's Empire: French Missionaries and the Modern World*, ed. by Owen White and J.P. Daughton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 195–212, Charles Keith explains that 'French Catholic missionaries had been active in Vietnam since the seventeenth century, mostly under the auspices of the Société des Missions Étrangères de Paris (MEP)' (p. 196). These missionaries established schools and churches. The 'Sœurs missionnaires de Notre-Dame d'Afrique', commonly known as the 'Sœurs blanches', was founded in Algeria in 1869.

intelligence, and being Vietnamese with ignorance and stupidity; yet as a child, Kim resists the denigration of her maternal culture.

Such prejudices, entrenched within the French colonial system, are also attributed to the Vietnamese language. Several critics have analysed Lefèvre's motives for writing her autobiographies in French, rather than in Vietnamese. In an unpublished doctoral thesis, Aurélie Chevant claims that Lefèvre wrote in French predominantly 'to understand why her mother abandoned her and was inconsistent in her affection for her'.<sup>94</sup> There is no textual evidence, however, to support this claim: Kim never suggests that she adopts French rather than Vietnamese as a way to punish her mother for the lack of emotional attention she received as a child. There are obvious colonial undertones which explain why Kim was unable to express herself in Vietnamese, and her mother was complicit in propagating the notion that only a French education would guarantee Kim's social progression. Her mother, then, subconsciously plays an important role in shaping this historically-fraught linguistic decision, and the suggestion that Lefèvre writes in French to punish her mother cannot be supported with evidence from either narrative. In contrast, for Pamela Pears, Lefèvre's relationship with French is representative of the French father who abandoned her at birth. According to Pears, Lefèvre is not only confronted with the choice between 'the language of the former oppressor and her indigenous cultural heritage', but she is also 'left to reconcile the choice to write in the paternal, unknown language, instead of the maternal, familiar one'.<sup>95</sup> There is, however, no textual space in either *Métisse blanche* or *Retour* which explores how Kim's relationship with either of her parents plays out through the language in which Lefèvre

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<sup>94</sup> Aurélie Chevant, 'Not my Father's Tongue: Traditions, Mediations, and Conflicts in the Contemporary Vietnamese Novel in French' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of California Santa Barbara, 2013), p. 163. Chevant analyses the role of colonial and postcolonial Vietnamese writers in the reconstruction of Vietnam's colonial history.

<sup>95</sup> Pamela Pears, *Remnants of Empire in Algeria and Vietnam: Women, Words, and War* (Lanham, MD; Oxford: Lexington Books, 2004), p. 125.

writes, in stark contrast to an author such as Bouraoui. Rather, the choice to write in French appears a natural consequence of her French education in Vietnam, and the fact that her entire writing career developed in France. As Kim explains in *Retour*, until the time of narration, ‘cela fait trente ans qu[‘elle] n’[a] plus pratiqué [s]a langue, trente ans qu[‘elle] n’[a] pas ouvert un livre vietnamien’ (p. 387). French is the only language available to her.

Attending French schools not only engenders a linguistic shift but also leads to the narrator’s displacement across Vietnam — within the borders of her native country — and at times, she experiences this as an exile because she must continuously readapt to new environments. Following the scandal caused by her affair with her choirmaster — exposed when her stepfather finds a pile of love letters hidden inside Kim’s schoolbook (pp. 218–19), who then blames her despicable behaviour on her *métissage* which he associates with immorality and insanity — she is shunned by her family. Gender inequalities are at play here: the married male teacher is simply transferred to another school, while Kim is sent away to a Catholic boarding school in Saigon, paid for by her lover’s wife in order to ‘repr[endre] la situation en main’ (p. 224). At boarding school, however, an institution dedicated to the intellectual development of young women, she feels as though she belongs to a particular community for the first time in her life. She has become ‘plus détendue et plus heureuse que dans [s]a propre famille’ (p. 228). She then returns to Nha Trang during the summer, where she is elated to renew her friendship with her old friends Dô and Ghi from her previous Vietnamese school. Here, Lefèvre makes a further comment about gender roles in Vietnam. Although for the first time the teenagers forget gender divisions and talk freely together about the deteriorating political situation of the country, it is the young men who dominate the conversation, pausing to clarify key events slowly ‘pour chercher la manière la plus simple d’expliquer un sujet aussi complexe’ (p. 233). The narrator is aware of the gender inequalities

here but problematically does not contest them, still hurt and lacking confidence from her painful encounter with her former lover. She chooses to prioritise fitting in to this new friendship group over opposing gender stereotypes, desperate for affection from her peers following her previous alienation among her family.

Yet these sentiments of belonging are soon erased, as Kim becomes isolated during her later schooling at the Couvent des Oiseaux in Dalat. Sœur Aimée, one of the teachers at boarding school, is particularly fond of her and encourages her to attend the prestigious convent. Kim's family are unable to afford the fees, so the nun asks an old friend, Madame N., who each year gives 'une somme considérable pour les bonnes œuvres' (p. 238), to act as Kim's godmother and pay for her schooling. Kim is desperate to win the affections of this mysterious, wealthy woman, but, yet again, she is rejected because of her *métissage*. Madame N. shows no warmth or friendliness towards her, giving her a luxurious box of chocolates as a confirmation present rather than a gift more suitable for a young girl, in a demonstration of her own wealth, not affection (p. 257). Kim blames herself for this lack of affection from everyone in her life, presuming that there must be something wrong with her: 'd'excellentes femmes — les différentes "grands-mères" de mon enfance, ma mère elle-même — avaient essayé de s'attacher à moi sans y parvenir. Pourquoi une étrangère comme Mme N. y aurait-elle réussi?' (p. 256).

With its cool climate, pine forests, and French colonial villas, Dalat seems very French, and, ironically, completely alien to her. She feels 'dépaycée comme si [elle] avai[t] quitté le Vietnam pour un autre pays' (p. 266). Her geographic exile is aggravated by the fact that she has little in common with the other Vietnamese pupils. The girls are friendly, but their conversations remain on a superficial level. She is stunned at their indifference when the French army is beaten at Diên Biên Phu (p. 278). This climactic battle, fought between the

French Far East Expeditionary Corps and the Viet Minh troops between 13 March and 7 May 1954, represents the end of French colonialism because the French forces then withdrew from Vietnam in October 1954, following the signing of the Geneva accords at the end of July.<sup>96</sup> Only her old friend Dô, a day-boarder at the school, is excited about the prospect of independence; the other girls are so deeply inscribed within the colonial regime that they never even contemplate celebrating this important victory.

Kim slowly becomes accustomed to life in Dalat. She even teaches at the convent in exchange for free tuition when Madame N. can no longer afford to pay for her studies (p. 306), a further demonstration of her growing autonomy and recognised status. Yet following a long illness, her exile is reversed when she returns to her family during the summer to recuperate. She finds it extremely difficult to readapt to family life and treats them with condescension. Now, it is her family who provoke feelings of exile. She continuously compares her life in Dalat with life with her family in Tuy Hoa — she prefers the cool northern climate and hates her life in Tuy Hoa, ‘dénudée d’élégance’ (p. 287). Her emotions bewilder her, rendering her exile even more traumatic. She wants to belong but constantly feels ‘out of place’: ‘lorsque j’étais à Dalat, c’était ma famille et mon style de vie qui comptaient pour moi, et dès que je me retrouvais parmi eux, cette vie m’apparaissait sans intérêt’ (p. 288). Although she loves her mother and her sisters, she does not understand them or the life they lead.

