

TRANSCULTURALITY AND THE FRANCOPHONE MOTHER

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ABSTRACT

ALLISON SPELLMAN CONNOLLY. Transculturality and the Francophone Mother
(Under the direction of Dominique Fisher)

This dissertation examines the representation of complex mother figures presented in Francophone literature. I focus my analysis on literature from three distinct Francophone regions: the French Caribbean, North Africa, and Quebec. Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle (1972) by Simone Schwarz-Bart and L'espérance-macadam (1995) and L'exil selon Julia (1996) by Gisèle Pineau put forth both positive and negative mother figures from Guadeloupe. La femme sans sépulture (2002) by Assia Djebar and Des rêves et des assassins (1995) by Malika Mokeddem depict the struggles of North African mothers and their children, both in Algeria and abroad. Finally, from Quebec, Ying Chen's L'Ingratitude (1995) and Abla Farhoud's Le bonheur à la queue glissante (2004) demonstrate the repressive patriarchal structure that inhibits mother figures and has lasting repercussions in the lives of their children. Close reading of these texts reveals the multiple roles mothers play in postcolonial contexts, including primary breadwinner, guardian of culture, and participant in a war of liberation.

In examining mother figures within and across various Francophone regions, this dissertation uncovers the complexities of the maternal role in transcultural societies. Drawing links between women of different continents, cultural heritages, and religious traditions, the study examines problematic issues pertaining to mother figures in postcolonial contexts, including those linked to exile, gender, and symbolic violence. I argue that the seven novels chosen for this dissertation resuscitate women's forgotten

voices. Furthermore, while recognizing the powerful role held by mother figures in certain circumstances, I uncover the nuances of the maternal figure, which point to the distinct disadvantages she experiences in postcolonial, transcultural societies, including but not limited to language barriers, isolation and repression by the patriarchy.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to Annette Sampon-Nicolas, who has been a great inspiration to me and who has held my hand in every stage of my education in the last decade.

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ABBREVIATIONS

| | |
|----|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| PV | <u>Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle</u> , Simone Schwarz-Bart |
| ES | <u>L'Exil selon Julia</u> , Gisèle Pineau |
| EM | <u>L'espérance-macadam</u> , Gisèle Pineau |
| FS | <u>La Femme sans sépulture</u> , Assia Djebar |
| RA | <u>Des rêves et des assassins</u> , Malika Mokeddem |
| IG | <u>L'Ingratitude</u> , Ying Chen |
| BQ | <u>Le Bonheur a la queue glissante</u> , Abla Farhoud |

CHAPTER 1

SITUATING THE POSTCOLONIAL

The field of postcolonial studies traces its roots to the publication of Edward Said's Orientalism. This monumental work has sparked numerous debates which continue more than twenty-five years after its publication. In this book, Said describes the notion of the Orient as a European discursive construction, dating to the post-Enlightenment period: "It is rather a distribution of geopolitical awareness into aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts."¹ In placing themselves in opposition to the Oriental "Other," Europeans seek and achieve domination. "Indeed, my real argument is that Orientalism is—and does not simply represent—a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture, and as such has less to do with the Orient than it does with 'our' world" (12). Although Said never employs the term "postcolonial" in this landmark work, he forges a path for postcolonial studies in bringing attention to modes of representation at work in the notion of the "Other" and putting forth what Bill Ashcroft refers to as "post-colonial textual resistance."² Grounding his argument in Foucault's notion of discourse,³ Said proposes that one examine Orientalism as a discursive formation.⁴

¹ Edward W. Said, Orientalism (New York: Random House, 1979) 12.

² Bill Ashcroft, "Introduction," The Post-colonial Studies Reader, eds. Bill Ashcroft et al. (New York: Routledge, 1995) 85.

Postcolonial theorists such as Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha have in large part built their academic careers as an elaboration on and response to Said's propos as presented in Orientalism and later works such as Culture and Imperialism.⁵ Described as a feminist,⁶ Marxist, and deconstructionist, Spivak grew up in India and has spent much of her professional life in the United States. In an interview with Elizabeth Groz, she underscores "otherness" as she has experienced it: "It seems to me that if, as someone of Asian provenance working in the United States with a certain *carte d'identité* in Western Europe and Britain, I think I have been really pushed to the extreme of having to take stock and having to see exactly what it was that I was up to" (The Post-colonial Critic 16). Spivak's "otherness" has forced her to continually define and justify herself in the academic world in which she has carved a place for herself. Her analyses also consider the position of subaltern voices.⁷ One of her best-known essays, "Can the Subaltern

³ According to Foucault, discourse is linked to both knowledge and power. Discourse on a specific topic is created at a key moment in history, by those who hold power, to enable discussion of that topic. Yet, Said does not elaborate on this. In his essay "Roads Taken and Not Taken," Said makes reference to Foucault's influence on his work: "In short he deals with texts as part of a system of cultural diffusion, rigidly controlled, tightly organized, difficult to penetrate. He argues that everything stated in a field like literary discourse or medical discourse is produced only with the most selective method, with little regard for individual genius. I have argued that similar things take place when 'other' cultures and peoples are discussed. Each statement is therefore a material effort to incorporate a particular piece of reality as selectively as possible" (150). So although Said acknowledges Foucault's influence, he never undertakes an in-depth discussion of Foucault's theory in conjunction with his own. Edward W. Said, "Roads Taken and Not Taken in Contemporary Criticism," The World, the Text, and the Critic (Cambridge, MA: Harvard U Press, 1983) 140-57.

⁴ Said brings forth the issue of Orientalism as a Western discursive formation, but does not elaborate on this. Postcolonial theorists, including Spivak and Bhabha, further develop the concept.

⁵ Edward W. Said, Culture and Imperialism (New York : Knopf, 1993).

⁶ Spivak rejects the term "feminist," insisting that she is an "anti-sexist." See her 1984 interview with Elizabeth Groz, "Criticism, Feminism and The Institution," published in The Post-colonial Critic. Ed. Sarah Harasym, (London: Routledge, 1990) 16.

Speak?,” claims that the colonized subject cannot speak due to the lasting effects of colonial historiography. His or her “voice” is formed within the theoretical framework of colonialism, as the subaltern knows only the oppressor’s version of history. The history of the subaltern, both personal and collective, is thus colored by colonialism. This, according to Spivak, is that which the subaltern *cannot* speak.⁸

Homi Bhabha, also from India, has published numerous articles on postcolonial theory, examining the blurred lines which exist between cultures in a postcolonial region. Like Said and Spivak, he is influenced by Foucault, but he also leans heavily on Frantz Fanon’s theories to better articulate his own. Charles Forsdick and David Murphy claim that he is, “perhaps the critic whose work has been most central to the development of postcolonial theory in the past decade.”⁹ Rather than accept the binary categories Said describes in Orientalism, Bhabha claims that colonialism is a complex phenomenon that can foster cultural hybridity. In contrast to Said and Spivak who argue that the Other has no place within postcolonial discourse, he argues that there is a third space—that of hybridity:

Hybridity is the sign of the productivity of colonial power, its shifting forces and fixities; [...] Hybridity is the revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects. It displays the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination. It unsettles the mimetic or narcissistic demands of colonial power but reimplicates

⁷ The term “subaltern” refers to any group of inferior rank, and can therefore be employed in discussions concerning the military, politics, race, gender, and ethnicity. The Subaltern Studies Group started in the 1980s aiming to rethink and rewrite the history of India.

⁸ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” The Post-colonial Studies Reader, eds. Bill Ashcroft et al. (New York: Routledge, 1995) 28.

⁹ Charles Forsdick and David Murphy, eds. Francophone Postcolonial Studies: A Critical Introduction (London: Arnold, 2003) 6.

its identifications in strategies of subversion that turn the gaze of the discriminated back upon the eye of power. For the colonial hybrid is the articulation of the ambivalent space where the rite of power is enacted on the site of desire, making its objects at once disciplinary and disseminatory...¹⁰

Hybridity creates a “Third Space” of enunciation. Peter Childs and Patrick Williams describe this hybrid space: “The indeterminate Third Space therefore ensures that cultural signs are not fixed but can be appropriated, rehistoricized, translated, and reread.”¹¹ In this hybrid space, the oppressed person seeks and obtains the power to speak out against his or her oppressor. Yet the question that remains is *can* and *how* does literature offer a third space, that is to say, a space of resistance in which the Other can inscribe his or her voice?¹² My analysis will examine this question through the work of several postcolonial Francophone authors, including but not limited to Assia Djebar, Simone Schwarz-Bart and Ying Chen. Consideration of literature as a possible third space impacts my study of the mother figure, as it attracts attention to discourses that situate themselves in opposition to the repressive forces of patriarchal systems. Launched in English departments, the field of postcolonial studies is expanding into other academic disciplines, including French and Francophone studies. Yet, postcolonial

¹⁰ Homi K. Bhabha, “Signs Taken for Wonders” The Post-colonial Studies Reader, eds. Bill Ashcroft et al. (New York: Routledge, 1995) 34-35.

¹¹ Peter Childs and Patrick Williams, Introduction to Post-Colonial Theory (New York: Prentice Hall, 1996) 142.

¹² In Fredric Jameson’s 1986 article “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” he claims that all third-world literature is national allegory. This declaration caused a great deal of debate, including Aijaz Ahmad’s response, in which he claims that Jameson reproduced the very colonialist relationship that he had meant to criticize. Although discussed extensively at the time, Jameson’s assertion is no longer a topic of debate. Frederic Jameson, “Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism,” Social Text 15 (1986): 65-88; Aijaz Ahmad, “Jameson’s Rhetoric of Otherness and the ‘National Allegory,’” Social Text 17 (1987): 3-25.

studies have been slow to take root in French departments on both sides of the Atlantic, due in part to resistance of its Anglo-Saxon origins.¹³ As Emily Apter remarks,

Many French intellectuals seem to have difficulty in grasping the pertinence of postcolonial theory to the contemporary politics of culture, despite their recognition that Maghrebian, Caribbean, West African and Indochinese exclusion from mainstream ‘francité’ continues to inflect internal political and cultural affairs as well as the export of French culture abroad.¹⁴

The book Francophone Postcolonial Studies: A Critical Introduction, edited by Charles Forsdick and David Murphy, seeks to place postcolonial studies within a Francophone context. In the introduction, they explain: “One of the ironies of this ‘French’ reluctance to engage with postcolonial theory is that the postcolonial debate was, in part, launched by anti-colonial French-language writers such as Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi and Jean-Paul Sartre [...]”(8). Postcolonial thinkers note the importance of French philosophers such as Derrida and Foucault in the development of postcolonial theory, especially Foucault’s theories on power and Derrida’s work on language and hospitality. While the voices of these French thinkers have played and continue to play an important role in postcolonial studies, much postcolonial literary analysis has dealt with texts written in English. In recent years, however, scholars such as Anne Donadey, Françoise Lionnet, Michael Dash, Dominique Fisher, Mireille Rosello and Valérie Orlando have examined Francophone literature through a postcolonial lens, moving beyond debates on the “Third Space” and the subaltern to examine how postcolonial

¹³ In many French universities, the teaching of literatures of former colonies is still met with resistance. Francophone literatures are often taught solely in Comparative Literature departments.

¹⁴ Qtd. in J. Michael Dash, “Postcolonial thought and the Francophone Caribbean,” Francophone Postcolonial Studies: A Critical Introduction, eds Charles Forsdick and David Murphy (London: Arnold, 2003) 233.

literature can rewrite history and question the status of historical discourse as an objective one.

Post-colonial or Postcolonial?

Before undertaking a discussion of literature dubbed “postcolonial,” it is necessary to define and examine the historical significance of the term. “Postcolonial” was first used in the late 1950s when referring to post-independence Marxist states. It therefore denoted a chronological reality of the post-World War II world. Evolution of the term has, however, incited confusion. The terms “post-colonial,” “postcolonial,” and “postcolonialism” are problematic and need to be situated before examining the nature of contemporary postcolonial studies. In the introductory chapter of Nomadic Voices of Exile, Valérie Orlando reveals the confusion elicited by the terms in the last decades:

In recent years confusion has resulted over the term postcolonial although it has existed since 1959. The word postcolonialism was not given a hyphenated form in its 1989 Oxford English Dictionary entry. However, in the OED the compound exists alongside other compounds such as post-adolescent and post-cognitive. Therefore, the concept of “postcolonialism” is still a “compound in which the ‘post’- is a prefix which governs the subsequent element.”¹⁵ ‘Postcolonial’ thus becomes which is ‘post’ or after colonial.¹⁶

In his article “On the Hyphen in ‘Post-Colonial,’” Bill Ashcroft discusses at length the post-colonial/postcolonial debate:

¹⁵ French and Francophone critics resist the term “postcolonial,” due to its Anglo-Saxon origins. Each country has its own term denoting the literature encompassed in this study. The terms include, amongst others, *diversité culturelle*, *littérature migrante*, *littérature de diaspora* and *transculturalité*.

¹⁶ Valerie Orlando, Nomadic Voices of Exile: Feminine Identity in Francophone Literature of the Maghreb (Athens, OH: Ohio U Press, 1999) 25-26.

The hyphen puts an emphasis on the discursive and material effects of the historical ‘fact’ of colonialism, while the term ‘postcolonialism’ has come to represent an increasingly indiscriminate attention to cultural difference and marginality of all kinds, whether a consequence of the historical experience of colonialism or not.¹⁷

This study will employ the term “postcolonial” as it is presented by Ashcroft, taking into account the impact of colonialism on contemporary political and sociological realities in former colonies.

Similarly, in his book Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction, Robert Young alludes to the importance of colonial history in contemporary postcolonial studies:

The postcolonial does not privilege the colonial. It is concerned with colonial history only to the extent that history has determined the configurations and power structures of the present, to the extent that much of the world still lives in the violent disruptions of its wake, and to the extent that the anti-colonial liberation movements remain the source and inspiration of its politics.¹⁸

So, postcolonial studies are in large part defined by the legacy of the institution of colonialism. Although decolonization provided people with a new agency, any postcolonial society struggling to redefine itself undoubtedly relies, to some degree or another, on structures and traditions imposed by colonialism. For instance, in many countries with a history of colonialism, government business is still conducted in the language of the former colonizer and schools are still modeled after the former

¹⁷ Bill Ashcroft, “On the hyphen in ‘post-colonial,’” New Literatures Review 32 (1996): 23.

¹⁸ Robert J.C. Young, Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2001) 4.

colonizers' educational systems. On the other hand, these same societies resuscitate cultural traditions virtually stamped out by the oppressor. Authors of the French Caribbean, for example, often depict characters who lean on magic or practice Vodou¹⁹ as a way to deal with the challenges presented to them in their daily lives.²⁰ The treatment of this and other controversial topics put forth by postcolonial literatures are at least partially molded by colonial rule and its legacies. As Francophone political and social realities change, so too do the literatures of those regions and the subjects they explore.

Postcolonial literary transformations in the Francophone world

The first postcolonial Francophone novels published, in the late 60s and early 70s, tended to have strong nationalistic tones and messages,²¹ but subsequent years and distance from colonial rule have ushered in an evolution in subject matter and literary style, especially in the last two decades. Francophone writers of the postcolonial era deal with a variety of topics, including living and writing in exile, the questions of bilingualism and diglossia, as well as the survival of traditions passed down through the generations.

¹⁹ The terms *vodou*, *vodun*, and *voodoo* elicit a great amount of confusion and misunderstanding. When capitalized, *Vodou* and *Vodun* refer to the religion whose roots are in West Africa. When written in lower case letters, they refer to the deities honored by the religion. Although suppressed by the colonizers, the practices linked to these religions survived and are practiced in Africa and various African diasporas. *Voodoo* refers specifically to the vodou traditions of New Orleans, but use of the term is often used incorrectly and in an offensive manner.

²⁰ See, for example, *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle*, by Simone Schwarz-Bart. In this novel Man Cia is an elderly woman renowned for healing and witchcraft. Her power comes from her mysterious ability to change people's destinies. Simone Schwarz-Bart, *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle* (Paris: Seuil, 1972).

²¹ See, for example, *Soleil des indépendances* by Ahmadou Kourouma. Ahmadou Kourouma, *Soleil des indépendances* (Montreal : Presses de l'université de Montreal, 1967).

These literatures, although written in French, display numerous characteristics which move them away from western traditions. One can classify them as “minor literatures,” as they fulfill Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s requirements for this sub-genre as laid out in their book Kafka: Pour une littérature mineure. These classifications include plurilinguism, acculturation and a marked “deterritorialization”²² of the language, strong political tones present in the text, and a sense of cultural diversity that permeates the novels.²³ While Deleuze and Guattari dub these works “minor,” they stress the fact that minor literature is the only literature that is really revolutionary due to the challenges it presents to the definitions of national culture and identity and, consequently, to state apparatus.²⁴

Like Said, Deleuze and Guattari have had a marked influence on postcolonial theory, especially on Edouard Glissant’s theory of rhizomatic identity. In an interview with Lise Gauvin, Glissant expounds on the idea as he understands it:

[...] il y a aussi un mouvement que je caractérise comme ceci : les identités à racine unique font peu à peu place aux identités-relations, c’est-à-dire aux identités rhizomes. Il ne s’agit pas de se déraciner, il s’agit de concevoir la racine moins intolérante, moins sectaire : une identité-racine qui ne tue pas autour d’elle

²² In Experimental Nations, Réda Bensmaïa elaborates on several ways in which North African writers have dealt with so-called “deterritorialized” language. Bensmaïa lists the following language types: vernacular (local and spoken), vehicular (“official” language used for communication between towns and across regions), referential (found in songs, proverbs, and rhetoric), and mythic (literary Arabic employed in religious contexts). Réda Bensmaïa, Experimental Nations, trans. Alyson Waters (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003) 16-18.