*Métisse blanche* concludes with the narrator’s permanent departure to France, after moving to Saigon to train as a secondary school teacher of French literature. When Ho, a

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<sup>96</sup> The French began strengthening their forces at Diên Biên Phu, in the hills of north-west Vietnam near the border with Laos, with the intention of trapping the Viet Minh forces and drawing them into battle. However, they soon found themselves besieged by the Viet Minh, who overwhelmed them with their heavy artillery. Many casualties were reported on both sides but after a two-month siege, the garrison was overrun, and the French were forced to surrender. See Martin Windrow, *The Last Valley: Dien Bien Phu and the French Defeat in Vietnam* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2004) for a detailed account of the battle.

young Vietnamese man who tries to court her, persuades her to apply for a competitive scholarship to continue her studies in France because he is applying too, Kim is initially unconvinced. She is unsure whether she should remain in Vietnam, a country which has cruelly rejected her at every opportunity, or leave for France, a country she despises because it represents ‘l’image du père qui [l]’avait abandonnée’ (p. 342). Her decision to leave demonstrates how greatly she has been affected by racial rejection, as moving to France is, realistically, her only option. Although she is not banished from her home, or forced to leave Vietnam for political reasons, she has experienced multiple forms of exile within Vietnam. Reminiscing about her past with her family before she leaves, her mother astutely predicts that her daughter will never return to Vietnam because she will finally feel at home within her own community in France. Perplexed by this, Kim replies: ‘mais de quelle race suis-je donc?’ (p. 343). She continues to be haunted by her mixed-race identity because it prevents her from belonging to Vietnamese society. Her mother’s predictions are accurate, although Kim’s permanent exile from Vietnam is partly caused by her mother’s very actions: she continuously privileges Frenchness over Vietnamese identity and focuses on identity as a singular, fixed concept, rather than conceiving of it as multiple. Her mother instils the belief that Kim’s *métissage* does not mean that she is both French *and* Vietnamese, but that she must choose one identity. She thus subscribes to French colonial ideology that French values are innately superior to local Vietnamese customs, a belief she passes down to her daughter. It is by prioritising her French identity, and thriving in the French educational system, that Kim becomes estranged from herself, her family, and her homeland. Even the title of the narrative evokes the rejection she experiences because of her Frenchness: in Vietnam, she is shunned for her whiteness, rather than for her colour.

## Exile and Family Estrangement in *Retour à la saison des pluies*

‘Trente ans, c’est une mesure, une quantité. Mais pour moi, c’est une plage qui s’étend entre mes vingt ans et aujourd’hui.  
C’est une vie.  
Ma vie.’ (*Retour*, p. 355)

*Retour* opens with this evocative reflection on the narrator’s long absence from Vietnam. The introduction is peppered with short, disjointed phrases, which work to convey the rupture that exile has had on Kim’s life. She compares her life in Vietnam to ‘un long fleuve dont l’amont serait si éloigné qu’il me paraît à présent enveloppé de brume’ (p. 355), so hazy is the memory of her past. Yeager and Michèle Bacholle both examine Lefèvre’s use of water imagery throughout her texts. Yeager argues that ‘in Southeast Asia water connects land masses and facilitates communication’ and suggests that the memory of water connects Kim to her family even when she is apart from them, particularly given the reference to water in *Retour*’s title.<sup>97</sup> Explicitly referencing Yeager, Bacholle agrees with this reading, defining water as ‘un principe unifiant aussi bien au Viêt-nam que dans ce texte’.<sup>98</sup> Yet in the above passage, water is not a unifying image. The reference to a ‘long fleuve’, coupled with the negative adjective ‘éloigné’, suggests that the narrator feels extremely far removed from Vietnam, her own source. Furthermore, the mystic image of the source of the river, described through the poetic term ‘amont’ and shrouded by ‘brume’, indicates that while Vietnam reluctantly remains a cornerstone of her identity, she does not look favourably on her memories of Vietnamese life. In fact, as she later explains, Vietnam ‘[lui] a rendu la vie intenable au point de le quitter’ (p. 357).

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<sup>97</sup> Jack A. Yeager, ‘Kim Lefèvre’s *Retour à la saison des pluies*: Rediscovering the Landscapes of Children’, *L’Esprit Créateur*, 33.2 (1993), 47–57 (p. 53).

<sup>98</sup> Michèle Bacholle, ‘Cahiers d’un retour au pays natal: Kim Lefèvre et Marie Cardinal’, *Mots Plurielles*, 17 (2001) <<http://motspluriels.arts.uwa.edu.au/MP1701mb.html>> [accessed 3 April 2017] (para. 5 of 8). As Laura Dennis explains in ‘Myth and Mémoire in Kim Lefèvre’s *Retour à la saison des pluies*’, *Kentucky Philological Review*, 25 (2010), 12–18, water is associated with the idea of the homeland, ‘particularly in the Vietnamese equivalent for “pays”, “Dât-Nuoc”, which signifies land and water’ (p. 14).



In order to protect herself from this traumatic past, Kim separates herself entirely from Vietnam. Selao reads Kim's self-imposed exile as a reaction against the rejection she suffered due to her racial 'impurity'.<sup>99</sup> Drawing on the references to blood which are prevalent in both narratives, Selao argues that Kim wants to protect herself from 'une "contamination identitaire"', for which she was punished in Vietnam.<sup>100</sup> Retaining this imagery of the body, Selao then uses the metaphor of skin to describe the narrator's identitarian issues, arguing that Kim wants to 'changer de peau' when she arrives in France in order to efface her Vietnamese identity entirely.<sup>101</sup> This particular French idiom suggests a desire on Kim's part to shed her old identity permanently and adopt new attitudes and behaviours. While Kim declares that her French 'seconde peau' is 'plus dure et plus résistante' than her Vietnamese identity (p. 433), Selao describes it as extremely fragile: 'ainsi, l'identité, qui se forme par identification avec les gens de la société d'accueil, n'est qu'une illusion dont l'assurance peut, à tout moment, être ébranlée'.<sup>102</sup> Through this metaphor, Selao implies that the narrator's French identity is less fixed and stable than is claimed in *Retour*, an assertion which supports my own reading, which highlights the ambiguities of Kim's position.

Kim's spatial and psychological distance from Vietnam could also be interpreted as a punishment which she chooses to inflict on all those who shunned her because of her racial difference. She remarks that she is reluctant to reconnect with 'ceux qui avaient partagé [s]a vie jadis' and had treated her so badly during her childhood in Vietnam (p. 358). As Eva Tsuquiashi-Daddesio posits, these thirty years are given little textual space in *Retour*, but the neglected years represent for Lefèvre 'une période idéologique plus complexe' than the other

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<sup>99</sup> Ching Selao, 'Deuils et migrations identitaires dans les romans de Kim Lefèvre et Linda Lê', in *Problématiques identitaires et discours de l'exil dans les littératures francophones*, ed. by Anissa Talahite-Moodley (Ottawa: Presses de l'Université d'Ottawa, 2007), pp. 275–97.

<sup>100</sup> Selao, 'Deuils et migrations identitaires', p. 280.

<sup>101</sup> Selao, 'Deuils et migrations identitaires', p. 280.

<sup>102</sup> Selao, 'Deuils et migrations identitaires', p. 280.

two spatio-temporal dimensions which structure the texts (her childhood in Vietnam, and her present life in France) because they involve ‘une sorte de négociation’ between her Vietnamese past and her French present.<sup>103</sup>

What is evident from the few details Lefèvre offers about this period, though, is that Kim intentionally avoids all contact with her former acquaintances from Vietnam who now live in Paris. She never ventures into the thirteenth *arrondissement*, an area with a growing Vietnamese community due to the mass arrival of the ‘boat people’ following the reunification of Vietnam in 1975 (p. 358).<sup>104</sup> In fact, she only begins to frequent this district once she has decided to return to Vietnam, following the publication of *Métisse blanche*. Writing her interview about *Métisse blanche* on *Apostrophes* into the sequel text *Retour*, she explains how Pivot asked her whether she would ever visit her birth country again. She has travelled extensively around Asia during her adulthood and is now aware of having drawn ‘tout autour de [s]on pays natal, devenu tabou à [s]on insu, une sorte de cercle magique’ (p. 433), yet she has never dared to confront her fears by returning. She considers her affirmative response to Pivot — ‘j’y songe, oui’ (p. 357) — as ‘un serment solennel’ to the television audience (p. 358). Her relationship with the Vietnamese community remains ambiguous, however. She is pleased to renew her relationship with former acquaintances, describing her chance encounter with Bach Tha, one of her students at the Couvent des Oiseaux, as ‘un cadeau qu’une main bienveillante y aurait déposé’. She is also annoyed, however, not to be in control of these spontaneous meetings, because they provoke a psychological reaction for

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<sup>103</sup> Eva Tsuquiashi-Daddesio, ‘L’Empire maternel et colonial chez Kim Lefèvre’, *Synergies Afrique Australe*, 1 (2005), 47–53 (p. 49).