²³ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Kafka: Pour une littérature mineure (Paris : Editions de Minuit, 1975) 33.

²⁴ Patrick Chamoiseau has accused Deleuze and Guattari of limiting their study of literature to western contexts. Their work therefore does not directly apply to Francophone literature. Rather, their theory on rhizomatic identity is considered a springboard for subsequent theories on identity, including Glissant’s interpretation of rhizomatic identity.

mais qui au contraire étend ses branches vers les autres. Ce que d'après Deleuze et Guattari j'appelle une identité-rhizome.²⁵

While Deleuze and Guattari perceive the *identité-rhizome* as essential to the *devenir*²⁶ of an individual and to attaining one's identity, Glissant's interpretation of the idea is that one's identity is in constant evolution and mutation. Rather than eventually achieving an ultimate, definitive identity, one possesses an ever-changing identity that transforms with the passage of time and experience. The multiple roots to which Glissant refers bring to mind the pluralistic nature exhibited by minor, or better, Creole,²⁷ literatures. The notion of region and place is in his eyes of little importance since Creoleness emphasizes the importance of *métissage* and supports the idea of an identity in constant evolution.²⁸ Yet, this view is problematic. Although grouped under a "Creole" umbrella, literatures of specific countries or even regions vary in subject matter, language, ethnic heritage, tradition, and political and social realities. They attest to the great diversity of

²⁵ Edouard Glissant, *Introduction à une Poétique du Divers* (Paris : Editions Gallimard, 1996) 132.

²⁶ *devenir*—to become. For Deleuze and Guattari, "a becoming" represents a moment of *métissage*. Cliff Stagoll describes that moment as one in which one "becomes different." Stagoll explains: "Rather than a product, final or interim, becoming is the very dynamism of change, situated between heterogenous terms and tending towards no particular goal or end-state." Cliff Stagoll, "Becoming," *The Deleuze Dictionary*, Ed. Adrian Parr (New York: Columbia UP, 2005) 21-22. See also Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 1987).

²⁷ In this context, the term "Creole literature" encompasses any literature whose people have a history of displacement, diaspora, hybridity and *métissage*, including works from the French West Indies, Quebec as well as the islands of the Indian Ocean.

²⁸ In *Introduction à une Poétique du Divers*, Glissant identifies some nuances of Creolization in the Americas. He refers to Native American cultures as *la Meso-America*. He dubs areas with strong outside influences, such as those brought to the Caribbean and Brazil by way of Africa, as *une Neo-America*. People who immigrated to the Americas fall into one of three categories: *le migrant armé*, who came to conquer; *le migrant familial*, who came in one of the waves of immigration; and *le migrant nu*, slaves who were forced to settle in America (13-14).

experiences which manifest and coexist within postcolonial societies, lending themselves to cross-cultural comparison.

Creoleness and identitarian cultural theory

This study is framed within the theory of Creoleness, but in order to understand the roots of the movement, one must first turn to Negritude, a preceding movement which is both literary and activist.²⁹ Two of Negritude's founders, Léopold Senghor and Aimé Césaire, define the movement in different ways. According to Senghor, Negritude is "the ensemble of black cultural values."³⁰ These values are what differentiate the Black man and his literary creations from "the Other," the white man who acted as colonizer and oppressor. Césaire, who first celebrated Negritude in his Cahier d'un retour au pays natal,³¹ says that Negritude is, "the awareness of being black, the simple acknowledgement of a fact which implies the acceptance of it, a taking charge of one's destiny as a black man, of one's history and culture" (qtd. in Kesteloot 105). Negritude is at the same time a rejection of the white man and an affirmation of Black identity. The movement promotes a universal black identity which links all people of African descent, including those from the Americas. Kofi Anyinefa explains, "It claims that all Black people, regardless of their historical or geographical situation, would share the same

²⁹ The movement was founded after World War I by l'*Etudiant noir*, a group of African students living in Paris.

³⁰ Qtd. in Lilyan Kesteloot, Black Writers in French: a Literary History of Negritude (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1991) 103.

³¹ Aimé Césaire, Cahier d'un retour au pays natal (Paris : Présence Africaine, 1983).

cultural values defined in opposition to and distinct from those of the West.”³² However, Negritude’s universal approach does not provide answers to the questions unique to Black West Indians, including problems of language, the erasing of group history, and matters of acculturation, deportation and diaspora.

It is in this context that Martinican intellectuals such as Frantz Fanon, Edouard Glissant, Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant strive to develop the concept of an identity specific to their islands. In Peau noire, masques blancs, Fanon begins to question Negritudian ideas, and a new generation of Martinican intellectuals continues along this path, making a more pronounced break with Negritude than had their predecessor.³³ Glissant, in expounding his movement of *Antillanité*, further distances himself from Negritude. In Le Discours antillais,³⁴ Glissant discusses the notion of a culture specific to the French Antilles. Instead of accepting the concept of a “pure” black identity, he promotes *métissage* and diversity.³⁵

Negritude reintroduces Africa into the Creole conscience, but the movement cannot respond to the rapidly changing international political climate and the concerns of French West Indians regarding origin, culture, languages, and diasporas. For Fanon,

³² Koffi Anyinefa, “Hello and Goodbye to Négritude: Senghor, Dadié, Dongala, and America,” Research in African Literatures 21 (1996): 53.

³³ Frantz Fanon, Peau noire masques blancs (Paris : Editions du Seuil, 1952).

³⁴ Edouard Glissant, Le Discours antillais (Paris:Seuil, 1981).

³⁵ Peter Hallward divides Glissant’s theoretical works into “early” and “late” periods. The “early” works are dominated by Le Discours antillais and focus on the author’s perception of Martinique as a nation. The “late” works, which include Poétique de la relation (1990), stress the importance of wandering and chaos as means to form identity, refuting the notion of *enracinement* (rootedness) to one place. The idea of nation is thus undermined in this later period. Peter Hallward, “Edouard Glissant between the Singular and the Specific,” Yale Journal of Criticism 11:2 (1998) 441-64.

Glissant, and the founders of Creoleness, Negritude proves to be a necessary forerunner teaching them to proudly recognize their African roots. They are anxious to explore their heritage as were their predecessors, yet their identity is distinct from that of their African counterparts, as they distance themselves from national, racial, and static cultural identities.³⁶ The Creole point of departure differs from that of their African contemporaries, resulting in a literature that is acutely aware of the lasting impact of deportation and slavery.

As people of a mixed heritage with no language of origin and a history of deportation, the founders of Creoleness are less interested in Negritude than in cultural diversity. Whereas Glissant's early work concentrates on the cultural identity of Martinique, the theoreticians of Creoleness encompass not only their island, but other diasporic regions. In Eloge de la créolité, the first Creole manifesto, Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant proclaim: "Le créole, notre langue première à nous Antillais, Guyanais, Mascarins, est le véhicule originel de notre moi profond, de notre inconscient collectif, de notre génie populaire, cette langue demeure la rivière de notre créolité alluviale."³⁷ So the Creole language, although based on several dialects, is the thread that unites the diverse peoples whose African ancestors were taken from their people and forced into slavery.³⁸

Like Negritude, Creoleness celebrates African or Caribbean cultures not often recognized by the West. Whereas Negritude proclaims a pure African culture,

³⁶ Even Africa is not unified, considering the fact that there are 54 countries on the continent and numerous linguistic, cultural, and religious differences to be taken into consideration.

³⁷ Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant, Eloge de la Créolité (Paris : Gallimard, 1989) 43.

³⁸ The use of Creole was prohibited during colonization and was not put into writing until 1980.

Creoleness announces one with multiple roots: “Notre Histoire est une tresse d’histoires. Nous avons goûté à toutes les langues, à toutes les parlures”³⁹ (Eloge 26). Moreover, Aimé Césaire and his contemporaries use French, the language of their oppressors, as a means of expression, since the use of Creole was discouraged at that time. Conversely, Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant are not satisfied with West Indian literature that is uniquely French and proclaim that the Creole language should be incorporated into their literary creations: “La langue créole est donc une des forces de notre expressivité” (Eloge 44). Since *Créolophones* have a mixed linguistic heritage, their written word should reflect that heritage:⁴⁰ “Nous sommes tout à la fois, l’Europe, l’Afrique, nourris d’apports asiatiques, levantins, indiens, et nous relevons aussi des survivances de l’Amérique précolombienne” (Eloge 27).

Another important aspect of Creoleness is that of orality. A subsequent manifesto on Creoleness, Lettres Créoles, by Chamoiseau and Confiant, further examines the role of history and language in contemporary Caribbean literature.⁴¹ The authors also explain the perceived birth of the *conteur créole*,⁴² a male plantation slave who serves as *gardien des mémoires*,⁴³ (81) transmitting his people’s stories and traditions to his sons. This

³⁹ *Parlures* is an important term. It includes all forms of language, from official languages to dialects. This term is especially pertinent to postcolonial literature since the use of dialects and regional languages was forbidden under many colonial regimes. Incorporation of these once taboo languages into postcolonial texts is a way to decolonize the language and carve the Third Space of enunciation.

⁴⁰ There are of course, many different ways to weave Creoleness into a text. A writer may choose to produce texts written solely in Creole, as has Raphaël Confiant. He or she may also integrate Creole quotations into a French text or “creolize” a French text with various cultural referents as does Simone Schwarz-Bart. Maryse Condé often includes translations at the bottom of the page.

⁴¹ Patrick Chamoiseau and Raphaël Confiant, Lettres créoles (Paris : Gallimard, 1999).

⁴² *conteur créole*—Creole storyteller

⁴³ *gardien des mémoires*—guardian of memories

*oralituran*⁴⁴ reminds us of the African griot, yet in an American context, where the institution of slavery plays a large role in forming identities.

Glissant's Poétique de la Relation is key in understanding the development of Creoleness since the publication of the first Creole manifesto. Although not considered a theoretician of Creoleness, his influence on the group is monumental. Chamoiseau describes Glissant as, "our great writer and our great thinker. Everything is there. [...] La Créolité takes place through and with Glissant's thought" (qtd. in Hallward 442). His early cultural theory enables the creation of Creoleness, and his subsequent writings complement and elaborate on the Creole manifestos discussed above.

To understand Poétique de la Relation, it is useful to have knowledge of the evolution of Glissant's work at the end of the twentieth century.⁴⁵ Hallward explains that Glissant first argues for the "re-territorialization of an independent Martinique, so as to celebrate an eventual global de-territorialization" (441). As his cultural theory evolves, however, Martinique is mentioned less and less, for Glissant now advocates an infinite, placeless Creolization, "a rather more far-reaching incorporation, into the univocity of a new world order based on nothing other than internal metamorphosis, dislocation and exchange" (Hallward 442). So Glissant shifts his focus from his own island to the world itself. The importance of a sense of place is eventually minimized, while the value of

⁴⁴ *oralituran*—one who remembers important information and transmits it to others in conversation or in story form presented to large groups. This figure, presented by Chamoiseau and Confiant in Lettres créoles, brings to mind the importance of *oralité* and *oraliture* not only in Creole culture, but also in other postcolonial cultures in which stories contain a people's collective memory. *Oralité* refers to the importance of storytelling as a means of transmission of culture, and *oraliture* is the inscription of *oralité* into a literary text.

⁴⁵ See note 35.

wandering, or nomadism, is emphasized.⁴⁶ He distinguishes, for instance, between two types of identity: *l'identité-racine* (root identity) and *l'identité-relation* (relational identity). The former is molded by tradition, territory and myths of origins. The latter is shaped by experience, contact between cultures, and wandering.⁴⁷ Glissant advocates a creolization to the *nth* degree so as to support the development of *l'identité-relation*:

Si nous posons le métissage comme en général une rencontre et une synthèse entre deux différents, la créolisation nous apparaît comme le métissage sans limites, dont les éléments sont démultipliés, les résultantes imprévisibles. La créolisation diffracte, quand certains modes du métissage peuvent concentrer une fois encore. (Poétique 46)

This “limitless” and unpredictable *métissage* is, therefore, an element of *l'identité-relation*.

Glissant throws weighty questions out for discussion. What is identity? How does one form his or her own identity? How does a group identity differ from personal identity? What is the significance of “Relation,” or shared knowledge, in the formation of these identities? Glissant also leaves some significant questions unanswered. He fails to account for evolving postcolonial identities that are linked to place, change of place, diasporas and the passage of time. For instance, he does not reflect on the case of a person from the French Caribbean living in the metropolis. Far from his or her island, that person’s identity evolves differently from that of a compatriot who has not left the island. An inevitable meeting of cultures occurs in the life of a displaced person, and as Glissant has indicated, these meetings are an important element of Creoleness. Yet,

⁴⁶ In this sense, Glissant’s notion of Creolization runs the risk of uniformity, not recognizing, for example, the inherent differences between literatures of different regions.

⁴⁷ Edouard Glissant, Poétique de la Relation, (Paris : Editions Gallimard, 1990) 157-158.

leading life at such a distance from one's homeland creates lacunas in collective experience, as is evidenced in André and Simone Schwarz-Bart's novel Un plat de porc aux bananes vertes.⁴⁸ The book presents an elderly Martinican woman named Mariotte who records her reflections in her six notebooks, or *Cahiers*.⁴⁹ As the only black woman in her retirement home in Paris, Mariotte suffers from racism, sexism, and class difference. Mariotte's cultural encounters prove to be neither enriching nor fulfilling, as she is not only far from her native land, but she is completely cut off from the traditions and experiences she associates with her island. As we see in the case of Mariotte, the longer she spends away from her homeland, the more emotionally wrenching it is for her to recall and identify with her experiences on her island. Recalling a seemingly distant past—both geographically and temporally defined—becomes more and more painful as time passes.

Just as one's identity is linked to a specific place, so too can it be linked to the concept of difference. That is to say, a person is oftentimes attached to that which distinguishes him from others, as it is those traits which make him unique. In Poétique de la Relation Glissant explains that claiming to understand differences can actually distort the identity of another: "Je 'comprends' ta différence, c'est-à-dire que je la mets en rapport, sans hiérarchiser, avec ma norme. Je t'admets à existence, dans mon système. Je te crée une nouvelle fois" (204). Therefore, in attempting to understand the Other without passing judgment, we run the risk of "recreating" the Other in a manner which is easier for us to understand and accept. The result is, of course, an unauthentic view of

⁴⁸ André and Simone Schwarz-Bart, Un plat de porc aux bananes vertes (Paris : Seuil, 1967).

⁴⁹ The format of the text recalls Aimé Césaire's Cahier d'un retour au pays natal. The use of the *cahier* also alludes to a diary format, strongly insinuating that Mariotte's stories are truthful.

that person, as it fosters a false understanding of him or her. Glissant therefore proposes that we not only support the right to difference, but also the right to *l'opacité*, or opaqueness. The notion of opaqueness refers to a person's unique traits that distinguish him or her from others and which *cannot be wholly understood by others*. Glissant encourages a harmonious coexistence of opaque beings who are aware of differences but who make no effort to alter others' unique, sometimes incomprehensible characteristics:

Non pas seulement consentir au droit à la différence mais, plus avant, au droit à l'opacité, qui n'est pas l'enfermement dans une autarcie impénétrable, mais la subsistance dans une singularité non réductible. Des opacités peuvent coexister, confluer, tramant des tissus dont la véritable compréhension porterait sur la texture de cette trame et non pas sur la nature des composantes. (Poétique 204)

L'opacité thus incarnates the synthesis of characteristics and experiences which differentiate an individual from others as well as *that which remains incomprehensible* to others. Interpersonal exchange is enriched because there are certain elements which people do not understand about one another.⁵⁰

How does *l'opacité* relate to Glissant's notion of creolization and how can the two be applied to contemporary postcolonial realities? Does one's right to difference and his or her consequent opaqueness compromise the creolization so dear to Glissant? Would an extensive process of creolization over a number of generations minimize or eliminate *l'opacité* that Glissant claims we each possess, therefore creating a uniform society? Glissant provides little insight concerning the dynamic between *l'opacité* and

⁵⁰ In The Force of Prejudice, Taguieff argues that difference without hierarchy is impossible, thus criticizing the concept of *métissage*: "[...] the antiracists demand both absolute respect of collective difference, therefore claiming the right to difference, and passage to the act of tasting the interethnic and intercultural mixture, hence calling for the right to community indifference and sometimes affirming the imperative duty to efface difference, the supposed sources of racism." Pierre-André Taguieff, The Force of Prejudice, trans. Hassan Melehy (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota Press, 2001) 7-8.

creolization, but it is useful to apply the two ideas to contemporary postcolonial societies. Glissant discusses a variety of regions affected by colonization at one time or another, including the Caribbean, Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, and even the United States, the South in particular. Yet, he does not bring attention to the fundamental differences and nuances between their colonial pasts, which ultimately lead to different degrees of *métissage* as well as inherent differences in both group and personal identity. In briefly considering the history of different regions, we are aware of a diversity of postcolonial experiences. North America was colonized by Europeans well before the colonial conquests of the 19th century, and it went on to become a colonial power in its own right.⁵¹ Brazil's history of colonization is different from that of Canada's, due in part to the influence of the Catholic Church on the continent since the 1600s⁵² and the presence of African traditions that also contributes to the religious atmosphere of the country. The colonial history of the French Caribbean is also unique, due to the contact between the natives,⁵³ Europeans, and African slaves. These are only a few of the countless differences one could mention, all of which could be considered part of the opaqueness, or intrinsic and very personal differences, described by Glissant. Do creolization and rhizomatic identity encompass the various colonial histories we know and study today?