<sup>104</sup> As Live Yu-Sion explains in ‘The Chinese Community in France: Immigration, Economic Activity, Cultural Organisation and Representations’, in *The Chinese in Europe*, ed. by Gregor Benton and Frank N. Pieke (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press; New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), pp. 96–124, the thirteenth *arrondissement* was renovated during the 1960s by the Paris City Council, and large tower blocks were built around Porte de Choisy. ‘The Asian refugees who arrived between 1975 and 1980 were among the first to move into the empty flats’, as Parisians rejected the architecture of the project (p. 106). An Asian community was soon formed, and the thirteenth *arrondissement* became Paris’s first ‘Chinatown’. Vietnamese migrants settled in this area too.

which she is unprepared (p. 362). Emily Roberts argues that in *Retour*, the narrator feels an urgent need to control these encounters due to ‘the fear of yet more trauma’.<sup>105</sup> In fact, it is precisely because the narrator is overwhelmed by this trauma that she has chosen to keep her Vietnamese acquaintances at a distance, out of fear that France will reject her if she reconnects with her Vietnamese identity, just as, in *Métisse blanche*, she was rejected in Vietnam for her Frenchness. Kim’s problematic stance towards her *métisse* identity becomes clear: in both texts, each identity, French and Vietnamese, remains separate and distinct, and only *one* can be assumed at a time, thwarting the established paradigm of *métissage* as a combination of identities.

The narrator has lost all contact with her family since she has been living in France. While she occasionally wrote to them on arriving in Paris, she never received a response; she then moved house and is thus fully aware that ‘[s]a famille, même si elle l’avait souhaité, ne savait plus où [elle] habitai[t]’ (p. 359). The alienation she experienced in Vietnam continues to affect her in France, and this is manifested in this emotional and physical estrangement from her family. In 1978, psychiatrist Murray Bowen was the first to theorise family estrangement, which he termed ‘emotional cut-off’, in *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*. For Bowen, this term refers to an emotional and physical distancing between a parent and child, brought about by ‘unresolved emotional attachments’ to parents, and an inability to be successfully separated from the past.<sup>106</sup> Bowen also maintains that those who suffer from emotional cut-off are extremely likely to pass this condition down to their own offspring.<sup>107</sup> Recent social science publications distinguish between ‘physical’ and ‘emotional’

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<sup>105</sup> Emily Roberts, ‘Close Encounters: French Women of Vietnamese Origin and the Homeland in *Retour à la saison des pluies* and *Les Trois Parques*’, in *Women, Immigration and Identities in France*, ed. by Jane Freedman and Carrie Tarr (Oxford; New York: Berg Publishers, 2000), pp. 121–34 (p. 123).

<sup>106</sup> Murray Bowen, *Family Therapy in Clinical Practice*, 5th edn (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2004 [1978]), p. 382.

<sup>107</sup> Bowen, p. 382.

estrangement.<sup>108</sup> These models offer a useful means of conceptualising Kim's exile from her own family, even though they focus exclusively on the parent-child relationship from the perspective of parents who have been abandoned by their children, whereas Lefèvre is estranged not only from her mother but also from her siblings. The constant reminders of the narrator's difference during her childhood in Vietnam acted as the trigger for her familial estrangement, preventing her from forming a new relationship with her family as an adult during her thirty-year absence from Vietnam.

In Lefèvre's texts, it emerges that in order to be accepted in France, Kim must remain estranged from both Vietnamese culture and her family. Problematically, though, she believes her integration into French society to be successful. Towards the end of *Métisse blanche* — and in a disruption of narrative time — the narrator comments on how willingly France, unlike Vietnam, has welcomed her: 'car ce que le Vietnam m'avait refusé, la France me l'a accordé: elle m'a reçue et acceptée' (p. 342). In France, she does not feel judged or excluded because of her racial difference. However, she seems unaware that she has paid a heavy price for this acceptance. In order to integrate into Parisian life, she has negated her Vietnamese identity and cut herself off entirely from her family and the Vietnamese diasporic community. France does not accept her as a *métisse*, but as French: the only way she has been successful in France is by conceiving of herself as two different people, 'vietnamienne pendant [s]on enfance, française par la suite' (p. 435). She still feels she has no other option but to prioritise

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<sup>108</sup> For instance, in 'The Gendered Experience of Family Estrangement in Later Life', *Affilia: Journal of Women and Social Work*, 28.3 (2013), 309–21, Kylie Agllias defines physical estrangement as a complete loss of contact between parent and child, whereas emotional estrangement involves some contact, but which is characterised by 'infrequency, discomfort, and dissatisfaction' (p. 309). Agllias's findings are based on a small qualitative study of parents estranged from their adult children in Newcastle, Australia. Other studies offer reasons for this distancing. For example, in *I Thought We'd Never Speak Again: The Road from Estrangement to Reconciliation* (New York: Quill Publishing, 2002), Laura Davis examines the role of intrafamilial abuse in family estrangement. Moreover, Ellen B. Sucov posits that life events, such as death and divorce, can also be a trigger in *Fragmented Families: Patterns of Estrangement and Reconciliation* (Jerusalem, Israel: Southern Hills Press, 2006).

one element of her identity over the other. In Vietnam, she was required to conceal her French identity. In France, even though her French identity is not imposed on her by legal or social frameworks, she believes she must eradicate her Vietnamese identity in order to integrate because of a lack of opportunities for Eurasian individuals at that particular time. At this stage of her life, she is aware of the negative experiences of other Vietnamese migrant women: her old friend Nam from Dalat, who was ‘si intelligente, si cultivée’ and had trained as a lawyer in Vietnam, is now working as a dinner lady in France because there are no other jobs available to her (p. 365).

Equating the narrator’s *métissage* with exile offers new perspectives on her life in France. Averis claims that *Retour* ‘affirms [Kim’s] new rootedness in France’;<sup>109</sup> yet it is troubling to propose that Kim can feel rooted in France only through a model which requires her to neglect one side of her identity and cut herself off from Vietnam, no matter how badly she may have been treated there. Moreover, Kim’s rediscovery of significant locations of her childhood in Vietnam suggests the eruption of a latent, repressed need to reconnect with the country. Laura Dennis points out that Lefèvre adopts the myth of Pandora’s box (p. 435) to demonstrate that while Kim is hesitant to return, she also realises that ‘not everything she has locked away is bad, and that to be whole, she needs to take the risk of opening herself to her past’.<sup>110</sup> While Kim does have the opportunity to revisit happier moments of her childhood, she is also confronted with traumatic memories of being rejected by her family. Indeed, the return is motivated by Kim’s realisation that she must face these traumas: ‘il était temps pour

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<sup>109</sup> Averis, p. 79.

<sup>110</sup> Dennis, p. 13. Dennis examines how Lefèvre uses three Western myths (Pandora, Orpheus, and Ariadne), along with important Vietnamese poems and tales, positing that ‘although she has experienced rejection by both worlds and at times forced to choose, Lefèvre’s mythical intertexts show that ultimately, she has made a place for herself in both’ (p. 13). This chapter challenges such a reading because the Vietnamese culture with which she engages is always explored from a French standpoint. Dennis draws parallels between the myth of Pandora’s box, in which all the evils of the world escaped except hope, and Lefèvre’s return, a painful yet optimistic experience, in Dennis’ opinion (p. 13). As this analysis shows, though, her relationship with her family never fully recovers.

moi, me semblait-il, d'oser retourner sur les lieux de mes terreurs enfantines' (p. 358). She no longer feels satisfied living in the present but must confront her traumatic childhood: an act which has the potential to unite her French and Vietnamese selves. The fact that she equates Vietnam with fear and dread, and yet still intends to return, demonstrates just how great is her need to reconnect with her Vietnamese identity.

For Tsuquiashi-Daddesio, the narrator's relationship with France contains neo-colonial undertones. She argues that Kim's positive depiction of life in France, coupled with a more negative impression of independent Vietnam which emphasises its poverty and corruption, indicates that 'elle semble préférer effacer les avanies de la colonisation comme une sorte de geste de remerciement à la mère patrie'.<sup>111</sup> This corroborates my earlier observation that Kim exhibits an Orientalist attitude because she represents Vietnam in patronising tones as being economically, culturally, and morally inferior to France now that the country is no longer supported by the colonial system. Her thinking has thus not developed since her late childhood, when her French identity was held up as a model through which she could become more sophisticated. Her sentiments of gratitude towards France are not reciprocated, however, as there she is expected to cut herself off from her former life in order to integrate. While Tsuquiashi-Daddesio's comments here are valid, it must be remembered that Lefèvre does paint a more ambiguous and critical portrait of France in *Métisse blanche*. As a young infant faced with the possibility of moving to France to escape the Second World War, Kim admits that France '[lui] faisait peur' because it was completely unknown to her (p. 68); even as an adult about to leave for Paris, she doubts she will have anything in common with French people (p. 340). It is thus essential to read the texts together in order to gain a more nuanced depiction of Kim's attitude towards France.

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<sup>111</sup> Tsuquiashi-Daddesio, p. 49.

### **Return and Reconciliation: *Métisse blanche* and *Retour à la saison des pluies***

In *Retour*, Kim is eager to reconcile her relationship with her family and reconnect with her past life once she has promised herself that she will return to Vietnam. Yet her inability to embrace her Vietnamese identity entirely offers a troubling indication that her *métissage* continues to alienate her, even though, after meeting different characters from her past, she admits no longer fearing ‘d’explorer les pistes anciennes, [...] par peur que ne se rouvrent des blessures encore vives’ (p. 373). Instead, she actively seeks to engage with diasporic Vietnamese culture, exploring authentic Asian supermarkets in the Porte de Choisy district of Paris for the first time. Just as the madeleine evokes childhood memories in Marcel Proust’s *À la recherche du temps perdu* (1913), the pungent smell of a durian fruit reactivates a vivid memory of the first time, aged fifteen, she had eaten this emblematic fruit in Vietnam. She explains how, after her illicit affair with her music teacher, her mother had promised Kim’s hand in marriage to a young man from Saigon. It was with him that she ate this fruit (pp. 374–75). This episode reveals the limited prospects available to Vietnamese young girls: for her mother, marriage was the only way Kim could lead a prosperous life. Kim simply had no say in the matter; she was entirely at her family’s mercy (p. 374). It is surprising that there is no mention of this important life-event, or its outcome, in *Métisse blanche* (although Kim evidently did not marry him or remain with him). This example reinforces one of the central arguments of this chapter: the texts must be read together in order to gain a complete picture of the complexities of Kim’s life, and of the aesthetic and narratorial choices, and ambiguities, between the two texts.

Back in the present, she rediscovers Vietnam in the Asian supermarket in Paris through her senses. Frustrated at the gaps in her memory, she asks one of the workers to help her remember the name of a familiar fruit. She receives the following response: ‘nous, on

l'appelle *gâc*, mais le nom en français, on ne le connaît pas' [original emphasis] (p. 376). Kim immediately notices how the young girl includes her within the Vietnamese community. Yet rather than feeling comforted, Kim feels that this comment others her within French society: 'elle s'adresse à moi en disant "nous", je suis donc "l'autre"' (p. 376). Lily V. Chiu reads this episode more positively, remarking that Kim's identity 'here is presented as fluid' because this incident suggests that she belongs to both French and Vietnamese communities.<sup>112</sup> Chiu's subsequent analysis of how the narrator reacts to the durian in France, however, reveals a less straightforward situation. On one occasion, Kim bought the fruit and left it in the kitchen, but a friend threw it away during her absence because of its potent, rotten-like odour. For Chiu, the durian is 'a type of crucible, separating the Vietnamese (who can appreciate the fruit and all its qualities) from the French (who regard the fruit as rotting rubbish)'.<sup>113</sup> Chiu's quotation reinforces the irreconcilability of French and Vietnamese cultures and contradicts her own argument that Kim can belong to both communities. In fact, in *Retour*, Kim does not at any point appear to desire a fluid identity; she is repeatedly seen wanting to be French. Her discomfort at being included in the shop assistant's 'nous' reveals both the distance she has placed between herself and Vietnamese culture, and the discrepancy between her own sense of identity and that which is imposed on her by others.

Lefèvre's autofictions are also illuminating for their focus on language, and Madelaine Hron's theoretical work which links translation and exile offers a useful analytical framework. Hron argues that translation operates as a metaphor for migration; both translation and migration involve crossing linguistic and cultural borders, adapting and transforming to a new

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<sup>112</sup> Lily V. Chiu, 'The Return of the Native: Cultural Nostalgia and Coercive Mimeticism in the Return Narratives of Kim Lefèvre and Anna Moï', *Crossroads: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 19.2 (2008), 93–124 (p. 111).

<sup>113</sup> Chiu, p. 111.



cultural environment.<sup>114</sup> As a child in *Métisse blanche*, Kim experienced her migration as a form of translation. Since she attended French schools, she was forced to deny her Vietnamese identity, struggling to translate herself, in Hron's terms, and speak only in French. However, when she arrived in France in 1960 to continue her university education, she was already linguistically and culturally fluent in French because most of her schooling had been in French. Ironically, it is when she is attempting to reintegrate into Vietnamese culture and speak in her former mother tongue that she experiences a bewildering sense of linguistic exile. While Kim admits that she is surprised to find herself speaking aloud in Vietnamese, appreciating the lilting cadence of the language and the musical rhythms it produces (p. 368), she finds having a conversation in her mother tongue particularly challenging. She meets regularly with An, her old best friend from Dalat, and they talk together in Vietnamese, 'ce qui constitue pour [Kim] une épreuve des plus fatigantes' (p. 387). The Vietnamese expressions she uses are calqued from the French, much to An's amusement, who teases Kim for having forgotten the 'vietnamien littéraire' she used to speak as an adolescent (p. 387). In a reversal of the linguistic exile she experienced as a child, she now finds herself struggling to converse in Vietnamese, although her fluency does eventually improve. French has replaced Vietnamese as her mother tongue: she now thinks and dreams in French, and translates her thoughts directly from French to Vietnamese. Language is thus an integral component of Kim's identity struggles.