⁵¹ In the Treaty of Paris, signed on December 10, 1898, Spain ceded Guam, Puerto Rico and the Philippines to the United States, giving Cuba its freedom. A Philippine war of independence ensued, and the United States ended its rule in 1901. The islands of Hawaii can also be considered as a colony of the United States.

⁵² Catholicism ceased to be the official religion of Brazil in 1889, but it continues to be the prominent religion.

⁵³ When mentioning the "contact" between Europeans and the Native Americans, such as the Caribs and Arawaks, it is important to remember that they were more or less exterminated by European violence and sickness against which they had no resistance.

Do citizens of each of these entities take part in Relation, or *l'expérience du gouffre*,⁵⁴ that Glissant proclaims as the most commonly exchanged experience? (*Poétique* 20)

As mentioned above, Glissant refers to the *résultantes imprévisibles*⁵⁵ of a continual meeting and blending of cultures. He recognizes the fact that the meeting and combining of cultures has, to a certain degree, unpredictable consequences, as Creoleness will manifest differently for each individual. Even so, he does not cease to put a positive spin on *métissage*. It is always portrayed in an energetic light without discussion of possible hardships experienced by the Creole person as the *identité-relation* forms and develops. *Identité-relation* calls to mind Bhabha's notion of cultural hybridity, yet one may wonder, is Glissant's *identité-relation* equivalent to a hybrid identity as described by Bhabha?

According to Bhabha:

If the effect of colonial power is seen to be the production of hybridization rather than the noisy command of colonialist authority or the silent repression of native traditions, then an important change of perspective occurs. It reveals the ambivalence at the source of traditional discourse on authority and enables a form of subversion, founded on that uncertainty, that turns the discursive conditions of dominance into the grounds of intervention. (35)

The institution of colonialism produces the cultural hybrid whose characteristics include the need to question authority and subvert power. The cultural hybrid, exposed to multiple languages and traditions, subverts colonial power and universalism, holding the oppressor accountable for the injustices of colonialism. The “uncertainty” to which Bhabha makes reference evokes Glissant's discourse on *opacité*, recognizing the

⁵⁴ In the context of Glissantian studies, the *expérience du gouffre* relates to the unknown and the trauma of deportation. In *Poétique de la Relation*, Glissant refers to the *gouffre*, or the abyss, as he describes what an African may have felt being brought across the ocean as a slave (18-19).

⁵⁵ *résultantes imprévisibles*—unpredictable outcomes

existence of ambiguities inherent in the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed. Glissant, too, describes a hybrid individual whose rhizomatic identity forms through countless contacts with other cultures. Yet, as Michael Dash explains, “Glissant’s point is not that hybridity represents the triumph of a new nomadic postcolonial identity. Rather he imagines a confluence of cultures whose creative energies are generated from the tense interdependency of specific cultures” (235). So, while both theorists depict an engaged,⁵⁶ active, postcolonial citizen who functions within the realm of uncertainty created by colonialism, the two do not necessarily have the same goals in mind. Bhabha’s hybridity aims to subvert colonial power within the ambivalent Third Space,⁵⁷ whereas Glissant’s *identité-relation* emphasizes the interconnectedness of people and cultures that exists despite the ever-changing nature of that postcolonial space.

The subject of place and its importance is one that has woven itself into Glissant’s cultural theory from the beginning. As we have already noted, Le Discours antillais concentrates on the creation of a unique Martinican identity, which would of course be linked to this island’s traditions and history of deportation and slavery. In this work Glissant examines the act of leaving and returning to one’s place of origins: “Il faut

⁵⁶ Creole literary “engagement” differs from Sartre’s notion of *littérature engagée* in that Creole writers do not adhere to a specific ideology. Rather, the Creole version of “engagement” involves issues of identity, culture, and language.

⁵⁷ As explained in the first pages of this chapter, Bhabha’s “Third Space” allows for subversion of colonial power as a means to gain power and find one’s voice. It can be used as a means to reappropriate that which was stolen by the colonizer. The idea of the Third Space has been criticized by many critics, namely Rosello and Fisher.

revenir au lieu. Le Détour⁵⁸ n'est ruse profitable que si le Retour le féconde ; non pas retour au rêve d'origine... mais retour au point d'intrication" (36). Just as leaving the homeland is important, so too is returning to that place without idealized illusions of encounters that may take place. *Le Détour* enriches the individual through travel and interpersonal exchange, but *le Retour* is an essential element in the development of the individual, as it highlights the experiences of *le Détour* at the same time that it abolishes unrealistic expectations one may have upon his or her return.⁵⁹

As Glissant's cultural theory progresses, he begins to grapple with the role of place in the formation of postcolonial identities. In *Poétique de la Relation*, he refutes the necessity to be linked to a place, distancing himself from *Le Discours antillais*.⁶⁰ First, Glissant distinguishes between two types of nomadism: a *nomadisme en flèche* characterized by invasion and conquest; and a *nomadisme circulaire*, a non-aggressive wandering from place to place which guarantees the survival of a group (24-25). Then Glissant goes on to explain that the latter is ideal, as the *nomade circulaire* seeks only contact and experience with the Other instead of hoping to conquer the Other.⁶¹ He or she also possesses *la pensée de l'errance*, or philosophy of wandering, an element which

⁵⁸ *Le Détour* refers to an experience outside one's place of origin that is personally enriching. *Le Détour* fosters contact with the Other, thus enlarging the individual's perspective on self and on his or her place of origin.

⁵⁹ *Le Retour* is essential to the individual's personal quest, but that is not to say that it is an easy part of that quest. The return home often proves to be a painful, unfulfilling experience, as we see in Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*. The interplay between *le Détour* and *le Retour* calls to mind a phenomenon of the diaspora, that of not feeling rooted in one's homeland or in the host country.

⁶⁰ Glissant refers to the latter work as follows: "le présent ouvrage est l'écho recomposé, ou la redite en spirale" of *Le Discours antillais* (28).

⁶¹ He gives Frantz Fanon as a modern example of the *nomade circulaire*, considering his stays in Martinique, France, and Algeria. The *nomade circulaire* would not, according to Glissant, be considered as someone living in exile nor as someone who suffers injustice (31).

enriches an individual's identity: "[...] dans la poétique de la Relation, l'errant, qui n'est plus le voyageur ni le découvreur ni le conquérant, cherche à connaître la totalité du monde et sait déjà qu'il ne l'accomplira jamais—et qu'en cela réside la beauté menacée du monde" (Poétique 33). The innate curiosity of the wanderer propels him or her in the insatiable pursuit of contact and knowledge. Furthermore, the wanderer's place of origin is overshadowed by his or her journey.

It would seem that in Poétique de la Relation, Glissant does not take into account the significance of place in a large number of postcolonial works, several of which will be discussed in this study, including Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle by Simone Schwarz-Bart, L'espérance-macadam⁶² and L'exil selon Julia⁶³ by Gisèle Pineau, and Le bonheur à la queue glissante⁶⁴ by Abia Farhoud. While the ideas of *l'identité-relation* and *le nomade circulaire* emphasize the sharing of knowledge and experience with the Other, how that identity evolves in time and space is neglected.

One could say that Glissant later rethinks the placeless identity he proclaims in Poétique de la Relation. In 1993, he publishes a series of essays and interviews in Introduction à une Poétique du Divers, a collection which serves to both clarify and elaborate on his previous work. In one interview, Robert Melançon asks Glissant about a possible relativization of one's homeland as a drawback of Creoleness. His response includes the following remarks:

⁶² Gisèle Pineau, L'Espérance-Macadam (Paris : Editions Stock, 1995).

⁶³ Gisèle Pineau, L'Exil selon Julia (Paris: Editions Stock, 1996).

⁶⁴ Abia Farhoud, Le Bonheur à la queue glissante (Montréal: Hexagone, 2004).

Le rapport est intense entre la nécessité et la réalité incontournables de la créolisation et la nécessité et la réalité incontournables du lieu, c'est-à-dire du lieu d'où l'on émet la parole humaine. On n'émet pas de paroles en l'air, en diffusion dans l'air. Le lieu d'où on émet la parole, d'où on émet le texte, d'où on émet la voix, d'où on émet le cri, ce lieu-là est immense. [...] L'important aujourd'hui est précisément de savoir discuter d'une poétique de la Relation telle qu'on puisse, sans défaire le lieu, sans diluer le lieu, l'ouvrir. (29-30)

So in this interview, instead of negating the importance of place through creolization and *métissage*, Glissant allows for a reinsertion of place, in the hopes of opening it to others, thus supporting his concepts of rhizomatic identity and *identité-relation*. Place is recognized, but Glissant does not consider it to be permanent or binding. In his poetic style, he does not ever really define place or its importance, leaving the idea of place open and vague. While the homeland may not have a privileged place in this problematic, he at least accepts it as an essential element in the postcolonial problematic. He also addresses the general role of place in literature:

Autrement dit, la littérature ne se produit pas dans une suspension, ce n'est pas une suspension en l'air. Elle provient d'un lieu, il y a un lieu incontournable de l'émission de l'œuvre littéraire, mais aujourd'hui l'œuvre littéraire convient d'autant mieux au lieu, qu'elle établit relation entre ce lieu et la totalité-monde" (Poétique du divers 34).

Here, Glissant recognizes the necessary interplay of homeland and displacement which contributes to the eventual formation of one's rhizomatic identity. Once again, we see that for Glissant, place is fluid and ever-changing. Along with Chamoiseau, Bernabé and Confiant, Glissant has sparked a dialogue on Creoleness and its possible applications in various contexts, including discussion of issues relevant to women in postcolonial contexts.

Carving feminine literary spaces

Much like literature in the French tradition, Francophone postcolonial literature puts forth a variety of maternal images, many of which are disturbing or unhappy.⁶⁵ Mothers in postcolonial settings face difficulties brought on by discrimination, familial conflict, patriarchal domination, and displacement. In this literature, mothers that emerge from these unenviable circumstances are complex characters whose strengths and weaknesses are evident in their interaction with their families. They represent an array of ethnicities, languages, temperaments, and religious backgrounds. In spite of the challenges they face, many of these mothers are positive, caring figures for their children. Others are emotionally distant or completely absent from their children's lives. The topic of mothers in literature and in particular the relationships between mothers and daughters, has proven to be of scholarly interest in the last decades, due to the continued interest in feminist movements and their effects in respective societies. This study has been informed by a number of previous works in literary, cultural, and sociological domains, both in western and non-western contexts. Scholarship in western contexts can be very useful in examination of mothers and motherhood in Francophone postcolonial contexts, setting a precedent of questioning a woman's place in society, as do Elisabeth Badinter⁶⁶ and Marianne Hirsch.⁶⁷ Previous studies on women in Francophone contexts

⁶⁵ Le Château de ma mère by Marcel Pagnol and La Maison de Claudine by Colette portray positive mother figures. Negative maternal images can be seen in Madame Bovary by Gustave Flaubert, Nana by Emile Zola and Un Barrage contre le pacifique (1950) by Marguerite Duras. Marcel Pagnol, Le Château de ma mère, 1957 (Paris : DeFallos, 1988) ; Sidonie Colette, La Maison de Claudine, Paris : Hachette, 1960 ; Gustave Flaubert, Madame Bovary, 1857 (Paris : Broché, 1995) ; Emile Zola, Nana, 1880 (Paris : Broché, 2000) ; Marguerite Duras, Un barrage contre le Pacifique. (Paris : Gallimard, 1950).

⁶⁶ According to Elisabeth Badinter's book L'Amour en plus, the mother's respected status in French society dates to the 18th century. Philosophers of the French Enlightenment, and especially Jean-Jacques Rousseau, emphasized early childhood education, which included extensive mother-child contact. This thinking

tend to portray mothers as powerful figures in postcolonial societies, underlining the positive aspects of relationships between mothers and their children as well as the respected place some Francophone mother figures hold in society. In her interview with Simone Schwarz-Bart, Mary Jean Green emphasizes the mother's central, positive role in the family unit, downplaying many of the challenges faced by mothers in a postcolonial setting.⁶⁸ Although she acknowledges the difficult familial situations of many immigrant families in Quebec, Lucie Lequin nonetheless focuses on the mother's role as protector of cultural heritage. The maternal legacy as guardian of tradition overshadows familial and societal conflicts that impact the characters she examines.⁶⁹

This study sheds light on some of the problematic issues of motherhood in culturally diverse contexts, including symbolic violence and the challenges faced by single parents. While in no way negating the positive aspects of mothers and motherhood as they are presented in Francophone literature, I examine the nuances of motherhood in postcolonial contexts so as to demonstrate the complexities of mother figures raising their children in these circumstances. Comparing mother figures within and across different

influenced bourgeois society, causing a reinsertion of the mother in the child's life from an early stage. Her role in the household thus grew in importance. See Elisabeth Badinter, L'Amour en plus: Histoire de l'amour maternel (Paris : Flammarion, 1980) 137-139, 154-174.

⁶⁷ Hirsch poses challenging questions pertaining to society's definitions and perceptions of mothers which will be discussed in Chapter 2. See Marianne Hirsch, The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989).

⁶⁸ See Mary Jean Green, "Simone Schwarz-Bart et la tradition féminine aux Antilles," Présence Francophone : Revue Internationale de Langue et de Littérature 36 (1990) : 130-132.

⁶⁹ See Lucie Lequin, "The Legacy of Words: Mothers as Agents of Cultural Subterfuge and Subversion," Doing Gender: Franco-Canadian Women Writers of the 1990s, eds. Paula Ruth Gilbert and Roseanna Dufault (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 2001) 203-216.

Francophone areas, I will take into account the similarities and differences between regions, each of which is influenced by traditions passed from one generation to the next as well as by pressures exerted by a particular postcolonial society. Using Creole theories as a starting point, this study will discuss the representation of women, and more specifically, of mothers in diverse societies.

Since Bernabé, Chamoiseau and Confiant published Eloge de la Créolité, countless studies have documented the complexities of Creole literature, including the questions of bilingualism, the history of slavery, as well as identity issues linked to these matters. Interestingly enough, none of the theorists of Creoleness addresses Creoleness in reference to gender and how it *is* or *could be* experienced by women. The place of women's voices in history as well as the roles mothers play in the construction of Creole identities comprise a feminine version of Creoleness that remains a field still largely unexplored.⁷⁰

The two Creole manifestos and Glissant's Poétique de la Relation are revolutionary works which have helped to bring attention to the literatures of the French Caribbean. Yet, is there recognition of Creole feminine literary creation in Poétique de la Relation and L'Eloge? Are these theories useful in examination of the works of women writers from the French Caribbean and elsewhere? It is interesting to note that although the Creole theories were developed by male intellectuals from Martinique, and all the

⁷⁰ In the context of French Caribbean literature, there is little place for issues related to gender, and even less of a place for questions related to homosexuality and transgender. These groups are rarely represented, and when they are, it is often in a negative manner. On the contrary, Francophone literatures of North Africa and Canada treat the questions of gender, homosexuality and transgender with more openness. Critics often refer to Francophone literatures in the plural so as to acknowledge diversity across the spectrum.

authors they quote are male, several of the most well-known novels from the region are written by *women* from *Guadeloupe*. We turn to examples from Maryse Condé, Simone Schwarz-Bart, Gisèle Pineau, and Myriam Warner-Vieyra. Each of these women portrays a unique facet of Creoleness as experienced by women. None of these authors subscribes specifically to a vision of Creoleness proclaimed by Bernabé, Chamoiseau, or Confiant. Rather, they illustrate the diversity of Creoleness through description of tradition, incorporation of French and local proverbs, subversion of language, and portrayal of the different experiences of each protagonist. Whereas Schwarz-Bart tells the story of a young girl growing up in a Guadeloupian village and influenced by the Creole stories and proverbs shared by her grandmother, Pineau tells about the diasporic experience of both girls and mature women. Warner-Vieyra recounts the stark isolation and cultural difficulties experienced by an Antillean woman living abroad, and Condé examines the seemingly endless *métissage* experienced by her characters who live in all corners of the Earth. Subsequently, these Creole writers depict different diasporas, both colonial postcolonial.

The various Creole experiences presented to the reader by these women writers are not addressed by Glissant, Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant.⁷¹ Nor do they allude to the influence that women may have had on their personal and intellectual growth. In his article “The Gendering of Créolité,” A. James Arnold remarks:

On reading Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant, not to mention Glissant, we would be hard pressed to account for all those grandmothers or elderly aunts, those repositories of oral history, folk medicine, and stories of all sorts who have

⁷¹ *Lettres créoles* devotes a number of pages to contemporary Caribbean writers, including Schwarz-Bart and Condé, but no issues specific to women are addressed.

been credited by nearly all women writers in the Caribbean with stimulating their writing careers.⁷²

As indicated by Arnold, women authors from the French Caribbean *do* attribute much of their story-telling skills to women in their lives, but it is essential to realize that a whole mosaic of influential women are presented, both positive and negative. One only has to consider two of the mother figures that appear in Simone Schwarz-Bart's novels. Along with warm, positive maternal figures, she presents neglectful and negative mothers such as Mémé Louise, in Un plat de porc, who does nothing but taunt and insult her granddaughter. At the other end of the spectrum, Reine Sans Nom, in Pluie et vent, is a nurturing presence who lovingly guides her granddaughter through life. Each of these grandmothers plays an important role in the growth and development of her granddaughter, but that role is not necessarily positive or constructive. The example of these two characters demonstrates the fact that Creoleness makes way for a diverse literature showing both the positive and negative aspects of human behavior and relationships between family members.

In La Parole des femmes,⁷³ Maryse Condé analyzes the feminine side of French Caribbean literature, drawing attention to subjects concerning women writers and their characters such as the manner in which power relations are negotiated between men and women. This critical work is important because it is the first to examine Francophone

⁷² James A. Arnold, "The Gendering of Créolité," Penser la Créolité. Eds. Maryse Condé and Madeleine Cottenet-Hage (Paris: Editions Karthala, 1995) 30.

⁷³ It is important to note that La Parole des femmes was published in 1979, well before the Creole manifestos. Maryse Condé, La parole des femmes : Essai sur des romancières des Antilles de langue française (Paris : L'Harmattan, 1979).

Caribbean literature in as far as it concerns women and women writers : “Nous avons pensé qu’il serait intéressant d’interroger quelques écrivains femmes des Caraïbes francophones pour cerner l’image qu’elles ont d’elles-mêmes et appréhender les problèmes dont elles souffrent éventuellement” (5). She discusses topics such as the education of young girls and women’s relationships with the men in their lives, including fathers, boyfriends, and husbands. Condé also considers the role of men in the French Caribbean:

Frustré, dépossédé, l’Antillais s’est réfugié dans des attitudes d’irresponsabilité qui ont survécu à l’évolution politique des Iles. Les reproches dont on l’accable, doivent toujours être situés dans une perspective plus large et éclairées du rappel de la condition socio-économique des Antilles.⁷⁴ (36)

Women, therefore, often serve as the central figure in the family unit. The absence of men, whether they are husbands, boyfriends, or fathers, makes for women who play multiple roles within the family, including breadwinner, parent, cook, and housekeeper. Creole literature written by women not only acknowledges the realities faced by single mothers, but also calls attention to the stratification of social classes in the French Caribbean, which leaves most of these mothers at the bottom.

Condé also depicts women as guardians of history rather than men and examines a woman’s complex, oftentimes complicated role in society, as a single mother, a grandmother raising her grandchildren, or as a woman who chooses not to marry and have children. Another issue raised by Condé in La Parole des femmes is that of

⁷⁴ In Portrait du colonisé Memmi examines the attitudes of the colonized man, also tracing his apparent lack of initiative and regular absences to poor treatment by the oppressor. Albert Memmi, Portrait du colonisé (Holland : Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1966).

religious practices, including the intermixing of witchcraft and Roman Catholic traditions:

Il est évident que dans la littérature, le quimbois⁷⁵ peut simplement servir d'élément d'exotisme, comme la description de scènes considérées comme pittoresques. Cela peut être une manière de relever un récit et de restituer cette prétendue saveur antillaise. Quand cela serait, cela traduirait l'importance des pratiques qualifiées de magiques dans la vie et la réalité des îles. (53)

The use of witchcraft by the female protagonists reveals ways in which a woman negotiates and acquires power within a patriarchal system where she traditionally does not have a voice.⁷⁶ It also represents cultural practices carried over from African ancestors as well as resistance against the colonizer's imposed religion. In La parole des femmes, Condé explores numerous subjects related to life in the Antilles and their portrayal in literature. Through her analysis of various works written by women, she sheds light on a sort of "feminine" Creoleness that the Creole manifestos will neglect—one that takes into account the significant role of women in a given culture, which can be any combination of teacher, healer, or mother.

Several critics have written on aspects of Creoleness that appear in texts written by women, such as A. James Arnold's article quoted above and a variety of articles on Schwarz-Bart, Condé, and Pineau.⁷⁷ L'écrivain antillais au miroir de sa littérature by

⁷⁵ *Quimbois* is a word used in the Antilles and "Obeah" in Jamaica. These two terms refer to the traditions of witchcraft, black magic, and white magic, emphasizing the need to protect oneself from bad spirits and/or masculine sexual domination.

⁷⁶ For more on religious practices and witchcraft in Pluie et vent, see Maria Anagnostopoulou-Hielscher, "Espace féminin et image divine : vers une définition de la religion dans *Pluie et vent sur Têlumée Miracle* de Simone Schwarz-Bart," Women in French Studies 3 (1995): 138-147.

⁷⁷ See, for example Beverley Ormerod, "L'Aieule: Figure dominante chez Simone Schwarz-Bart," Présence Francophone: Revue Littéraire 20 (1980) : 95-106 ; Lydie Moudileno, "Le Rire de la grand-mère: insolence et sérénité dans *Désirada* de Maryse Condé," The French Review 76.6 (2003) : 1151-1160 ;

Lydie Moudileno examines the roles of women writers and characters in several novels by authors from Martinique and Guadeloupe. She observes:

... l'écriture féminine, comme l'a montré Françoise Lionnet, témoigne d'une convergence de systèmes—l'oralité, l'écriture, l'imaginaire et le symbolique—et de couleurs qui font de son texte un métissage. Le texte féminin des Antilles, intégrant des 'fils de différentes natures et couleurs' est un processus de créolisation.⁷⁸

She calls to mind the diverse contributions of women writers to the body of Creole literature, including recognition of a woman's essential place in society as repository of collective memory. Moudileno thus specifies the nature of "feminine" Creoleness expressed through literary creation. Furthermore, she notes the absence of patriarchal references in Schwarz-Bart and Condé's novels:

Ce qu'elle brise dans *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle*, roman qui opère une récupération de la tradition orale, créole et féminine, sont d'une part les discours patriarcaux érigeant systématiquement l'homme en héros, d'autre part l'hégémonie de l'Histoire écrite. Pour elle comme pour Maryse Condé, "briser" prend moins la forme d'un mépris que d'un détournement⁷⁹ qui met à profit l'espace du livre pour ménager la possibilité d'une parole oubliée, éclipsée par les discours successifs de la colonisation et de la négritude. (*Ecrivain antillais* 36)

Brendha Mehta, "Culinary diasporas: identity and the language of food in Gisèle Pineau's *Un papillon dans la cité* and *L'Exil selon Julia*," *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 8.1 (2005) : 23-51.

⁷⁸ Lydie Moudileno, *L'écrivain antillais au miroir de la littérature* (Paris: Karthala, 1997) 30.

⁷⁹ Here, Moudileno chooses the word "détournement," which reminds us of the importance of *le Détour* in Glissant's cultural theory. She suggests that women writers of the Caribbean offer another path to understanding the Creoleness that defines the French Caribbean. Rather than contradict that which is put forth by her male contemporaries, the women authors provide a complementary perspective which serves to give a more complete image of the region, its traditions, and its people.

As demonstrated by Moudileno, this proposed “feminine” Creoleness creates a literary space enabling writers to express and explore a universe whose survival is assured by women. While not overtly condoning or criticizing the French Caribbean’s important male figures such as Aimé Césaire, Condé and Schwarz-Bart use the literary space to weave stories neglected by the writers of History.⁸⁰

Authors such as Schwarz-Bart and Condé, both of whom have strongly influenced a younger generation of writers, reject placement of their bodies of work into any specific literary movement. Yet, one cannot ignore the Creole dimension of their novels, which oftentimes is more evident than in the works of male authors from the region. They include but are not limited to: repeated instances of cultural *métissage*, tension between tradition and modernity, characters’ awareness of their history of deportation and slavery, and incorporation of Creole proverbs and language into a text. Within the bounds of their specifically Creole and feminine literary space, Condé, Schwarz-Bart and their successors portray the steadfastness and strength of women who protect and pass on Creole traditions.

The existence of a Creoleness including the feminine would, of course, not be limited to the French West Indies. As evidenced in Eloge and Poétique de la Relation, the Creoleness movement is intended to encompass multiple regions in which cultural *métissage* has taken place, or in which meetings between cultures could potentially occur, creating a unique dynamic conveyed by and through literature. Thus, virtually any postcolonial area could be considered “Creole,” including North Africa, Asia and

⁸⁰ The distinction between “History” with a capital “H” and “history” with a lower-case “h” is significant. “History” refers to the official, written version of history, chronicled by dominant forces. On the other hand, “history” encompasses both documented and undocumented events, oftentimes neglected by those who record the official version of historical events.

Canada. The term “Creoleness” is, however, problematic, as it is inextricably linked to the French Caribbean in the minds of most readers. It is therefore necessary to employ a less problematic term to encompass the literatures of multiple regions treated in this study. It is for that reason that I have chosen to incorporate Wolfgang Welsch’s theory of transculturality in my study of Francophone postcolonial literature, a theory that examines the extensive contact between members of different cultures throughout the world. In conjunction with one another, Creoleness and transculturality allow for an encompassing, dynamic analysis of literary works from Francophone postcolonial regions.

Transculturality : a new way of looking at cultures

Before examining the parallels between transculturality and Creoleness, it is useful to briefly trace the development of concepts of culture throughout the centuries. In his article “Transculturality—the Puzzling Form of Cultures Today,” Welsch outlines the ways in which culture has been defined since the 18th century.⁸¹ He explains that Herder’s concept of single cultures, presented in Ideas on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind (1784-1791), is defined by “social homogenization, ethnic consolidation, and intercultural delimitation” (19). This concept of culture is insular, and each culture is perceived as a sphere, with a minimum amount of interaction between cultures. Welsch notes that this concept of culture is inadequate in today’s world: “The sphere premise and the purity precept not only render impossible a mutual understanding between

⁸¹ Wolfgang Welsch, “Transculturality—the puzzling form of cultures today,” California Sociologist. 17-18 (1994-1995): 19-39.

cultures, but the appeal to cultural identity of this kind finally also threatens to produce separatism and pave the way for political conflicts and wars” (20). With increased contact between groups of people due to travel and the development of rapid communication, other cultural concepts have developed.

The notion of interculturality, often applied when referring to contemporary Europe, seeks to promote understanding between different cultures as they interact with one another.⁸² Although similar to Welsch’s theory on transculturality, interculturality does not adequately describe the potential influences that people of various cultures can have on one another, nor does it reflect the inclusive aims of transculturality. In his article “Logos Without Ethos: On Interculturalism and Muticulturalism,” Claude Karnoouh points out that, “The Latin prefix *inter* denotes separation, spacing and reciprocity”⁸³ (119). In considering the situation of present-day Europe, one can see that interculturality exists within the European Union. That is to say, twenty-seven countries, all with different languages and cultural traditions,⁸⁴ are members of and take part in the governance of the European Union. While striving to maintain their specific national identities, each country submits to and is expected to respect the laws imposed by the organization, including those concerning human rights, trade agreements, and laws regulating agricultural practices. The problem with this concept, according to Welsch, is that it relies on the idea of cultures as spheres or islands (21). Each culture keeps its

⁸² The term “interculturality” refers to the coexistence of different cultures in a common space.

⁸³ Claude Karnoouh, “Logos Without Ethos: On Interculturalism and Multiculturalism,” Trans. John Lambeth, *Telos* 110 (1998): 119.

⁸⁴ The citizens of many of these countries, such as Belgium, experience interculturality in their daily lives, as there are a number of languages and cultural traditions within their own nations.

distinct identity, separate from other member states, while interacting with them and hoping to avoid conflict.

The term “multiculturalism,” a concept which incarnates many of the same goals as interculturalism, is used almost exclusively in an American context. Karnoouh explains the roots of the American policy of multiculturalism.⁸⁵

In the beginning, it was fueled by antiracist struggles, a recognition of the social and cultural dignity of all immigrants in the ghettos. It dealt with questions of urbanization in American megalopolises where, beside Afro-Americans, diverse, teeming populations had come to look for work and wealth at the heart of the capitalist world, while escaping discrimination based on ‘race’ or religion in their native countries (128).

Although multiculturalism was first meant to call attention to the economic hardships of ethnic minorities, it has since come to represent a broader group of individuals within American society: “It now includes groups which, after successful economic integration, continue to flaunt their cultural difference. Now multiculturalism refers to a sort of equalization of all differences, whatever the source” (129). Karnoouh refers to a “homogenization of values” of minority groups, including Native Americans, African-Americans, and Hispanics. While traditionally employed in referring to the inclusion of ethnic minorities, the term “multiculturalism” is also used in an effort to include minority groups such as homosexuals.⁸⁶ Welsh states that although multiculturalism seeks tolerance and understanding, it underscores the boundaries between groups and is therefore an insufficient means to envision culture (22).

⁸⁵ “Multiculturalism” refers to the American application of the notion of multiculturalism, often describing the United States as “melting pot.”

⁸⁶ It is rare that homosexual rights are discussed in the context of American multiculturalism. In the United States, homosexuals have no status and are not included in affirmative action.

Finding that interculturality and multiculturalism do not adequately respond to the conditions of today's world, Welsch proposes transculturality⁸⁷ as an appropriate means to articulate contemporary cultures. He claims that the high degree of intertwinement in modern societies calls for a new vision and understanding of the way in which cultures, and therefore people, relate to one another: "The new forms of entanglement are a consequence of migratory processes, as well as of worldwide material and immaterial communications systems and economic interdependencies" (23). The entanglements to which Welsch refers make for hybrid cultures in which identities form through exposure to numerous cultural factors which are all present in the same society. He thus defines transculturality as follows: "The concept of transculturality aims for a multi-meshed and inclusive, not separatist and exclusive understanding of culture. It intends a culture and society whose pragmatic feats exist not in delimitation, but in the ability to link and undergo transition" (26). Transculturality differs from multiculturalism and interculturality in that the barriers that have been articulated in preceding cultural models no longer function as obstacles.⁸⁸ Welsch sees cultural components as cutting through these boundaries, creating new personal identities not linked to the nation.

⁸⁷ On the term "transculturality," Welsch writes, "[...] I have learned that 'transculturality'—or at least the adjective 'transcultural'—isn't quite so rare after all. But my usage of the term aims not, as is usual elsewhere, at transcultural constants. With this term I seek rather to take into account the historically altered constitution of today's cultures" (31).

⁸⁸ Lamberto Tassinari, director of the journal Vice Versa, was born in Italy and immigrated to Quebec in 1980. He explains the notion of transculturality as follows: "Le terme *transculturel* a une dimension politique car ce mot implique la traversée d'une seule culture en même temps que son dépassement. L'unité qu'il sous-tend n'a pas la même résonance que celle qu'évoquent les termes 'inter-culturel' ou 'multiculturel.' Ceux-ci définissent un ensemble et le circonscrivent dans un espace et un temps, alors que le transculturel ne possède pas de périmètre." Qtd. in Clément Moisan, Une histoire de l'écriture migrante au Québec (Montréal : Nota bene, 2001) 288-289.

Both transculturality and Creoleness complement interculturality and multiculturalism through a continual search for and acceptance of diversity. One can easily draw parallels between the notions of transculturality and Creoleness. Transculturality is not a literary or cultural movement, but it names a phenomenon that exists in western and non-western cultures throughout the world—that of cultures meeting, co-existing, and very often influencing one another. As mentioned above, Creoleness, which is at the same time literary and political, not only recognizes but *encourages* mutual influence between cultures. Seeing as how both concepts promote the meeting and blending of cultures, one could wonder if uniformity is a risk.⁸⁹ Welsch believes that one must reconsider diversity in order to understand its transcultural character:

Under conditions of transculturality diversity doesn't disappear altogether, rather its mode is altered. [...] Diversity in the traditional mode of single cultures does in fact disappear. Instead, a new type of diversity is formed: the diversity of different ways of life with a transcultural cut. It too is distinguished by a high degree of individualization and manifold differences—at least as high as attested to for single cultures by the traditional conception. (28)

Thus, a transcultural society, or better, a transcultural individual, undergoes transition without the risk of becoming identical to his or her peers. Difference is not defined by national or ethnic affiliation, but rather through interactions on an individual level. Each person's "transcultural blend" or "transcultural cut" is unique, as each person's identity is formed through diverse experiences.

It is evident that transculturality and Creoleness share a number of concerns regarding the formation of identities in a world where contact between individuals of

⁸⁹ See this chapter's discussion on Glissant and *métissage*.

different backgrounds occurs on a regular basis. We can, therefore, employ the term “transculturality” when referring to notions incarnated by Creoleness. Although Welsch makes literary references in his article on transculturality,⁹⁰ he does not present the theory as one that is primarily literary. Nonetheless, in his book Une histoire de l’écriture migrante au Québec, Clément Moisan characterizes recent Québécois literature as “transcultural,” taking into account the ethnic transformation of Quebec’s population in the last seventy years: “Le transculturel, caractéristique de la présente période, dépasse la mise en présence ou en conflit des cultures pour dégager des passages entre elles et dessiner leur traversée respective”⁹¹ (207). Moisan goes on to explain that contemporary Québécois literature has evolved from an “immigrant” literature—balancing between the past and the present of two cultures—to a “migrant” literature—focused on movement towards and through others (207-208). Québécois literature consequently represents numerous cultural heritages, as well as cultural and linguistic hybridity.

This study employs the term “transcultural” in reference to the construction of mother figures in the works of the selected authors. Transculturality in a feminine context builds on Condé’s Parole des femmes, addressing questions pertinent to the modern Francophone woman, such as her rights in a given society and her role in the transmission of culture. Of utmost importance and the focus of the present study is the role of women in the family unit and her interaction with her children, given the specific circumstances of her postcolonial existence. Other important issues include the perception of women in the greater community; the role of language, whether it be her own or that of the

⁹⁰ “Today’s writers, for example, emphasize that their inspirations are shaped not by a single homeland, but by differing reference countries, by French, Austrian, Italian, Russian, South and North American Literature, and so on. Their cultural formation is transcultural” (Welsch 24).

⁹¹ The prefix “trans” is significant, as it implies movement.

oppressor; a woman's place in the postcolonial landscape, and her participation in the formation of her society.