The second section of *Retour* moves beyond the narrator's introspections on her linguistic heritage, as the setting moves to Vietnam. Ravi describes how the narrator is trapped in a perpetual return because Kim's return occurs on various levels:

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<sup>114</sup> Madelaine Hron, *Translating Pain: Immigrant Suffering in Literature and Culture* (Toronto; Buffalo, NY; London: University of Toronto Press, 2009), p. 40.

the narrative that positions a return (to her past) in another return (to her mother's past) in yet another return (her fantasised physical journey to Vietnam) and finally in the actual arrival (her physical return to Vietnam) reflects the perpetual discontinuous state of being that the migrant embodies.<sup>115</sup>

Ravi's comments reveal the never-ending cycle of migration and return, of belonging and non-belonging, and of hurt and forgiveness in which Kim is imprisoned. She seeks to rebuild her broken relationship with her family, but now their roles have been reversed, as her sisters cannot understand why they had been abandoned. Her youngest sister Yê'n cries out: 'tu nous as délaissées pendant trente ans!', while Dung is equally incredulous because her sister was supposed to return to Vietnam after three years (p. 454). The narrator is struck by guilt; guilt at abandoning her family, but also for leading a comfortable life in France. This chasm is symbolised by her gifts for her family: her mother treasures the French cheese 'comme s'il s'agissait d'un bijou précieux', explaining that she has not eaten any since the reunification of the country in 1975 (p. 456) because communist Vietnam had been isolated from the rest of the world. The narrator is rapidly made aware of the privilege she has experienced in France, and how her diasporic existence has permanently altered her relationship with her family: 'je prends brutalement conscience que je suis la plus grande en taille, la mieux habillée, la mieux nourrie' (p. 463). She feels like a stranger among her own family and is ashamed of her privilege. By assimilating into French society and abandoning her Vietnamese identity, she has improved the material conditions of her life. Her success has been achieved at a cost, though, because it has increased the already-significant gulf between herself and her family.

By the final part of *Retour*, it appears that Kim has closed this gulf between herself and Vietnam. She is convinced that she will never lose touch with her family again, explaining to her mother: 'maintenant que nous nous sommes retrouvées, tu ne me perdras

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<sup>115</sup> Srilata Ravi, 'Consuming Alterity: Writing Vietnam in French', *Francophone Postcolonial Studies*, 3.2 (2005), 51–76 (p. 64).

jamais plus' (p. 514). These textual details confirm what Chiu terms Lefèvre's 'reconciliatory sentiment' in Lefèvre's writing.<sup>116</sup> Chiu takes issue with Nguyen's claim that at the end of *Métisse blanche*, Lefèvre can embrace both the French and Vietnamese elements of her identity. Yet Chiu does agree that Kim reconciles her differences with her family but nuances Nguyen's assertion, stating that 'this reconciliatory sentiment was only possible at the end of the act of writing the text of *Métisse*, in the late 1980s, and was not actually present in 1960, when the narrative of *Métisse* ends'.<sup>117</sup>

Having restored her relationship with her family, Kim then seeks to reconnect with Vietnam. She is no longer consciously searching for her roots — she acknowledges that she has successfully partitioned her French and Vietnamese identities, described as 'deux couches successives' (p. 435). The fact that she conceives of her identities as two distinct and separate layers demonstrates that she remains divided between France and Vietnam and is unable to bring both identities together to form a coherent whole. Pears argues that the narrator's identity quest is best represented through Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's image of the rhizome,<sup>118</sup> rather than the root, because 'it is through the multiple lines of flight that pass through the rhizome that a person *becomes*' [original emphasis].<sup>119</sup> By actively revisiting her childhood haunts, such as the boarding school where she has an emotional encounter with Sœur Aimée (p. 491), Kim indicates that her Vietnamese origins remain important to her. Yet

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<sup>116</sup> Chiu, p. 115.

<sup>117</sup> Chiu, p. 115.

<sup>118</sup> In *Capitalisme et schizophrénie: mille plateaux* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1980), Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari create a new way of conceiving of thought. Moving away from the traditional approach to knowledge as one which follows a linear, hierarchical pattern, like a tree, they prefer the image of the rhizome, which is based on the structure of bulbs and tubers. A rhizome has six characteristics: connection, heterogeneity, multiplicity, asignifying rupture, cartography, and decalomania. At any point, rhizomes can be connected to something else, no matter how similar or different; a rhizome can be broken off at any point but will always start again; and a rhizome can be thought of as a map, always open and connectable. As Deleuze and Guattari explain, 'un rhizome ne commence et n'aboutit pas, il est toujours au milieu, entre les choses, inter-être, *intermezzo*' [original emphasis] (p. 36). For the two philosophers, then, thought is a dynamic, perpetual process of creation.

<sup>119</sup> Pears, p. 133.

rather than perceiving this as crucial to her sense of self, she approaches it with the distance of an archaeologist on a dig, examining a distant, past layer which has been entirely buried.

Kim struggles to make Vietnam her permanent home. She goes back as a tourist, intending to return to her privileged life in Paris once she has reconciled with her family. She stays in a hotel rather than at her family's house, claiming in a letter to them before her arrival that she did not want to intrude when they have such little space (p. 466). In the narrative, she admits the real reason: she does not feel ready to cope with such an intense emotional encounter. Her family are devastated: her mother tells her that she has 'brisé le rêve de [s]es sœurs' who had imagined spending all their time with her (p. 466). The image of Kim as a visitor to Vietnam, rather than a returnee to the homeland, is repeated throughout *Retour*. During her preparations for the trip, she is required to go to the Vietnamese consulate in Paris to obtain the correct documentation. Speaking to the official in French, she requests a tourist visa because she self-identifies as French; the officer, however, initiates the conversation in Vietnamese and assumes that she is 'Vietnamien résidant en France' (p. 434). She immediately feels uneasy and begins to question her identity herself, just as she had previously in the Parisian supermarket: 'dès que je me trouvais officiellement devant un Vietnamien je ne savais plus qui j'étais, mon identité devenait floue et la peur d'être rejetée me reprenait' (p. 434). As Siobhán Shilton comments, this episode reveals 'the discrepancy between how the traveller is perceived and how she perceives herself',<sup>120</sup> and once again calls into question the extent to which Kim has successfully assimilated into French society, despite her own conviction that she is now French.

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<sup>120</sup> Shilton, p. 350. Shilton's reading of these two narratives is informed by Edward W. Said's theorisation of 'contrapuntal readings', which is different to comparative readings. In *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Vintage Books, 1994), Said draws on the concept of counterpoint in music and defines this method as one which demonstrates a 'simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts' (p. 59). In this way, colonial and non-colonial themes can intertwine, demonstrating that non-European histories of colonialism are just as important as European histories.

Kim certainly imitates French attitudes towards present-day Vietnam as an impoverished, corrupt, and primitive society. This negative portrayal of the country is a vestige of the colonial era, when the French government made improvements to the infrastructure of the country in rapid, European-style ‘modernisation’.<sup>121</sup> She makes an important remark on her family’s financial precariousness when explaining why she prefers not to stay at their house on her return. The whole family live together in a small, cramped house, sharing two bedrooms between nine people. The mother lost her Chinese husband a few years earlier after he had broken his pelvis and died due to complications (p. 459) and now shares her room with her youngest daughter Yêu who has never married (p. 466). The family’s lack of material possessions contrasts sharply with the narrator’s relative wealth. Foregrounding the poverty of her family and of Vietnamese society, Kim perpetuates the notion that Vietnam is economically undeveloped: she uses the emotionally-charged phrase ‘des taudis sur pilotis’ to describe the local housing (p. 452) and comments that even the main roads are ‘mal éclairé[s]’ and badly maintained (p. 451). Yet as Allison Truitt explains, in the last decades of the twentieth century, ‘Vietnam has been ranked among the fastest growing economies in Asia’.<sup>122</sup> Ho Chi Minh City (formerly Saigon until 1976), where her family now live, is a large, bustling metropolis, and although the rapid growth of the city has heightened inequality between the urban elites and the rest of the population,<sup>123</sup> it is inaccurate to depict the city as an economic backwater. Kim never mentions the economic successes of the city in

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<sup>121</sup> See Brocheux and Hémerly, p. 116.

<sup>122</sup> Allison Truitt, ‘Banking on the Middle Class in Ho Chi Minh City’, in *The Reinvention of Distinction: Modernity and the Middle Class in Urban Vietnam*, ed. by Van Nguyen-Marshall, Lisa B. Welch Drummond, and Danièle Bélanger (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Springer, 2012), pp. 129–41 (p. 131).