One can expound on this proposed transculturality through discussion of selected texts, spanning cultures and continents. The works of Simone Schwarz-Bart and Gisèle Pineau are transcultural insofar as their examination of women with a history of displacement and no language of origin. Schwarz-Bart's Un plat de porc aux bananes vertes and Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle touch on many of the questions later discussed by the founders of Creoleness, including the historical legacy left by slavery and colonization. These issues are pertinent to representation of the mother since they determine, in part, the role she plays in society and thus how she is perceived by her family. For Pineau, raised both in France and Guadeloupe, migration and exile are central concerns. In L'Exil selon Julia and L'espérance-macadam she sheds light not only on exile as it is experienced by mother figures, but also on the physical abuse endured by many women in the French Caribbean. Both authors provide a range of maternal portraits, including grandmothers who fill in for absent or otherwise occupied mothers, mothers who raise their families in exile, adoptive mothers, and mothers who suffer from abuse and abandonment. Whether they deal directly or indirectly with these controversial issues, Schwarz-Bart and Pineau nonetheless bring them to the attention of the reader, opening them to discussion.

North Africa is another fertile ground for literary production, boasting well-known authors such as Tahar Ben Jelloun, Assia Djébar and Abdelkebir Khatibi, each of whom depicts characters who navigate multiple cultures and languages. This study examines works of Assia Djébar and Malika Mokeddem, who, much like Schwarz-Bart

and Pineau, represent different generations of writers. Assia Djébar's writing can be considered transcultural in that she provides a critique of patriarchal tradition in both western and North African contexts. She also deconstructs the monolithic image of the Maghreb by revealing divisions within the Muslim culture and by calling attention to the different languages spoken in the region, including Berber and Arabic dialects. In La Femme sans sépulture,⁹² Djébar provides a mother's account of Algeria's war of liberation through that mother's spectral voice.⁹³ The novel represents an effort to *reclaim* and *proclaim* the role women played in the war against France. Mokeddem, a medical doctor in the south of France, has published several novels dealing with the struggles of Algerian women, both in Algeria and abroad. She also critiques patriarchal tradition in her novels and portrays characters who are influenced by both Muslim and western traditions, as they travel between France and Algeria. Des rêves et des assassins recounts a young woman's quest for knowledge about the mother she never knew.⁹⁴

Djébar and Mokeddem's novels both provide examples of mothers who are absent due to death under violent circumstances, revealing the long-lasting reverberations of violence against women in patriarchal societies. Although both mothers die violent deaths, the children they leave behind nonetheless experience their mothers' absences differently. Since the Second World War, Quebec's immigrant population has grown, changing the social fabric of the province and diversifying its literary production. Much of Quebec's

⁹² Assia Djébar, La Femme sans sépulture (Paris : Albin Michel, 2002).

⁹³ In postcolonial literature, the spectral voice is important in that it allows the oppressed to speak out against the oppressor. It is doubly significant in Djébar's works, as spectral voices also attempt to shed light on the role women played in Algeria's war of liberation. Chapter 4 examines the spectral voice in the works of Djébar, Mokeddem, and Chen.

⁹⁴ Malika Mokeddem, Des rêves et des assassins (Paris : Grasset, 1995).

contemporary literature is thus classified as *littérature migrante*,⁹⁵ reflecting migratory waves and Quebec's changing demographics. Ying Chen, born and raised in China, and Abia Farhoud, a writer of Lebanese descent, are two authors whose works belong to Canada's body of *littérature migrante*. Chen produces work that is inherently transcultural. Her literary creations allude to both the history and traditions of her native China and the fast-changing, globalized society that currently characterizes her homeland. Chen's L'Ingratitude chronicles a young woman's suicide and her anger with her spiteful mother.⁹⁶ In Le Bonheur à la queue glissante, Farhoud gives a voice to Dounia, an illiterate immigrant mother who is ready to die and who speaks by mediation of her daughter.⁹⁷ Although Chen and Farhoud present contrasting mother figures that approach their children differently, both are victims of patriarchal authority, hindered in life and relationships by a system that seeks to repress women.

In examining the works of these authors, we shall see the emergence of mothers who evolve in transcultural contexts. The authors mentioned above present a great diversity of characters performing motherhood. Shared experiences such as the existence of language barriers, raising children in violent surroundings, and geographic exile make for characters who invite comparison, despite the diversity of religious and ethnic backgrounds. Chapter 2 of this study will examine the development of individual mother figures in their specific transcultural settings. Chapter 3 studies the importance of place

⁹⁵ *Littérature migrante*, or migrant literature, refers to Quebec's culturally diverse literature, most often written by immigrants or children of immigrants.

⁹⁶ Ying Chen, L'Ingratitude (Montréal : Lémac, 1995).

⁹⁷ Abia Farhoud, Le Bonheur à la queue glissante (Montréal: Hexagone, 2004).

in the formation of the mother figure, and Chapter 4 discusses death and absence as forms of exile.

CHAPTER 2

THE EVOLVING MOTHER FIGURE: FRENCH INFLUENCES AND TRANSCULTURAL PERSPECTIVES

The previous chapter established the link between Creoleness and transculturality, calling attention to the need for a cultural theory that addresses multiple contemporary societies spanning the globe. As we have seen, Welsch's theory on transculturality responds to the need for a cultural theory reflecting the numerous and rapid exchanges which regularly occur on a person-to-person basis in the daily lives of countless people throughout the world. Everyone can be influenced by any number of cultures on a given day, due to the contemporary global realities of immigration, travel, and ease of communication through technical means. People therefore have more and more opportunities to develop their own transcultural identities.

Although first developed as a cultural theory, it is also appropriate to discuss transculturality in a literary context. In his book Une histoire de la littérature migrante au Québec, Clément Moisan highlights several periods of twentieth century Québécois literature, identifying the following periods: *l'uniculturel*, *le pluriculturel*, *l'interculturel*, and *le transculturel*.⁹⁸ He dubs the most recent period transcultural because of the

⁹⁸ Moisan explains *l'uniculturel* as a society in which the dominant culture reigns over all that enters from the exterior, therefore encouraging harmonious assimilation. Societies defined as *pluriculturel* exhibit a polyphony of cultural contributions, close to the United States' vision of multiculturalism. The *interculturel* represents societies in which different groups co-exist and one approaches the other, either

movement (*trans*) to and through cultures that contemporary Québécois literature highlights. The result is culturally and linguistically diverse literatures. Literary works of other Francophone regions can also be considered as transcultural, due to the great ethnic and social diversity that is also present in those regions.

Societies with a high concentration of immigration and cultural exchange tend to invite discussion on the roles of men and women within that society, due to the large number of practices and traditions that can exist in a single community. This chapter will examine transculturality as represented by the various mother figures in the works herein. Much as we recognize the existence of an *écriture au féminin*, that is to say, literary works that implicitly or explicitly speak to and about issues pertinent to women,⁹⁹ we can also refer to a transculturality that addresses concerns of women living in a diverse society. These matters include the interaction between men and women in both the private and public spheres, the obstacles faced by an immigrant mother in the host country, and the mother's role in preservation of the native culture in a colonial or postcolonial society. There are undoubtedly intersections and common interests between masculine and feminine versions of transculturality, such as encounters with the hierarchy established by the oppressor and participation in wars of liberation. Yet, transculturality in a feminine context is acutely aware of the distinct disadvantages a

integrating into that culture or transforming it. Finally, the *transculturel* seeks to pass through, influence, and in turn be influenced by a foreign culture (14-17).

⁹⁹ See Lori Saint-Martin's article in which she discusses the particularities of littérature written by women. Lori Saint-Martin, "Le Nom de la mère: Le Rapport mère-fille comme constante de l'écriture au féminin," *Women in French Studies* 6 (1998): 76-91.

woman experiences in a postcolonial society, whereas transculturality in a masculine context will not express those difficulties in depth and with great detail.

As we have already seen, critics such as Condé, Moudileno and Arnold have pointed out the particularities of Creole literature written by women, which include depiction of women as guardians of history, as well as the fiber that creates cohesiveness in the family unit. Additionally, as Moudileno has noted, these texts do not heed patriarchal discourses, thus creating literature that turns its attention to events and occurrences that tell the story of a people, yet are left out by official History (Ecrivain antillais 36), including the cultural significance of food preparation and meals, storytelling, and education of children. It is in this vein that I will explore the multiple facets of Creoleness, taking into consideration the literary space inhabited by women writers from the French Caribbean. Simone Schwarz-Bart and Gisèle Pineau, both Guadeloupian authors, have made it a point to examine issues that concern the welfare of women in postcolonial societies, where women experience the ravages of natural disasters, must send their children to work for economic reasons, endure marital violence and even incest. This chapter will underline the intersections between Creoleness and transculturality in the case of women. Likewise, we will see that it is not only possible, but *useful* to identify what could be called a “*feminine* transculturality,” no matter how blurry gender roles may appear to be.¹⁰⁰ This distinction allows discussion of common experiences portrayed through postcolonial literature and more specifically and pertinent

¹⁰⁰ It may be taken for granted by postmodern theory that gender lines are indistinct, yet that does not translate in many Third World literatures. Francophone literature exemplifies this fact. Not only are Francophone societies highly misogynist, but even more homophobic, as pointed out by Maryse Condé in Traversée de la Mangrove. Marysé Condé, Traversée de la Mangrove (Paris: Mercure de France, 1989).

to this study, invites examination of the mother figure in Francophone postcolonial literature.

It is true that postcolonial theory, still dominated by Anglo-Saxons, is skeptical of issues related to women and gender.¹⁰¹ Considering this fact, it is useful to ask if postcolonial theory does or could allow for meaningful discussion on the subject of gender. In her article “Francophone women writers and postcolonial theory,” Anne Donadey cites Bhabba as one postcolonial theorist who either overlooks or ignores gender questions.¹⁰² Creole theorists, too, have chosen not to broach the topic of women and gender, neglecting a domain which could enhance their theories of creolization. Taking into consideration the mostly unexplored rapport that exists between Francophone women writers and postcolonial theory, Donadey proposes that one classify the relationship as follows: “Given this situation, it may be more accurate to speak of a certain confluence of interests between Francophone women writers and postcolonial theory, rather than a direct contribution of the former to the latter” (Donadey 203). It is with this dynamic in mind—one of coexistence and *potential* influence—that we proceed with our examination of mothers in a postcolonial context. While discussion of gender and postcoloniality still lies, at least partially, in the domain of uncharted territory, this chapter will demonstrate the usefulness of examining the two in conjunction with one another.

¹⁰¹ There are a few exceptions, including Trinh, Spivak, and Lionnet, who each examine gender issues in their work.

¹⁰² Anne Donadey, “Francophone women writers and postcolonial theory,” Francophone Postcolonial Studies: A Critical Introduction, eds. Charles Forsdick and David Murphy (London: Arnold, 2003) 203-205.

Before exploring the complexity of motherhood through transculturality, it is necessary to first consider the concepts of mothers and motherhood as they have been examined in literary theory. In her book The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism, Marianne Hirsch poses several interesting questions which serve as an appropriate starting point for discussing mother figures in literature. First, “What is a mother?” and “What is maternal?” Also, “Is motherhood [an] ‘experience’ or [an] ‘institution?’”¹⁰³ Finally, “Is it biological or cultural?” (The Mother/Daughter Plot 163). Indeed, not all female voices are maternal, and not all mother figures are positive. Given this, my discussion of maternal figures encompasses any woman who profoundly influences, positively or negatively, the life of a child.¹⁰⁴ Motherhood is not only biological, but also cultural, as each mother figure, in some way, passes history and tradition onto her children.

The performative aspect of motherhood is thus of utmost importance in this examination of Francophone postcolonial mother figures. Performing Motherhood by Michèle Longino Farrell examines the correspondence of Madame de Sévigné, discussing the manner in which a mother operates within a patriarchal system. Longino points out that in the seventeenth century, the formation of the mother figure is strongly influenced by male society. The centuries which separate seventeenth century literature

¹⁰³ In her 1976 study on motherhood, Of Woman Born, Adrienne Rich describes the institution of motherhood as one created by men in order to control women. While this work is not central to the present study, it has influenced the anthropological, sociological and literary studies of mothers, their relationships with their children, and their roles in society. Rich’s distinction between “institution” and “experience” is still employed in such studies. Adrienne Rich, Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1977).

¹⁰⁴ Men can most definitely serve as mother figures, yet this is rarely seen in a Francophone context, due to the tradition of male chauvinism in these cultures. One example of a novel where men serve as mother figures is Traversée de la Mangrove by Maryse Condé. In this novel, fathers who steal their children from their mothers end up acting as both mother and father for these children.

from the contemporary works of Francophone authors have most certainly allowed for evolution of the literary mother figure, but similarities can be seen across the centuries. According to Longino, Madame de Sévigné depicts herself as a mother to assert herself in a society which places little value on mothers of grown children and widows.¹⁰⁵ As we shall see in Ying Chen's L'Ingratitude, Gisèle Pineau's L'espérance-macadam, and Simone Schwarz-Bart's Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle, contemporary literary mothers still define themselves in relation to the patriarchy which surrounds them. The act of mothering one's children, whether biological or adopted, continues to be one of the most important ways for a character to define herself in the context of a given society.¹⁰⁶ Like Madame de Sévigné and other subsequent mother figures such as those portrayed by Colette, Simone de Beauvoir and Marguerite Duras, postcolonial literary mothers function within societies dominated by men. There is, however, an added dimension to these mother figures who also deal with the restraints imposed upon them by their postcolonial societies. They not only find themselves marginalized as women, but linguistically and culturally speaking as well, oftentimes relegated to a purely domestic role with little contact outside the family unit.

¹⁰⁵ Michèle Longino Farrell, Performing Motherhood: The Sévigné Correspondence (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1991) 12.

¹⁰⁶ Rejecting motherhood is also a strong way for a woman to assert herself. An excellent example of this is Simone de Beauvoir's refusal of motherhood as a way to free herself from what she perceives as a physical and societal handicap experienced by women. In Parity of the Sexes, Sylviane Agacinski offers sharp criticism of de Beauvoir's rejection of woman's maternal function, seeing it as "an absurd denial of nature, of maternity, and of the feminine body in general" (42). Agacinski proposes that rather than alienate herself from her body and its natural functions, a woman should be aware of that which distinguishes her from men, capitalizing on her femininity to liberate herself from "historical and natural alienation" (60). The differences between men and women therefore have the possibility of being viewed by women as positive rather than negative. Sylviane Agacinski, Parity of the Sexes, trans. Lisa Walsh (New York: Columbia U Press, 2001).

Works such as Longino's Performing Motherhood and others, including Writing Mothers and Daughters,¹⁰⁷ edited by Adalgisa Giorgio, and "Le nom de la mère: Le rapport mère-fille comme constante de l'écriture au féminin," by Lori Saint-Martin, provide a strong foundation for studies on mothers in literature, acting as stepping stones for studies on mother figures in a postcolonial context instead of a purely European one. In my examination of mothers from the works of selected authors, I will address the following questions: What does the literary depiction of mothers reveal about mothering in a postcolonial, culturally diverse context? How does living in a host country affect the act of mothering? What similarities are there between mother figures of different cultural traditions, heritages and languages? In short, what parallels exist between the mother figures in different Francophone diasporas?

Colette, de Beauvoir and the mother figures they create

Before delving into the intricacies of a feminine transculturality as expressed through mother figures, I will briefly examine mother figures as portrayed by Colette and Simone de Beauvoir.¹⁰⁸ French literature of the twentieth century abounds with representations of the mother, many of them idealistic. Colette and de Beauvoir, two

¹⁰⁷ Adalgisa Giorgio, Writing Mothers and Daughters: Renegotiating the Mother in Western European Narratives by Women (New York: Berghahn Books, 2002).

¹⁰⁸ Marcel Pagnol's Le Château de ma mère and Albert Cohen's Le livre de ma mère both portray saint-like mothers wholly devoted to their sons. I have chosen not to include these two novels in my analysis, because they tend not to recognize the mother figure's imperfections and weaknesses. Yet, they nonetheless provide important examples of mother figures in twentieth century French literature.

writers¹⁰⁹ who influenced feminism and feminist writing in the West, both present loving mothers, yet do not hesitate to point out what they perceive to be the disadvantages and risks involved in giving birth and mothering.¹¹⁰ While the works of these two authors are not necessarily models for the novels treated in this study, it is helpful to discuss them in order to underscore both the similarities and differences between them and contemporary Francophone works so as to better understand the role of the mother figure in recent Francophone literature.

One may wonder if it is appropriate to study the works of French women authors in conjunction with those of colonial or postcolonial cultures. Can the western woman be considered a colonized subject? In his chapter “Plaidoyer d’un tyran” in L’Homme dominé (1968), Albert Memmi puts forth the argument that Simone de Beauvoir was not really as liberated as she claimed to be, insisting that she renounced her right to marriage and family in an effort to please Jean-Paul Sartre. While she had the freedom to travel, pursue intellectual interests and even have relationships with other men, Memmi finds that her freedom was not complete: “Pour être libre efficacement, la femme doit être considérée comme femme: c’est-à-dire comme amante et mère. Pour libérer la femme, il faudra instaurer des rapports nouveaux dans les relations amoureuses et dans la

¹⁰⁹ Colette and Simone de Beauvoir were not only writers, but public figures whose seemingly radical sexual exploits shocked French society. Their writings and lives paved the way for future feminists. It can be argued that de Beauvoir was more influential in the United States than in France with regards to feminism and the Women’s movement.

¹¹⁰ Colette, for example, writes about pregnancy as deforming the woman’s body and the pains of labor in the short story “Maternité.” In Le Deuxième sexe, de Beauvoir encourages women to either not have children or to choose the time to conceive a child very carefully. See note 7 for Agacinski’s critique of de Beauvoir. Sidonie Colette, “Maternité,” La Maison de Claudine (Paris : Hachette, 1960) 72-75 ; Simone de Beauvoir, Le Deuxième sexe (Paris : Broché, 1949).

maternité.”¹¹¹ So, de Beauvoir’s long-term relationship with Sartre may not have fully respected her needs as a woman. Memmi argues that in order to assure true liberation for women, both in romance and motherhood, the structure of relationships between men and women must be rethought and transformed.¹¹² It is in this vein that we can begin to draw parallels between the works of French women writers and their colonial and postcolonial counterparts, for even modern western women such as de Beauvoir can be considered colonized by the expectations of a patriarchal society. Accordingly, at the heart of this study lies the fact that Memmi’s proposed “new relationships” have yet to take hold in the Francophone realm, a fact that is reflected in the literature of the various diasporas.¹¹³ As illustrated in each work of this study, interaction between men and women continues to be colored by the negative effects of physical, emotional or symbolic violence and the complexes instilled by colonialism and postcolonialism. Consequently, family dynamics are often disrupted by the unbalanced, even oppressive nature of relations between men and women.

A prolific writer, some of Colette’s best loved and most translated works focus on the mother. Sido, the mother figure appearing in many of Colette’s works, is modeled after Colette’s own mother and plays a central role in the collection of short stories La

¹¹¹ Albert Memmi, L’homme dominé (Paris : Gallimard, 1968) 167.

¹¹² On a similar note, Pierre Bourdieu claims that masculine domination can be overcome only through a major societal change: “[...] the relation of complicity that victims of symbolic domination grant to the dominant can only be broken through a radical transformation of the social conditions of production of the dispositions that lead the dominated to take the point of view of the dominant on the dominant and on themselves.” Pierre Bourdieu, Masculine Domination, trans. Richard Nice, (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2001) 42.

¹¹³ The same could be said about contemporary French literature, however this issue does not fall in the scope of this study.

Maison de Claudine (1922),¹¹⁴ the novella La Naissance du jour (1928),¹¹⁵ and the novella Sido (1930).¹¹⁶ She is an attentive, possessive mother who constantly worries about her children. In each of these three works, the Colettian mother figure is constructed through movement and attachment to certain symbolic objects. The home and garden comprise her domain, and it is in these places that the mother figure is most fully expressed.

Sido plays a dominant role in the life of the daughter-narrator. In the home and garden, she is queen, and her family does not question the central role she plays within that unit. Although she expresses emotion and is seen in moments of weakness, it cannot be disputed that Sido is constructed as a quasi-mythic character. Colette's homage to the mother continues in Sido where she proclaims, "Je la chante, de mon mieux" (22). This work further develops the persona of Sido through description of interaction with her husband, children, and other people who pass through their lives. Everything can be traced back and even attributed to Sido.

La Naissance du jour examines the mother figure in a whole other manner. In this story, the narrator imagines conversations with her deceased mother, evoking her presence through letters, imaginary dialogues, and by seeing her own reflection in the mirror. The complicated format makes for a rather disjointed story, as the narrator both

¹¹⁴ Sidonie Colette, La Maison de Claudine (Paris : Hachette, 1960).

¹¹⁵ Sidonie Colette, La Naissance du jour, In Colette : Romans-Récits-Souvenirs, Volume II, ed. Guy Schoeller (Paris : Editions Robert Laffont, 1989) 579-652.

¹¹⁶ Sidonie Colette, Sido et Les vrilles de la vigne (Paris : Hachette, 1930).

mourns the loss of her mother and attempts to make sense of her own love life. Yet, a sense of loss permeates the text, making for a tender tribute to a deceased mother figure.

Each of these three works presents a different facet of the Colettian mother figure. While in La Maison de Claudine Sido is mostly portrayed through the eyes of a young child, in Sido she is presented in relation to both her natural surroundings and each member of her large family by an adult narrator who seeks to comprehend her mother's influence on those who surround her. Finally, in a departure from the physical realm, Colette creates a mother figure whose impact is wholly understood only after her death. Even though the author consistently portrays Sido in a positive, almost angelic light, the reader is aware of Sido's fear of losing them, her constant need to protect her children and the oftentimes stifling role she plays in the life of her adult daughter. Through these three works, the reader also witnesses an evolution on the part of the narrator. That is to say, with each consecutive work, she sees and describes her mother differently as she better understands the course her mother's life took.

Whereas Colette often puts the mother figure on a pedestal, de Beauvoir uses the mother figure to criticize middle class woman's traditional role as wife and mother. Many of her works, including Les Mandarins,¹¹⁷ L'Invitée,¹¹⁸ and the play Les Bouches inutiles,¹¹⁹ analyze the mother's role through a rather skeptical, distant lens.¹²⁰ She is not

¹¹⁷ Simone de Beauvoir, Les Mandarins (Paris : Broché, 1961).

¹¹⁸ Simone de Beauvoir, L'Invitée (Paris : Broché, 1968).

¹¹⁹ Simone de Beauvoir, Les Bouches inutiles (Paris : Broché, 1945).

¹²⁰ Yolanda Astarita Patterson offers a complete analysis of de Beauvoir's mother figures in Simone de Beauvoir and the Demystification of Motherhood (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1989).

in any way idealized, as de Beauvoir's women characters oftentimes illustrate her feminist views annunciated in Le Deuxième sexe.

De Beauvoir's definition of motherhood differs from that which I have chosen to use in this study. In her 1985 interview with Patterson, she insists on the nurturing and practical aspect of motherhood, denying the fact that she may have served as a mother figure for those influenced by her thinking:

Oh, une mère ce n'est pas ça. Pour être la mère, il faut d'abord avoir accouché, et puis ensuite avoir torché l'enfant pendant des mois et des mois et puis il faut lui avoir appris à marcher, à parler. C'est ça une mère. [...] Et puis généralement, précisément, les enfants ne prennent pas les idées de leurs mères. Alors quand les femmes disent qu'elles ont été influencées par moi, ça veut dire que je ne suis pas leur mère. (Patterson 345)

Unlike Colette, whose stories document the mother-daughter exchange which defines the monumental relationship between the narrator and her mother, de Beauvoir denies any substantial influence of mothers over their children. A mother's role is *not* to form and educate her children, but rather to perform thankless and necessary tasks for them. De Beauvoir's vision of motherhood is therefore considerably narrower than that of Colette, which reflects the differing objectives of the two authors in setting out to write on the mother.

Some of her works, like those of Colette, contain important autobiographical elements which reveal her thoughts on mothers and motherhood. In that vein, I will briefly discuss two volumes of de Beauvoir's memoirs: Les Mémoires d'une jeune fille

rangée,¹²¹ the first in de Beauvoir's autobiographical trilogy and Une Mort très douce,¹²² the work that chronicles the final weeks of her mother's life. Through the study of her memoirs, we can see de Beauvoir's personal development and changing perception of her own mother as a human being. Les Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée captures the essence of the author's childhood, recounting her earliest memories, childhood fantasies and struggles, and finally her university studies. In this work and others de Beauvoir strives to demystify the mother figure by refusing to place her on a pedestal.

In Une mort très douce de Beauvoir details the emotionally wrenching process of her mother's death, revealing the mutual dependence mother and daughter have on one another: "Je ne tenais pas particulièrement à revoir maman avant sa mort; mais je ne supportais pas l'idée qu'elle ne me reverrait pas" (88). The work brings the mother's life full circle when her children must assume the role of mothering the mother.

Simone de Beauvoir portrays the mother as a product of a society in which a middle class woman is relegated to child rearing and serving her husband. Neither wholly positive nor wholly negative, one can see that the mother is key in the daughter's need for adolescent rebellion and later, emotional distance. De Beauvoir does not specifically condemn her own mother or mother figures in general, but she does criticize

¹²¹ Simone de Beauvoir, Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée (Paris : Gallimard, 1958).

¹²² Simone de Beauvoir, Une mort très douce (Paris : Gallimard, 1964).

the institution of motherhood and the patriarchal society that creates that institution. De Beauvoir's conception of motherhood is, thus, riddled with trepidation.¹²³

One can draw parallels between the Francophone mother figures examined in this study and those described by Colette and de Beauvoir. Just as Colette portrays Sido as the dominant figure in the home and garden, Schwarz-Bart and Pineau also paint mothers who reign over the domestic sphere. De Beauvoir's reflections following the death of her mother are echoed in the accounts of Zoulikha's orphaned daughters in La Femme sans sépulture by Assia Djebar. These and other commonalities traverse the boundaries of time and place, but the status of contemporary literary Francophone mothers is distinct from that of Colette and de Beauvoir. The political and social implications of colonialism and postcolonialism as well as different cultural practices make for a variety of characters that play the mother role in ways more varied than those of the aforementioned authors. Societal changes such as the fall of colonialism paired with increased interaction between those of different cultures, have made for an evolution in the mother figure. It is therefore necessary for us to expand our vision of literary mother figures, going beyond the already complex figures of Sido and Madame de Beauvoir to include the Francophone mothers examined in this study.

Representations of mother figures in a transcultural setting reveal that their experiences, some of which include displacement, exile, and wars of liberation, are not always positive. On the contrary, motherhood in a postcolonial context carries burdens

¹²³ See note 106.

not often expressed in French literature.¹²⁴ For instance, the passing on of traditions from mother to child is a predominant theme in both French and Francophone writing. Yet, in a postcolonial society, the oppressor has the power to undermine the native culture, thus creating a hierarchy of cultures. In La femme sans sépulture, Assia Djébar portrays Zoulikha, mother of four and combatant in Algeria's war of liberation. Educated in French colonial schools, she rejects both the French and traditional Algerian patriarchies in refusing to wear the veil and joining the war effort against the French. She experiences first hand the hierarchical structure of the colonies, and in rejecting that system, she sets an example for her children who, later in life, will live in Algeria's postcolonial society. Francophone mother figures like Zoulikha must negotiate multiple cultures and languages, striving to find a balance between acceptance in a society dominated by the oppressor and survival of their own ways. The overwhelming presence of another culture is a fact of life that risks stamping out their own cultural practices and religious beliefs. Through interaction with her children, however, the mother plays a small part in saving her culture from extinction.¹²⁵ Her role as guardian of culture is thus an urgent one,¹²⁶ with pressures that western mother figures do not experience.

¹²⁴ In his studies on Québécois society and literature, Simon Harel does not focus on mother figures, but he repeatedly underscores the potentially traumatic downfalls of life in exile: "[...] la mémoire de l'émigrant et de ses descendants est soumise à l'événement d'un choc traumatique et à sa profonde et sévère résonance. De ce choc résulte un interdit d'habiter qui plonge le sujet dans le plus vif désarroi." Simon Harel, Les passages obligés de l'écriture migrante (Montreal : XYZ, 2005) 176.

¹²⁵ This fact is exemplified in the works of Condé, Schwarz-Bart, and Pineau. During colonial times, it was forbidden to speak Creole, and so the language was preserved in family settings.

¹²⁶ As discussed in the first chapter, there is some disagreement as to whether it is men or women who serve as guardians of culture. The theorists of Creoleness claim that the male *oralituri* fulfills this role, while Condé perceives women as guardians of culture.

Family dynamics are also altered by transculturality, as illustrated by the high number of women who serve as heads of household. Unlike the families depicted by Colette and de Beauvoir, most Francophone authors do not portray traditional nuclear families, reflecting the phenomenon of single parenthood that so often reins in postcolonial societies.¹²⁷ In Gisèle Pineau's L'espérance-macadam, Eliette adopts a young girl who had been molested by her father, accepting the responsibility of raising Angela on her own. L'Ingratitude, by Ying Chen, portrays an incompetent, voiceless father who always folds to the will of his wife, and in La femme sans sépulture, by Assia Djebar, the vibrant Zoulikah completely overshadows her successive husbands. The relative unimportance and virtual invisibility of strong male figures renders their presence unnecessary in the context of a postcolonial family. Contemporary Francophone texts therefore criticize the patriarchy in ways not pertinent to the works of previous French authors through creation of households that manage to function and sometimes thrive in spite of their "manless" state. While the mother figures of Colette and de Beauvoir garner plenty of attention and a good amount of admiration from their daughter-narrators, father figures do play a necessary, oftentimes positive role in the family unit, both financially and morally. This is most definitely not the case in Francophone literature, where fragmented families are the norm and where absence is a dominant characteristic

¹²⁷ In the case of Schwarz-Bart and other female Antillean writers, for instance, father figures are not only overshadowed by mother figures, but they are virtually absent from the lives of their wives and children. Fathers, grandfathers, and boyfriends are seldom mentioned, and men remain at the periphery of the women's lives. The predominance of matrifocal, or mother-focused, families in the French Caribbean can be attributed to the long absences of men who leave the home to seek employment or live with mistresses and the higher death rate among men. See Arlette Gautier, Women from Guadeloupe and Martinique. French and West Indian: Martinique, Guadeloupe and French Guiana Today, eds. Richard D.E. Burton and Fred Reno (Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1995) 126-127.

of family life. Francophone mother figures both directly and indirectly present a challenge to the patriarchal systems which have inhibited them emotionally, sexually and professionally. Whereas Colette and de Beauvoir's discourses concern sexual liberation and economic independence in a *western* society, those of Francophone writers involve battles against that very western society—one whose imposed and unjust political system stifles and exploits a whole population linguistically, religiously, physically, politically, and economically.

Keeping in mind the inherent differences mentioned above, it is possible and worthwhile to discuss both French and Francophone mother figures as victims of a patriarchal society. There are, however, distinct sets of circumstances, brought on by colonialism and postcolonialism, from which new sorts of literary mother figures emerge and which invite discussion of transculturality as it is experienced by women.

Displacement and exile

Postcolonial literature stems, in part, from a history of invasion and displacement. Literature of the French Caribbean, for example, is keenly aware of the slave trade which brought Africans to the Caribbean as well as the European invasion of the islands, practically wiping out the native population. These historical facts have played and continue to play an important role in Creole society and consequently in the literature of the region.¹²⁸ This study focuses heavily on the characteristics of transcultural societies and how they influence representation of mother figures in literature. Consideration of

¹²⁸ See Chapter 1 for a thorough explanation of Creoleness.

the French Caribbean, however, lends itself to discussions of both interculturality and transculturality, as examination of various texts will illustrate.

Schwarz-Bart and Pineau's mother figures, although different from one another, are all products of the islands' history. While they could be considered victims of the unpleasant circumstances of their lives, each is a strong and imposing figure for her children. As is often the case in Creole literature, the principal mother figure is the grandmother¹²⁹ or an adopted mother figure, as we shall see in Pineau's L'espérance-macadam. Whether the mother resides in her native village or in a large city far from home, Schwarz-Bart and Pineau's mother figures each display numerous characteristics which demonstrate an awareness of other cultures. In the case of Schwarz-Bart, mother figures perceive otherness, yet have limited interaction with those of varied backgrounds. Rather, they simply possess the knowledge that their ancestors are from elsewhere and that there are stark differences between them and the French, who are at the top of the Antillean social ladder. According to Moisan's categories, this awareness endows Schwarz-Bart's novels with an intercultural perspective, since little mixing and exchange occur between people of different social, economic, and ethnic backgrounds.

Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle and Un plat de porc aux bananes vertes, both by Schwarz-Bart, present grandmothers who serve as primary mother figures. Though both are mythical figures, Télumée's grandmother, Reine Sans Nom, and Mariotte's grandmother, Mémé Louise, seem to be polar opposites. In Pluie et vent, Reine Sans Nom encourages and compliments, and in Un plat de porc, mémé Louise ridicules and

¹²⁹ See note 127.

taunts. The two characters approach their granddaughters differently, but both are Creole women who serve as models for their granddaughters. They are both descendants of the slaves brought from Africa, guardians of the Creole language, traditions, and of the stories that make up the fabric of their history. In addition, both women hold and express strong beliefs. Mémé Louise is a firm believer in slavery, the institution that both betrayed and supported her. Although slavery took her dignity, it gave her a sense of loyalty and community that she was never able to re-establish after having been freed. Mémé Louise, as a slave, was never given the opportunity, and therefore has never learned to embrace her African roots and traditions. Rather, she admires and emulates the ways of her western master, neglecting and condemning her own history and the value system of her people. In Portrait du colonisé, Memmi examines this contradictory attitude often displayed by oppressed people. This “amour du colonisateur et haine de soi” (Portrait 156) is ingrained by the oppressor over generations. By constantly undermining the native culture and uplifting his own, he succeeds in creating a dominant culture accepted by the society as a whole. In effect, the colonized internalizes the perception of the colonizer, according to which the traditions and values of the colonizer are praised, whereas those of the colonized are devalued and suppressed. Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic violence, “a gentle violence, imperceptible and invisible even to its victims” (Masculine Domination 1), operates in much the same manner. The oppressed are not aware of the violence being exerted on them, as it is one that emerges subtly through language. Domination is therefore inscribed in the deepest subconscious of the body, and the victims of this violence likely do not even know that they are, in fact, victims. The oppressed, both for Memmi and Bourdieu, are active, yet unknowing

participants in the process of domination, for it is only in subscribing to the discourse of the oppressor that one can be dominated.

Reine Sans Nom, a highly positive mother figure, has not been won over by the oppressor's ideologies. She, unlike Mémé Louise, finds hope in her people, and particularly in the women of her family. She preaches the strength of Lougandor women,¹³⁰ never failing to remind Télumée that she is part of that female tradition.

Mémé Louise and Reine Sans Nom probably have not experienced a great deal of physical displacement, but they have inherited the history of forced displacement brought on by the slave trade. They are aware that their ancestors are from elsewhere, but each woman knows that her reality and her roots are firmly planted in the Caribbean. Pineau's mother figures are also linked to the region, but the exile experience differentiates them from Schwarz-Bart's mother figures. Eliette and Julia are characterized by, to use the words of Moisan "... à la fois le passage et le changement d'un lieu, d'un état ou d'un moment, à un autre" (208). These two mothers are eternally linked to the passages they have undergone to arrive at the present moment. Upheaval has defined them as human beings and has heavily influenced the way in which they enact their maternal roles.