<sup>123</sup> In ‘Wealth, Power, and Inequality: Global Market, the State, and Local Sociocultural Dynamics’, in *Postwar Vietnam: Dynamics of a Transforming Society*, ed. by Hy V. Luong (Lanham, MD; Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers; Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies Publications, 2003), pp. 81–106, Hy V. Luong notes that ‘by the late 1990s, a small Vietnamese urban elite had accumulated sufficient wealth to be able to finance their children’s overseas education in the West while the annual per capita income in 1999 Vietnam remained around U.S. \$374’ (p. 81).

*Retour*, though, and once again reproduces Orientalist attitudes by portraying Vietnam as economically 'inferior' to France.

Moreover, she lampoons the Vietnamese government for neglecting beautiful, tranquil Dalat. Now a state-run university, the site of the convent has fallen into ruin. The lush garden is spoilt by the presence of small shacks, and Kim describes the area as a 'camp de réfugiés' (p. 497), a problematic description because this hyperbolic and insensitive phrase, referring to sites where thousands of people live in precarious tents and lack decent sanitation, implies a level of desperate poverty going beyond the situation with which she is faced. The interior of the building has not been preserved either, with paint flaking off the walls and a thick layer of moss forming on the ground (p. 498). Kim is bewildered at the sight of her beloved convent in such a dilapidated state and remarks miserably that she 'quitte ce lieu avec le sentiment d'avoir à jamais perdu quelque chose de précieux' (p. 499). Neglecting to consider the social progress instigated by the Vietnamese government during the late 1980s, Kim focuses on the negative transformations that the country has undergone. Problematically, her conviction that Vietnam is incapable of providing political, social, and economic stability for its citizens, and granting them adequate resources and infrastructure, exhibits traces of the legacy of the colonial era, fuelled by her mother's determination that she should receive a French colonial education; this, of course, was the catalyst for her departure to France. Vietnam is now an independent country, but it is evident in *Retour* that the same neo-colonial attitudes prevail among French citizens. Pears claims that the narrator is 'no longer a victim of colonization any more than she is a product of Vietnam' because, according to Pears, Kim has moved beyond binary thinking, which stipulates that a person can only claim one, single cultural identity, and has succeeded in overcoming the humiliation attached to her *métissage* during

the colonial era.<sup>124</sup> As this chapter has demonstrated, however, Kim remains trapped within a binary conceptualisation of identity and is only ever able to claim one identity at a time. She adheres to the colonial mindset which pits France against Vietnam and so will always be bound to the French colonial project in some way, despite Pears's assertion to the contrary.

The ending of *Retour* reinforces Kim's *métissage* as a form of exile. In the final paragraph, she explains how she has come to terms with the erasure of the Vietnam of her past: 'lorsque je quitterai ce pays mon image s'effacera et je ne laisserai plus de trace dans ce paysage d'eau où il recommence à pleuvoir' (p. 514). Retaining the water metaphor that runs throughout the text, Kim figures the rain as wiping out all traces of her previous life. According to Pears, this melancholic ending is nevertheless one of reconciliation for the narrator. Pears argues that the narrator 'has returned to the Vietnam of the present, has faced her past, and is now willing and able to accept herself as *métisse* in the postcolonial world', adding that the narrator is now actively '*taking* the present-day Vietnam *with her*' [original emphasis].<sup>125</sup> Selao disagrees with this analysis, instead interpreting the final paragraph as an indication that the narrator now accepts her French identity 'sans avoir l'impression de trahir les siens'.<sup>126</sup> She reads the return not as a means to reconnect with Kim's Vietnamese identity, but rather as an opportunity to erase Kim's sentiments of guilt for having adopted a French identity.

Despite their obvious differences, both Pears's and Selao's analyses suggest that Kim has successfully reconstructed her painful memories of her Vietnamese past and is now able to move forward in her life. However, read with a focus on Kim's family estrangement, *Retour*'s ending seems to be a more pessimistic portrayal of betrayal and abandonment. Kim's

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<sup>124</sup> Pears, p. 138.

<sup>125</sup> Pears, p. 138.

<sup>126</sup> Selao, 'Deuils et migrations identitaires', p. 284.

behaviour can be interpreted as selfish, as she abandons her family once more now that she has overcome her own identitarian struggles. The fact that Kim does not want any trace of her to remain in Vietnam contradicts Pears's assertion that the narrator now fully accepts her *métissage*; instead, it implies that Kim will cease to exist in Vietnam once she leaves because her French identity supersedes her Vietnamese identity. After her long confrontation with her past, she still feels unable to be *both* French *and* Vietnamese. Even on her return to Vietnam, she continues to exile herself from her Vietnamese identity and to prioritise her French identity.

## Conclusion

In June 2010, in an interview with the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie, Lefèvre's attitude towards her own Franco-Vietnamese identity appears to reflect a positive stance of reconciliation and acceptance: 'pour ma part, je suis en paix avec mon métissage'.<sup>127</sup> This sentiment of optimism is not confirmed in *Métisse blanche* or *Retour*, however, both of which were published twenty years earlier than the interview. In Lefèvre's autofictional writing, *métissage* exiles the narrator-protagonist in several ways, particularly from her Vietnamese family. As a child in Vietnam she is shunted across the country because her family cannot cope with the burden of looking after a mixed-race child; she then severs all ties with her family on arriving in France; and even when she finally returns to Vietnam, their relationship is strained. It seems unlikely that the relationship will ever fully recover, despite her apparent conviction that she will not lose touch with them again. Her family have thus been instrumental in heightening what Lefèvre herself termed her 'flou identitaire [...]

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<sup>127</sup> Lefèvre, 'Une parole francophone', para. 12 of 34.



déséquilibrant’, something she explicitly equates with *métissage* in an interview with Nguyen in 2001.<sup>128</sup>

By examining the depiction of mixed-race identities across both of Lefèvre’s autofictional texts, this analysis has demonstrated how the French colonial mentality, which associated *métissage* with illegitimacy and impurity, has in fact been perpetuated within the Francophone postcolonial context. In a counter-balance to the other authors analysed throughout this thesis, Lefèvre’s literary heroine remains bound to colonial paradigms of identity. Furthermore, the chapter has broadened contemporary understandings of exile by arguing that exile can occur within the homeland. In fact, this exile is even more traumatic than Kim’s permanent departure to France in 1980 because Vietnam, which was once her home, has become a location of pain and suffering. While for Glissant, Lionnet, and Vergès, *métissage* offers a dynamic and positive model of identity, for Kim there emerges a less optimistic, more traumatic experience. Whereas her grandmother suggests to her that she is ‘un alliage, ni or ni argent’ (*Métisse blanche*, p. 39), Kim is never able to embrace her *métisse* identity as a kind of blend, or alloy, but rather appears condemned to experience it as the impossible collision of two incompatible cultures, and the cause of separation, anxiety, and exile.

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<sup>128</sup> Kim Lefèvre, ‘*Métisse blanche*: entretien avec Kim Lefèvre’, Interview by Nathalie Huynh Chau Nguyen, *Intersections: Gender, History and Culture in the Asian Context*, 5 (2001) <[http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue5/nguyen\\_interview.html](http://intersections.anu.edu.au/issue5/nguyen_interview.html)> [accessed 6 September 2016] (para. 22 of 25).

## CONCLUSION

This thesis has reconceptualised female experiences of exile. From the analysis of primary and secondary sources undertaken, it is evident that a gap exists in the current understanding of exile, namely the question of gender, which, all too often, goes underexplored. By analysing the autobiographical narratives of four contemporary female authors from across the Francosphere — Nina Bouraoui (Algeria), Gisèle Pineau (Guadeloupe), Véronique Tadjo (Côte d’Ivoire), and Kim Lefèvre (Vietnam) — the thesis has drawn on literary theory, postcolonial theory, and interdisciplinary theoretical approaches from the social sciences and international development in order to create an analytical framework which widens contemporary gendered understandings of exile. It has demonstrated that scholars who examine exile solely in terms of a geographic displacement have neglected to incorporate women into their theoretical analyses, instead producing an overtly masculine reading which risks reproducing phallogentric discourse. By deconstructing these theoretical models and analysing the metaphorical interpretations of exile as a gendered, sexual, racial, and linguistic otherness, engaging particularly with Julia Kristeva’s work on gendered exile and estrangement, this thesis places women at the centre of discourses on exile.