Eliette, married and widowed three times, is a resident of Guadeloupe's Savane Mulet,¹³¹ a place of refuge for many undesirables:

¹³⁰ According to Reine Sans Nom, Lougandor women have a long tradition of courage. As part of this tradition, Télumée has the responsibility to rejoice in moments of happiness and to find strength in moments of despair (142).

¹³¹ Oliveira identifies the term "Savane" as originating from the native Taino tribe. It also evokes images of Africa for a Eurocentric reader. Humberto Luiz de Oliveira, "Migrations, Exils et Reconfigurations Identitaires," *Babilonia* 2-3(2005) :100.

Au fur et à mesure, dans les années soixante, la plupart des esprits mauvais furent refoulés sur l'autre bord de la rivière. Et une multitude peupla soudain Savane. Ils arrivaient de partout, barraient des morceaux de terre, plantaient des cases immondes... Gens jetés de tous les côtés de Guadeloupe. (EM 24)

Savane Mulet protects Eliette from the violent memories of a cyclone in which she was injured and which she believes to have left her infertile. It is a place which lets her forget, and when she is ready, remember traumatic events of her life. Although unable to conceive a child, she eventually adopts a neighbor girl who has been sexually abused by her father. Thus, Savane Mulet is also a space which allows her to become a mother. Like Mémé Louis and Reine Sans Nom, Eliette experiences interculturality, or the co-existence of cultures, in her people's history of displacement and slavery. Her transcultural experience is represented in the fact that she herself has sought refuge after having lived through an event which very well could have taken her life.¹³² In Savane Mulet, dubbed *Quartier-Mélo*¹³³ by a French police officer, Eliette encounters people with roots in both English and Spanish-speaking areas (EM 24-25). The community of Savane Mulet never attains a harmonious existence, and Eliette is witness to the agony that permeates the area: "Les paroles se sont mises à voltiger dans mon salon. Querelles, cris, pleurs, rires, tambours me tanaient éveillée dans la couche jusque tard dans la nuit. Ma case, au coeur de Savane Mulet, était devenue comme un grand bénitier plein des vies démontées des nations assemblées..." (EM 26). Although Eliette does not actively seek

¹³² Savane Mulet is a community with a high degree of cultural diversity that welcomes people from different regions and all walks of life. These characteristics make for a transcultural environment. Yet, poverty and crime create an environment of distrust and suspicion, so the transculturality that Eliette and the other residents know is a troubled, unhappy one that does not adhere to Welsch's vision of transcultural societies.

¹³³ *Quartier-mélo*—mixed neighborhood. This is inspired by the French expression *méli-mélo* which refers to a mess, a muddle, or a jumble. Savane Mulet's mixed population has a multitude of problems, including poverty, incest, and natural disasters.

contact with the other residents of *Quartier-Mélo*, she does serve to witness and chronicle the traumatizations that define life in the settlement. Her transcultural experience is formed not only through person-to-person interaction outside the home, but perhaps more importantly through contemplation of the diverse and troubled society she observes from the safety of her living room.

The negative aspects of life in Savane Mulet, including poverty, filth, and violence, make for an unpleasant existence that exudes dishonesty. People from all over the Caribbean have settled in the area, have come to know their neighbors, and yet have never come to fully trust one another. This proves to be one of the drawbacks of displacement and consequently of transculturality—the inability to trust others with different backgrounds and personal histories. Eliette cannot help but be influenced by her community, yet she seeks solitude: “[...] Eliette cherchait rien d’autre sur cette terre que la paix de sa case. Pas mêler son existence au désordre de Savane. Pas laisser son esprit donner couleurs aux sons, bâtir des cathédrales de douleur en son cœur” (EM 8).

Although Eliette has attempted to ignore the crimes, abuse, and heartbreak that have repeatedly occurred in her community, the sordid atmosphere of Savane Mulet has inhibited her for years. Yet, when she finally opens her eyes to Angela’s grave situation, one which parallels her own adolescent memories, she knows she must reach out to the girl. For Eliette, a transcultural society proves to be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, discomfort and mistrust of others cause her to retreat into her private space, but on the other hand, that very same society presents her with the opportunity for and responsibility of motherhood, a role she has actively sought throughout her adult life.

Eliette's story demonstrates the fact that displacement is not only an historical fact of postcolonial literature, but also a contemporary reality. Living in exile is a prevalent theme in Francophone literature, and what Welsch refers to as "new forms of entanglement" (23) resulting from migration contribute to the transcultural nature of much of today's literature. Women, and especially mothers living in exile, frequently find themselves in an unenviable position as they raise their families abroad. Oftentimes they do not speak the language of the host country, nor are they able to comprehend many cultural references to which their children become accustomed. These mothers are not integrated into a transcultural society and their realities thus do not conform to the positive images put forth by Welsch. Similarly, Glissant's lively visions of creolization and mutual exchange do not correspond to the experiences of women who live in exile.

In Ces voix qui m'assiègent...en marge de ma francophonie, Assia Djébar reveals some of the challenges these mothers face:

La mère cependant se maintient au premier plan, symboliquement et concrètement, dans le quotidien des migrations de banlieues. Tant qu'elle ne s'ancre pas dans une autre culture, dans d'autres habitudes, une autre vie, le temps qui s'écoule, pour la femme émigrée, est temps pour procréer encore, et voir grandir les enfants. Ceux-ci vont aller à l'école des Autres, devenir peu à peu des demi-étrangers à leur terre d'origine, en quelque sorte des Européens mais dans l'étrangeté.¹³⁴

Little by little, the mother loses her grip on her children whose experiences no longer parallel her own. She continues to be a visible figure in the household, but unlike her children she does not integrate, and daily life therefore continues to pose numerous linguistic and cultural challenges. Even living in the West, these mothers are restricted

¹³⁴ Assia Djébar, Ces voix qui m'assiègent (Paris: Albin Michel, 1999) 198.

by traditions brought from their homelands. Self expression is consequently not an option for many of them, and they are bound to tradition and familial expectations. In reference to these women being caught between two languages, Djébar proclaims: “Les matrones de l’errance se tiennent-elles entre deux langues ? Plutôt entre deux silences” (*Ces voix* 202). Like Djébar, many postcolonial authors recognize the silence imposed on immigrant mothers, and through their works some of them seek to break that silence, oftentimes as a daughter or granddaughter tells the story of her mother or grandmother.

Farid Laroussi considers the status of feminine voices in his article “Eloge de l’absence dans *La Femme sans sépulture* d’Assia Djébar,” noting that “Le discours de la femme algérienne, surtout celui établi à partir de la guerre, a été oublié ou occulté, sans que cette étrangeté d’une réalité pourtant familière ne renvoie à une différence d’ordre typologique entre les pouvoirs de représentation.”¹³⁵ This forgotten or hidden discourse emerges in Francophone Algerian literature through the polyphony of women’s voices that permeates the works of writers such as Assia Djébar and Malika Mokkedem : “Il s’avère que très souvent la femme maghrébine, en particulier algérienne, n’est pas éliminée, mais plutôt subordonnée à un terme métaphorique, tantôt libérateur tantôt stéréotype” (Laroussi 198). Works of fiction therefore reflect North African women’s uncertain and evolving status in both postcolonial and French societies. Valérie Orlando discusses the works written by and about Algerian women living in exile, explaining that they are produced both *because of* and *in spite of* exile and deterritorialization : “Ils sont le produit d’une découverte de soi au sein d’un exil et d’une identité féminine qui ressurgissent et aussi le produit d’une histoire féminine qui n’a jamais été racontée”

¹³⁵ Farid Laroussi, “Eloge de l’absence dans *La Femme sans sépulture* d’Assia Djébar, ” *International Journal of Francophone Studies* 7.3(2004) :189.

(“Ecriture d’un autre lieu” 114).¹³⁶ Exile and solitude force women to consider their existence and, in some cases, give them the chance to express the realities of that existence through the written word: “La femme est mise en face d’une *tabula rasa* où son destin reste encore à écrire” (“Ecrire d’un autre lieu 115). Yet, Orlando stresses that the feminine Maghrebien “sphere of agency” is one that enables women to explore their own realities as well as those of people who have been “left out” (Nomadic Voices of Exile 16). Francophone authors, many of whom live in exile, are thus in a position to express not only the obstacles they have met, but also of the hardships experienced by secluded women who do not have the means or the ability to speak for themselves.

In Pineau’s L’Exil selon Julia, Man Ya¹³⁷ unwillingly moves to Paris with her son’s family as they try to protect her from her violent husband. The novel recounts the extreme culture shock, loneliness, and physical illness she experiences during her time in a Paris suburb. At the same time, the narrator, her granddaughter, relates the monumental influence Man Ya exerts over her grandchildren during her time in their home. Through her stories the children imagine and claim their homeland, Guadeloupe: “Ma vie commence bien là, même si je n’existais pas encore” (ES 27). Man Ya’s need to return to her home is evident throughout the story, as living in exile takes its toll on her: “Sa terre aimée l’a jetée combien de fois, et puis l’a ramassée. C’est là même qu’elle veut vivre, en Guadeloupe” (ES 38). She yearns for her homeland and eventually returns, but not before perplexing adventures in France, including getting lost in Paris while making

¹³⁶ Valérie Orlando, “Ecriture d’un autre lieu: la déterritorialisation des nouveaux rôles féminins dans l’*Interdite*,” Malika Mokeddem : Envers et contre tout, ed. Yolande Aline Helm (Paris : Harmattan, 2000) 105-116.

¹³⁷ “Man” is a respectful term for an older woman. Julia’s grandchildren call her “Man Ya.”

her way to the Sacré Cœur on foot, a confusing encounter with French police who want to arrest her for wearing her son's army jacket, and experiencing winter weather for the first time in her life. Throughout her exile, Man Ya never leaves Guadeloupe behind: "Si son corps reste là, d'entre nous, son esprit voyage sans fatiguer entre la France et son Pays"¹³⁸ Guadeloupe où chaque jour elle espère retourner" (ES 16). She evolves in a transcultural space, and her presence in the household transforms the lives of her grandchildren. For the first time, they are exposed to the Creole language and must learn to communicate with their grandmother who does not understand French. She alone incarnates their seemingly mysterious roots, daring to talk to them about slavery without shame (ES 84). Yet, she also implicates herself in their daily lives in a Parisian suburb, making sure the children are fed, coddled, and spoiled. She is a strong influence on her grandchildren, and they, too, facilitate her discovery of another culture. Thanks to them, she discovers the television and a passion for the singer Edith Piaf (ES 105-107). She learns about prominent black figures, including Martin Luther King and Josephine Baker (ES 101), and after a few years, she succeeds in learning to write her name (ES 99). Man Ya contributes to the transcultural education of her grandchildren, and they, in turn, contribute to hers.

Man Ya's yearning to return home does not prevent her from effectively carrying out what she perceives as her grandmotherly duties. Rather, her undesired transcultural experience enriches her grandchildren's knowledge of their Creole roots, for in living with her, they begin to cultivate an awareness of their unknown homeland. Once Man Ya has returned to Guadeloupe, their appreciation for their grandmother and the island only

¹³⁸ In capitalizing the word *pays*, Pineau reiterates the central, respected status the homeland holds for Man-Ya.

grows. Although physically absent from the family apartment, Man Ya is present in the mind of her granddaughter. A series of letters from the narrator attests to the grandmother's influence and the role she plays in "creating" a homeland for her grandchildren: "Quand je mange des lentilles, je songe aux Antilles. Lentilles, Antilles. Est-ce qu'on peut dire que la Guadeloupe est une Antille parmi tant d'autres qui forment les Antilles ?" (ES 147). Although she cannot fully imagine Guadeloupe and the Antilles, they are now part of her daydreams and childish musings, thanks to Man Ya. At a young age, Gisèle is anchored in two distinct cultures. The epistolary genre is significant in L'Exil selon Julia and in transcultural literature in general, for its strong cultural and linguistic dialogic dimension. Gisèle's creative manipulation of language, the paronomasia¹³⁹ of the words *Antille* and *lentille*, reflects her ability to negotiate multiple cultures. The reflections in her letter also demonstrate a charming childish humour linked to food and country.

Regions other than the Caribbean have experienced and continue to experience demographic upheaval. As noted in the first chapter of this study, the province of Quebec has a large immigrant population, and many of Quebec's best known writers are immigrants or children of immigrants. Abia Farhoud immigrated to Canada as a child and has since spent long periods of time in both France and her native Lebanon. Her first novel, Le bonheur a la queue glissante, is an excellent example of a transcultural novel, as it deals with exile, language barriers, preservation of culture, and acceptance in and of the host culture. There are several levels of transculturality expressed in this novel, as demonstrated in the relationships Dounia maintains with her children and her husband.

¹³⁹ *paronomasia*—play on words

Her interactions with her husband are peppered with memories of physical violence and emotional neglect, and her first years in Canada marked by isolation: “Je ne pouvais parler à personne. Je ne connaissais pas la langue du pays, je ne sortais jamais de la maison, je n’avais ni parents ni amies, mon mari avait tellement de problèmes, c’était impossible de lui parler” (BQ 31). Abuse, loneliness, and the inability to communicate underscore the negative side of Dounia’s life in a transcultural society. The relationships she maintains with her children, however, demonstrate the success they have achieved in life, as both parents and young professionals, at ease in various cultural and social situations. While Dounia was not able to overcome the barriers to integration, her children were. She therefore experiences and embodies both positive and negative aspects of transculturality.

Since leaving Lebanon with her small children to join her husband in Canada, Dounia has experienced numerous obstacles in raising her family abroad, and has come to the realization that for her, “home” is with family rather than with place, land, country, or a given nation-state: “Certains immigrants disent: ‘Je voudrais mourir là où je suis né.’ Moi, non. Mon pays, ce n’est pas le pays de mes ancêtres ni même le village de mon enfance, mon pays, c’est là où mes enfants sont heureux” (BQ 22).¹⁴⁰ Although she never escapes the feeling of living in exile, Dounia knows from experience that she cannot return to her homeland without feeling like an outsider. In Canada, she has difficulty communicating with those outside her immediate family, as she speaks neither French nor English. In Lebanon, where one would expect her to feel at ease, she has lost

¹⁴⁰ In migrant literature redefinition of homeland is common, as notions of territory and nation are less and less a focus for identity in a postmodern and global context. Also, the province of Quebec is not a nation-state, but a nation defined by a common language and culture.

her personal connections. Upon her family's return, they are considered "American" and are therefore outsiders (BQ 109). Dounia's identity, like those of other immigrants, cannot be defined within the framework of a nation. She has experienced multiple displacements, all forced, and so the way in which she situates herself in a particular space is more important than her country of origin or even her country of residence. Simon Harel defines this phenomenon as *la pensée-habitacle* : "La pensée-habitacle est précisément cette manifestation subjective qui indique à chaque fois la façon dont un sujet se situe dans le monde, la manière dont il l'habite, c'est-à-dire son mode particulier d'aménagement du monde" (123). Dounia's *lieu habité*, that is to say, the space she inhabits, more readily and accurately captures her identity and better allows for self expression than would description of a claimed homeland.¹⁴¹

Having immigrated proves to have been the seminal event of Dounia's life: "La chose qui a été la plus importante de toute ma vie ? C'est... attends...laisse-moi réfléchir... Je dirais que c'est d'avoir émigré. Oui. Avoir changé de pays. Parce que cela a complètement changé ma vie et celle de mes enfants" (BQ 121). The life she has lived in Canada can hardly be compared to the one she would have led in Lebanon.

Dounia has, however, been able to incorporate bits of her culture into her life in exile. One element she has passed on is her Arab proverbs, sprinkled in conversation at appropriate moments: "[...] un proverbe vient en temps et lieu, en accord ou en désaccord avec ce qui vient d'être dit ou fait..." (BQ 23) In her article "Oralité et écriture dans *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle*," Nathalie Buchet Rogers explains the

¹⁴¹ Chapter 3 examines the importance of place for the mother in Francophone postcolonial societies.

place of proverbs in texts from traditionally oral cultures : “Il s’agit de la tension entre une culture encore fortement orale, et la présence d’une culture écrite qui peu à peu s’infiltré en elle et menace de la transformer de fond en comble.”¹⁴² Rogers’ remark is highly pertinent in Le bonheur a la queue glissante, as Dounia’s inability to read forces her to rely on strictly oral communication with those who surround her. Her incorporation of proverbs has two purposes. First, to teach a lesson in few words. Dounia’s children remember many of her proverbs, one of which serves as the title of the novel: *le bonheur a la queue glissante*.¹⁴³ The proverb reminds them that happiness is fleeting and that life invariably presents unpleasant experiences.

Second, Dounia admits that her use of proverbs allows her to evade potentially uncomfortable situations: “Je réponds par un dicton, un proverbe ou une phrase toute faite quand mes enfants me posent une question sur mon passé, c’est plus facile que d’avoir à chercher la vérité, à la dire, à la revivre...” (BQ 30). Myriam,¹⁴⁴ one of Dounia’s daughters, has become attached to the proverbs which have served as a sort of auditory background in her relationship with her mother. She collects the proverbs in a notebook and aspires to tell her mother’s story, which we can assume is Farhoud’s novel, told in the mother’s voice. Myriam’s affinity for the proverbs proves not only the potency of her mother’s words, but also reflects her desire to understand Dounia’s life.

¹⁴² Nathalie Buchet Rogers, “Oralité et écriture dans *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle*,” The French Review 65.3 (Feb. 1992) : 435.

¹⁴³ *le bonheur a la queue glissante*—“happiness has a slippery tail,” refers to the impermanence of happiness.

¹⁴⁴ The name “Myriam,” Arabic for Mary, is the Old Testament name that becomes “Mary” in the New Testament. The name means “bitter” or “rebellious.” The allusion to rebellion could refer to the fact that Dounia’s daughter is the courageous figure who desires to give her mother a voice by telling the story of her life.