This research has sought to define similarities in how women articulate their experiences of exile, and how their exile has impacted upon their sense of self, confirming

Kate Averis and Isabel Hollis-Touré's assertion that 'women's identities are irrevocably altered, if not constituted by the fact and experience of mobility'.<sup>1</sup> For all four authors, their complex identities are closely tied to the colonial past of that part of their heritage which is located beyond the European continent. Their texts thus offer a point of entry for a thorough re-engagement with critical questions about the legacy of French colonialism across the Francophone world, and in metropolitan France itself. Moreover, they each interact with the autofictional genre, which allows them to blur boundaries between truth and fiction, carry out an internal reflection on their complex identity issues, and distance themselves from the traumatic circumstances of their exile. Throughout this thesis, particular attention has been paid to the positionality of the four authors, and to their status as privileged women who have had both the financial means and the opportunity to create new identities for themselves in France, and to write about their experiences. This is not to denigrate the estrangement that they have undoubtedly felt because of their physical and cultural otherness but to be aware that their experiences of exile differ considerably to those of most exiled individuals. They are 'cosmopolitan', hybrid, and mobile Francophone writers, able to travel towards and away from the metropolitan centre. Yet rather than experiencing their mobility as enriching, they define themselves as rootless, 'out of place', and exiled. By examining the gap between existing theoretical models of exile and its literary expressions by Bouraoui, Pineau, Tadjou, and Lefèvre, this thesis has revealed the limitations of the cosmopolitan framework of mobility and hybridity which has been put forward as empowering, positive, and liberating in postcolonial studies. I have argued that this model is particularly unsuitable for Francophone autobiographical narratives written by women, who often experience their fluid, multi-layered

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<sup>1</sup> Kate Averis and Isabel Hollis-Touré, 'Introduction', in *Exiles, Travellers and Vagabonds: Rethinking Mobility in Francophone Women's Writing*, ed. by Kate Averis and Isabel Hollis-Touré (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2016), pp. 1–14 (p. 9).

identities as a manifestation of exile, which is both a source of invention and creativity, and one of trauma.

Bourauoi, Pineau, Tadjou, and Lefèvre can thus be considered as part of a new trend of successful, contemporary Francophone women writers who question the idea of a fixed, static homeland. In November 2016, the Prix Goncourt, the most prestigious French-language literary prize, was awarded to Moroccan-born French writer Leïla Slimani for her second novel *Chanson douce* (2016),<sup>2</sup> of which over seventy-six thousand copies have been sold since its publication in August 2016.<sup>3</sup> Born in 1981 to a Franco-Algerian mother and Moroccan father, Slimani is a mobile, middle-class writer from the Maghreb: she was brought up by a progressive family who encouraged her to reject traditional gender norms and strict Islamic values.<sup>4</sup> Slimani is only the twelfth woman to win the Prix Goncourt in its one-hundred-and-twelve-year history. Yet read alongside the fact that the Prix Renaudot was awarded in 2016 to *Babylone* (2016) by Yasmina Reza,<sup>5</sup> a French author whose father is Iranian and mother Hungarian and for whom consequently ‘il n’y a jamais eu [...] de chez moi’,<sup>6</sup> Slimani’s success demonstrates the increasing recognition that rootless Francophone women writers, like the corpus under consideration in this thesis, are currently gaining across the Francophone world.

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<sup>2</sup> Leïla Slimani, *Chanson douce* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> Benoît Morenne, ‘Leïla Slimani Wins Prix Goncourt, France’s Top Literary Award’, *The New York Times* (3 November 2016) <<http://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/04/books/prix-goncourt-leila-slimani.html>> [accessed 9 November 2016] (para. 2 of 12).

<sup>4</sup> Slimani’s latest text, *Sexe et mensonges, la vie sexuelle au Maroc* (Paris: Les Arènes, 2017), is an essay which denounces patriarchal society and Islamic practice in Morocco. She bears witness to the testimonies of young Moroccan women who are unable to express their sexuality freely, despite Morocco presenting itself as a relatively liberal and progressive country. The text has been nominated in the essay category for the Prix Renaudot 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Yasmina Reza, *Babylone* (Paris: Éditions Flammarion, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> Yasmina Reza, ‘En lice pour le Goncourt et le Renaudot, Yasmina Reza s’amuse à “mélanger les genres”’, *La Dépêche* (21 September 2016) <<http://www.ladepeche.fr/article/2016/09/21/2423487-lice-goncourt-renaudot-yasmina-reza-amuse-melanger-genres.html>> [accessed 10 November 2016] (para. 5 of 16).

Examining the ways in which the four authors use their autobiographies to activate personal and historical memories, this thesis has argued that the literary depiction of exile assists the four authors in beginning to explore and articulate their status as exiled subjects. In Bouraoui's narratives, the narrative persona seems to be increasingly coming to terms with her national, gendered, and sexual otherness; Pineau's narrator appears to have embraced her French and Creole identities; and in Tadjó's autofictional text, Nina considers returning to Abidjan permanently. In contrast, *Métisse blanche* discusses the narrator-protagonist Kim's exile within Vietnam and her departure to France but does not address her exile in France nor her return to Vietnam thirty years later. This text can thus be considered as only one part of Lefèvre's autobiography, and the reader only receives a complete depiction of the author's multifaceted exile by reading it alongside her sequel *Retour*. By paying particular attention to the ambiguous endings of each text, this thesis concludes that the literary heroines of the four writers remain troubled by their multiple experiences of exile.

Other connections between these narratives include a sustained emphasis on events during the authors' childhood and adolescence, a crucial formative period for their future selfhood. The tropes of home, return, and belonging also bring the texts together, as does an investigation of how issues of gender and sexuality add different layers to the protagonists' experiences of exile. The four authors all reveal in their writing the patriarchal frameworks which hinder the roles and possibilities available to them in their birth country, and which often continue to hold them back following their displacement to metropolitan France.

Yet several differences have also emerged between the four female authors. A particularly striking divergence is their use of the French language. Although adopting the language of the former coloniser to write postcolonial narratives of exile and estrangement is

problematic,<sup>7</sup> the language employed by the four authors is undoubtedly inflected by their native culture, demonstrating their continued attachment to their indigenous culture and a certain resistance to the hegemonic frameworks of metropolitan France. Bouraoui is the most creative in terms of linguistic innovation, playing with the language and form she uses in order to construct a new linguistic identity within the space of her narratives. In *Le Jour du séisme* (1999), the language is repetitive, fragmented, and agrammatical.<sup>8</sup> Sentences are disrupted by commas which separate the verb from the direct object, creating a lilting, soothing rhythm which contrasts sharply with the tense semantic content: ‘il [le séisme] tient, en otage. Il brise, la prière. Il appuie, sur la gorge’ (p. 28). Pineau employs the metonymic gap, ‘that cultural gap formed when appropriations of a colonial language insert unglossed words, phrases or passages from a first language’,<sup>9</sup> by infusing her French with Creole terms and vocabulary. This is indicative of her desire to foreground her strong Caribbean identity and of her affinities with the movement of *créolité*;<sup>10</sup> however, since her texts are predominantly published in Paris, her use of Creole could also be interpreted as a form of exoticism, with the view of satisfying a metropolitan French readership intrigued by Antillean culture. Tadjó’s language, in contrast, is simple and concise. In a 2011 interview for the pan-African cultural magazine *Présence Africaine*, Tadjó described her style as poetic prose,

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<sup>7</sup> Many scholars have discussed at length the political implications of using the French language in postcolonial literature. For instance, in *Women Writers in Francophone Africa* (Oxford; New York: Berg Publishers, 2000), Nicki Hitchcott describes French as a ‘politically loaded linguistic tool’ (p. 156), while Patrick Corcoran explains the historical journey of the French language from colonial to postcolonial contexts in *The Cambridge Introduction to Francophone Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). As Corcoran observes, ‘the tool that had been used to assimilate populations to a French way of viewing the world, and a French ordering of affairs in general, was also used by those who sought to reject that order and win independence from France’ (p. 5).

<sup>8</sup> Nina Bouraoui, *Le Jour du séisme* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 1999). All subsequent references to this text will appear in parentheses in the main body of this chapter.

<sup>9</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts*, 3rd edn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013 [2000]), pp. 152–53.

<sup>10</sup> In 2016, Pineau published *La Guadeloupe à travers la carte postale ancienne* (Paris: HC Éditions, 2016), a collection of postcards through which she tells the history of Guadeloupe, focusing on the legacies of the slave trade. This text is further evidence of Pineau’s desire to engage with important moments in Guadeloupe’s past and explore her Caribbean heritage. As has been argued in this thesis, however, she does not fully subscribe to the *créolité* movement.

explaining that it takes considerable effort to strip back her language: ‘en épurant le plus possible mon écriture, en élaguant sans cesse, j’essaie d’arriver à une fausse simplicité qui est le résultat de tout un travail’.<sup>11</sup> Her creativity lies in her use of intertextuality: she layers *Loin de mon père* with extracts from published books, fictional letters, diary entries, and email correspondence from the different characters in order to demonstrate the multiplicity of voices, perspectives, and cultures which form a person’s identity.<sup>12</sup> Lefèvre, in contrast, is the most traditional of the four authors in terms of her use of language, perhaps also indicative of her older age, and the fact that, in contrast to the others, she was educated at the height of the French colonial empire. Her descriptions are poetic but she writes in standard metropolitan French, and any references to Vietnamese vocabulary or cultural items are clearly explained. Even though her narratives reflect at length on her racial *métissage*, her writing itself is not *métissé*.

While each author has demonstrated the crucial role played by warfare in their exile and displacement, their autofictional narratives reveal that warfare has affected them in a myriad of different ways. As I argued in Chapter Five, Lefèvre is the only author to be affected by war personally, living through both the First Indochina War against France from 1946 to 1954, and the Vietnam War, fought between North and South Vietnam between 1955 and 1975. War is one of the principal factors in her exile across Vietnam, as her family are displaced across the country in search of safety. Bouraoui’s protagonist Nina, in contrast, is not a direct victim of the Algerian War; she was born in 1967, five years after the end of the conflict which resulted in Algerian independence. However, because she carries French blood

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<sup>11</sup> Véronique Tadjo, ‘Véronique Tadjo’, *Présence Africaine*, 184 (2011–12), 261–64 (p. 263).

<sup>12</sup> Véronique Tadjo, Email to Antonia Wimbush (6 June 2016). When asked why she included these different textual extracts, Tadjo replied ‘je m’intéresse de plus en plus à la multiplicité des voix. Les textes apportent un éclairage différent. Ils sont écrits donc figés dans le temps alors que la narration est influencée par l’histoire qui se déroule sous nos yeux. Je trouve aussi que c’est ainsi que nous vivons’. See Appendix, p. 295.

within her through her French mother, she feels responsible for the barbarity carried out against Algerian citizens. Examining Nina's situation through Marianne Hirsch's concept of 'post-memory', Mona El Khoury demonstrates how the trauma of the conflict is passed on to her affectively through the memories and photographs of her family.<sup>13</sup>

In Tadjó's narrative, the after-effects of war bring about Nina's exile. Her native Côte d'Ivoire has been torn apart by the First Ivorian Civil War, fought between 2002 and 2007. In contrast, Pineau's young narrator never witnesses warfare or its devastating consequences first-hand, even though it served as a catalyst for the family's displacements across the Atlantic, through her father and grandfather's active military participation in the two World Wars. Studying the representations of colonial and postcolonial wars across the four authors has led to new insights regarding the complex motivations for their displacements and has highlighted the role that the French colonial system continues to play within the Francophone postcolonial world.

This thesis has focused explicitly on contemporary female Francophone writers, combining material on prolific, well-known authors from North Africa and the Francophone Caribbean with relatively understudied Ivorian and Vietnamese narratives. It is the first critical study to unite the four authors, and while they clearly cannot be considered as representative of all female writers originating from their specific locations, this thesis has revealed new and diverse cross-cultural comparisons of Francophone women's exile and estrangement. In their introduction to *Women's Writing in Twenty-First-Century France* (2013), Amaleena Damlé and Gill Rye question the need to prioritise women's writing over writing by men in the twenty-first century, concluding that 'it is our (feminist) position that

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<sup>13</sup> Mona El Khoury, 'To Be or Not to Be Métis: Nina Bouraoui's Embodied Memory of the Colonial Fracture', *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, 22.1 (2017), 123–35 (p. 127).



the study of writing by women offers crucial — and unparalleled — insights into women’s lives, experiences and creativity, as well as into their perspectives on a range of issues’.<sup>14</sup> Responding to their call to foreground female articulations of lived experience, this thesis has demonstrated that women experience exile and otherness differently to men, because of the patriarchal frameworks inherently embedded within contemporary society. Yet as this research has also confirmed, although Francophone women’s writing has developed in parallel with writing by women from metropolitan France, it has not been directly informed by the same Western models of feminist thought. As I argued in Chapter One, the feminist movement known as *l’écriture féminine*, which has been extremely influential for contemporary women authors in metropolitan France, neglects to consider how racial difference intersects with debates about gender equality, a focal point for the authors under consideration here.

There is much room for further research on female self-articulations of exile, which might investigate themes of exile and displacement across different media, considering how visual artists, film makers, and photographers depict their own exile within the Francophone postcolonial context. Furthermore, the corpus could be widened to examine understudied authors from areas of the Francophone world not considered in this thesis, such as French Canada and across Oceania, perhaps questioning whether islands offer a particularly productive space for an analysis of experiences of exile. A transcultural comparison across different linguistic frameworks would be another avenue of investigation; it would be productive to question how the legacy of French colonialism on female writers’ subjectivities is comparable to that of other European colonial projects. This comparative line of inquiry is

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<sup>14</sup> Amaleena Damlé and Gill Rye, ‘Women’s Writing in Twenty-First-Century France: Introduction’, in *Women’s Writing in Twenty-First-Century France: Life as Literature*, ed. by Amaleena Damlé and Gill Rye (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), pp. 3–16 (p. 3).

informed by Charles Forsdick's 2015 reflections on the discipline of Francophone postcolonial studies. Forsdick writes:

if there is still to be a meaningful cross-cultural debate around 'le postcolonial' — cross-Channel, trans-European, trans-Atlantic intercontinental, and modulated according to a variety of other axes of exchange — then the shared but often obscured roots in transcolonial, transnational and transcultural comparatism constitute one of the most fruitful areas in which this might take place.<sup>15</sup>

Above all, this thesis has revealed how Bouraoui, Pineau, Tadjó, and Lefèvre facilitate a critical engagement with postcolonial models of identity and displacement through their autofictional writing because while they are not, strictly speaking, exiled individuals, the disconnection and psychic dissonance they experience as a result of their multiple layers of otherness is more closely associated with the paradigm of exile, rather than with postcolonial models which celebrate difference as a form of resistance. This, in turn, has led to a more nuanced understanding of their gendered exile, and one which transcends geographic displacement. It is my aspiration that this study will compel others to turn to this important and neglected area of study.

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<sup>15</sup> Charles Forsdick, 'Beyond Francophone Postcolonial Studies: Exploring the Ends of Comparison', *Modern Languages Open* (2015) <<http://www.modernlanguagesopen.org/articles/10.3828/mlo.v0i0.56/>> [accessed 7 June 2017] (para. 34 of 35).





















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