Transculturality and absence

As seen above, Djébar has revealed the stressful circumstances of immigrant mothers who remain secluded in spite of the fact that they live in a diverse society. Their children are exposed to multiple cultures and learn the language of the host country, and little by little they evolve away from their mother's knowledge and personal experience. The stories of Man-Ya and Dounia have shown us that that transculturality influences the lives of immigrant families. Mothers, although often anchored to the home, serve as essential cultural references and as a link to the homeland.

Transculturality can also be experienced within the borders of one's own country, adversely affecting family dynamics. As mentioned early in this chapter, loss, death and trauma are common concerns in postcolonial literature. The high number of matrifocal families presented in literary works is a symptom of these facts. While absent father figures are common in literature, as seen in the novels of Simone Schwarz-Bart, there is also room for discussion of mothers and children whose absence upsets the family unit. La femme sans sépulture by Assia Djébar, Des rêves et des assassins by Malika Mokeddem and L'Ingratitude by Ying Chen each present women who are, for one reason or another, absent from family life. Of course, absence is an abstract notion, and writing on absence can be a problematical undertaking. Yet, one family member's physical absence creates concrete and specific situations that Djébar, Mokeddem and Chen succeed in recreating.

Zoulikha, *la femme sans sépulture*,¹⁴⁵ left her young children with their older sister to fight in Algeria's war of liberation. The narrator of the story returns to Zoulikha's city Césarée, also her home town, to make a documentary about the heroine. Years after Zoulikha's disappearance and Algeria's independence,¹⁴⁶ her daughters still suffer in their mother's absence and perceived abandonment.¹⁴⁷ Hania, the eldest, explains to the narrator, "[...] si je parle d'elle, je me soulage, je me débarrasse des dents de l'amertume. Oh, je sais bien, les autres femmes de la ville, aujourd'hui, pensent que je suis fière de Zoulikha" (FS 51). She does not deny the deep connection between her and her mother, but it seems that she has yet to accept her mother's abandonment, death, and the fact that she did not receive a proper burial.¹⁴⁸ "Plusieurs fois je vis, dans un rêve, sa sépulture : illuminé, isolé, un monument superbe, et je pleurais sans fin devant ce mausolée" (FS 61). Hania has no tomb to visit and therefore feels that she has no way to pay tribute to or confide in her deceased mother. She believes that she and her sister are "plus défavorisées que de simples orphelines" (FS 93).

Although less vocal than her older sister, Mina also has difficulty dealing with her mother's absence and status as war hero. During her summer vacation she returns to her sister's house from Algiers, and in the afternoons she visits Dame Lionne, a friend of her

¹⁴⁵ *la femme sans sépulture*—the woman without a sepulture. This refers to the fact that Zoulikha's body was never found and she never had a proper burial. The title *la femme sans sépulture* does not explain the issue of maternal absence, but it alludes to a wandering of the unsettled spirit whose final resting place is unknown to her family.

¹⁴⁶ *La Femme sans sépulture* was published in 2002, the fortieth anniversary of Algeria's independence from France, but the story is being told some twenty years after Zoulikha's disappearance.

¹⁴⁷ Chapter 4 examines the notion of death as a form of exile.

¹⁴⁸ Muslim tradition dictates that the deceased are to be buried within a day of death. Unbeknownst to Zoulikha's family, the heroine actually was buried by a young soldier.

mother's. In the hours the two women spend together, the talkative Dame Lionne delves into the past, rehashing stories about her friendship with Zoulikha. For Dame Lionne and the other women who knew Zoulikha, the act of storytelling becomes a way to reconstruct the many facets of this heroine's persona, but in a broader sense, a way to piece together a history of women's involvement in the war of liberation. It is difficult for Mina to hear Dame Lionne's stories about her mother: "Qu'elle ne me parle pas aujourd'hui...de ma mère! [...] Je ne veux plus trembler, ni souffrir!" (FS 27). In spite of her reticence to listen to stories about Zoulikha, Mina nonetheless seeks the company of Dame Lionne, perhaps because this woman was a trusted confidant of her mother.

An interesting characteristic of the novel is the presence of Zoulikha's four monologues, addressed to Mina, where her spirit attempts explain her decision to leave her family, shed light on the circumstances of her death, and provide guidance for her youngest daughter.¹⁴⁹ These four monologues, contributed by a spectral narrator and interspersed throughout the text, represent an attempt at mothering beyond the grave, as the spirit shares stories that she would have shared with Mina, had she been alive. In the third monologue, for example, she tells about meeting Mina's father, the ten happy years they spent together, and then how their lives changed once he was killed (FS 190-193). The monologues also reveal information about the mother's last days and the mother-son relationships she developed with some of the young men with whom she served (FS 230). In his article "Place, Position, and Postcolonial Haunting in Assia Djébar's *La femme sans sépulture*," Michael O'Riley notes that Djébar's use of spectral voice reappropriates

¹⁴⁹ In Djébar's novels, the dead often speak, as the case in *Le blanc d'Algérie*, a book in which the narrator undertakes a dialogue with three deceased friends. The deceased are not dead, and through literature their voices survive. Authors' use of spectral narrators is examined in Chapter 4. See Assia Djébar, *Le blanc d'Algérie* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1996).

history while avoiding the problematic of the “imperialist gesture of appropriation and effacement so related to place.”¹⁵⁰ On a similar note, Zoulikha’s ghostly monologues seek to reappropriate the maternal duties she sacrificed in death. The deceased mother figure finds a voice and seeks to perform the act of motherhood for her youngest daughter.¹⁵¹

We know that transculturality deals with the disappearance of boundaries and intermingling of cultures that form many contemporary literary characters, yet this does not exclude conflict and violence. During her life, Zoulikha encountered multiple cultures which are important to discuss in consideration of this mother figure. Educated in French colonial schools, Zoulikha chose to leave her family and fight for Algerian independence. The interplay between cultures is fundamental in the formation of this unique character. We learn that her desire to be free and adventurous is in conflict with Algerian society’s wish that she veil herself or stay home. The fact that she had three husbands also goes against society’s expectations for a woman. In keeping with her contradictory ways, she chose to put her life on the line and fight the colonial power. Zoulikha is a very different kind of mother who refuses to accept traditional roles, yet respects and maintains friendships with those who do. Her legendary and spectral status differentiate her from other mother figures examined in this study.

¹⁵⁰ Michael F. O’Riley, “Place, Position, and Postcolonial Haunting in Assia Djebar’s *La femme sans sépulture*,” *Research in African Literatures* 35.1 (Spring 2004): 66. For an intriguing discussion on the (re)appropriation of space in postcolonial regions, see also Michael F. O’Riley, “Victimes, héros et spectres du passé colonial dans *La Disparition de la langue française* d’Assia Djebar,” *Nouvelles Etudes Francophones* 21.1 (Printemps 2006): 153-167.

¹⁵¹ Zoulikha’s spirit seeks to erase the boundaries between life and death in an effort to mother her daughter, and in doing so, also fulfills a more encompassing role, that of inscribing history. According to Laroussi, “Zoulika fonctionne comme un filtre qui préserve l’intégrité de la mémoire par delà le temps. [...] c’est la guerre qui est fantasmée, [...] à travers elle sont projetées les constructions de l’identité nationale” (191).

Mokeddem's Des rêves et des assassins also presents a motherless Algerian girl. Kenza is raised in her diabolic father's household and has no memory of her mother whom she has not seen since the age of two and who has since passed away. She is aware of certain facts pertaining to Keltoum, her mother. Kenza was born in Montpellier, France the year of Algeria's independence, when her mother was in the country caring for an ailing brother. Upon her return to Algeria, Keltoum discovered that her husband had taken a second wife and that the couple was expecting a child. She left, and her husband prevented her from taking Kenza with her: "J'avais trois mois lorsque, sur le seuil d'une porte, mon père m'arracha à ses bras" (RA 10). Most of what she knows about her mother is vague, such as details concerning her apparent "kidnapping": "Il paraît que ma mère m'a enlevée lors de l'un de ses retours à Oran. Que pendant quinze jours mon père a écumé la ville et battu son épouse. Il paraît qu'on m'a retrouvé en bas de l'immeuble, le jour où ma mère reprit le bateau pour la France. J'avais deux ans. Il paraît que, par la suite, toutes ses tentatives pour me revoir restèrent vaines" (RA 17). Kenza's repeated use of *il paraît* insists on the fact that she has doubts about the official version of the story as it was told to her and that the truth about her mother is out of reach, given the scant details provided to her.

One last bit of information about her mother arrives one day, when Kenza is told by a neighbor child that there is a woman waiting for her in the street who wants to talk to her about her mother. Zana Baki, a friend of her mother's, comes bearing the news of her mother's death. Keltoum's tomb is in Oran, and Zana proposes to take Kenza to visit it. At the burial site, the young girl feels no emotion: "Je n'avais jamais vu frémir ces traits. N'avais aucun souvenir de baiser, aucune parcelle de vie commune à insuffler à ce

mot: mère. Il ne m'était que l'absence et l'inconnu. L'absence d'une inconnue. [...] Je ne pouvais pas perdre une mère que je n'avais jamais eue" (RA 18). The child's reaction or lack thereof is directly linked to the fact that she has absolutely no memory of her mother. Unlike Hania and Mina in La femme sans sépulture, having access to her mother's tomb is of no importance to the young Kenza since she has no knowledge of the person that her mother was or what it even means to have a mother. Contrary to Zoulikha's status as legendary figure in Algeria's war of independence, Keltoum is known to few and her status in her former husband's household is one of hushed tones and shame. This, of course, filters down to Kenza, and her throughout her childhood she is always set apart from her half brothers and sisters and sent away to boarding school as soon as possible.

Both Kenza and her deceased mother are familiar with life in culturally diverse settings. Born on the other side of the Mediterranean, Kenza has an instant connection to both France and Algeria. When, as a young woman, she travels to Montpellier in search of information about her mother, she recognizes the ambivalence of her transcultural experience: "Gare de Montpellier. Ville étrangère où je suis née. Où ma mère est morte. Un lieu, un lien entre ma naissance et sa mort. Point de rupture de nos deux vies, aussi" (RA 81). She is thirsty for knowledge about her absent mother and seeks to know her through people who may have crossed her path and landmarks that she would have seen when going about her daily life. At the age of eight, when she learns of her mother's death, she does not feel the need to know about this absent mother figure. Later in life, however, her need to understand her mother propels her across the Mediterranean to a city and country she does not know, but to which she is nonetheless linked. In her article

“Traversée de l’angoisse et poétique de l’espoir chez Malika Mokeddem,” Margot Miller analyzes mobility as a means of fostering and maintaining hope in the search for one’s identity.¹⁵² Although Miller’s article does not refer to Des rêves et des assassins, her research most definitely pertains to the path Kenza forges for herself. This protagonist’s need to know and understand her deceased mother can only be satisfied through a voyage to another continent, visiting a town that is foreign, yet somehow familiar. Kenza’s stay in Montpellier sparks ambivalent emotions—the satisfaction of knowing that her mother loved and cared for her paired with the trauma of knowing that she lived a solitary life and died alone after an illegal abortion.

Once she has learned all she can about her mother’s painful life and has begun to come to terms with the perceived maternal abandonment, Kenza discovers a need to continue moving, visiting other places in her personal quest: “Il me prend des envies de voyage. Des envies d’aller vers des pays où je n’ai aucune racine” (RA 155). As the title of Miller’s article indicates, agony and hope go hand in hand in this transformative period. The discoveries Kenza makes in Montpellier are simultaneously cathartic and traumatic, reinforcing the dual nature of her transcultural experience. Kenza’s desire to travel hints at a need to mold herself in a neutral space, one Orlando dubs “l’espace d’une métissée” (“Ecriture d’un autre lieu” 105). Travel and discovery of new places thus become essential to Kenza’s identity formation.

The legacies of Zoulikha and Keltoum, both absent, both deceased, both Algerian mothers, affect their children differently. Hania and Mina feel the presence of their

¹⁵² Margot Miller, “Traversée de l’angoisse et poétique de l’espoir chez Malika Mokeddem,” Présence Francophone 58 (2002) : 116.

mother in Césarée, where she is revered as a hero. Both women also have concrete memories of their mother (FS 51-65, FS 99-111). Kenza's mother, on the other hand, has been almost totally absent from her life, to the extent that Kenza is not even permitted to talk about her (RA 19). The truth about her mother's life in Montpellier and her death at a young age are cloaked in mystery. She benefits from absolutely no mothering beyond the grave and can remember no lessons learned from her mother. While Hania and Mina can tap into memories of their mother and talk about her with people who knew Zoulikha, Kenza's only possibility of rediscovering her mother is to cross the Mediterranean and seek out clues that could help her unravel the secrecy that surrounds Keltoum.

Death and absence are also central themes to Ying Chen's novel L'Ingratitude, but in this story a daughter disappears from her suffocating mother's life by committing suicide, as she sees it as the only way to escape her mother's influence. The narrator, Yan-Zi, starts her story looking down on her corpse in the morgue, commenting on the way her body is treated and revealing the fact that she committed suicide: "Ma mort est une honte démesurée, car je m'y suis condamnée moi-même, j'en ai exécuté la peine moi-même" (IG 9). The tale she weaves is compelling not only because she tells about her suicide and the events leading up to that moment, but also because L'Ingratitude treats the afterlife as a reality. The existence of life after death is significant for the narrator in that her memories follow her beyond the grave. She never attains a complete separation from the detested mother figure, carrying her earthly traumas into the afterlife, an unsettling situation she had not expected. As Emile J. Talbot remarks in his article "Conscience et mémoire : Ying Chen et la problématique identitaire," for Yan-Zi, "la

liberté, même dans la mort, n'est qu'illusion" (152).¹⁵³ Rather than free her from the burdens that hinder her development as a young woman, Yan-Zi's suicide lances her into a strange space in which she has to deal with those same issues. In Histoire de fantômes, Martine Delvaux studies the spectral nature of characters, some dead, some alive. She discusses the permanence of lost loved ones in the lives of those left behind : "Les morts ne meurent jamais, ils demeurent; le deuil n'est jamais fait et on n'atteint jamais le fond originel des choses."¹⁵⁴ Yan-Zi's death, like those of Zoulikha and Djébar's other spectral characters, is not a final parting, and mother and daughter remain in one another's conscience, due to the bond they possess.

As the spirit of Yan-Zi observes funeral preparations, the funeral itself, and the dinner following the ceremony, she comments on various members of her family and how her death has affected them:

Grand-mère et maman, ces deux femmes qui se détestent depuis tant d'années à cause de moi, vont donc pleurer ensemble devant ma tombe. Je veux que maman perde ses larmes, beaucoup de larmes, comme elle a perdu son sang le jour de ma naissance. C'est le prix qu'une mère doit payer. Quant à grand-mère, elle a payé cher son propre enfant. (IG 36)

The contentious relationship between mother and grandmother represents their internalization of discourse on patriarchal and symbolic violence.¹⁵⁵ The consistently negative interaction between Yan-Zi's mother and grandmother reflects symbolic violence in that these two women constantly want to inflict suffering on the other. It is a

¹⁵³ Emile J. Talbot, "Conscience et mémoire : Ying Chen et la problématique identitaire," Nouvelles Etudes Francophones 20.1 (Printemps 2005) :152.

¹⁵⁴ Martine Delvaux, *Histoires de fantômes : Spectralité et témoignage dans les récits de femmes contemporains*. (Montreal : PU Montréal, 2005) 102.

¹⁵⁵ See earlier discussion on symbolic violence.

relationship that functions poorly on all levels. They reproduce symbolic violence for their daughter and granddaughter through continual expression of their strong dislike for one another, displayed in their arguments and their need to harshly criticize the other. The grandmother, for example, says to Yan-Zi : “Le plus grand tort de ton père, commençait-elle ainsi en l’absence de maman, c’est d’avoir épousé une femme aux cheveux imprésentables; on dit que la qualité de la chevelure reflète celle de la personne. Ce disant, grand-mère prenait le ton de ceux qui se croyaient d’une race meilleure et qui sentaient leur supériorité piétinée par des créatures médiocres” (IG 38).

Although Yan-Zi does not participate in the horrible relationship between mother and mother-in-law, she reproduces the negative schema in wishing to inflict emotional pain on her mother in committing suicide. Her tone is as harsh, if not harsher than that employed by her mother and grandmother when she declares: “Je brûlais d’envie de voir maman souffrir à la vue de mon cadavre. Souffrir jusqu’à vomir son sang. Une douleur inconsolable”(IG 18). This family most definitely functions within a matriarchal system, that is to say, one in which women hold power. Yet, their behavior reinforces a system of control that seeks to repress women. Yan-Zi, like her mother and grandmother before her, has internalized patriarchal violence. In attempting to break away from her mother, she only succeeds in further implicating herself in the contentious and unpleasant matrilineal structure that dominates family life. She is no longer a simple victim of symbolic and patriarchal violence, but also a perpetrator of that violence which so inhibited her before her suicide. In consciously seeking to inflict emotional pain and suffering on her mother, Yan-Zi becomes an active participant in the negative cycle of patriarchal violence she witnessed between her mother and grandmother.

Death is not the peaceful refuge Yan-Zi had hoped it would be, nor does her family suffer as much as she had expected. Life goes on without Yan-Zi, a fact that her spirit has difficulty accepting. The longer she is dead, the harder it is for her to connect to the human plane, but one moment she sees members of her family processing together, and she realizes that they are celebrating the national holiday: “Tout peut arriver ce jour-là. [...] on mange de son mieux, on signe des contrats, on se marie, on fait l’amour ou l’on tue. Le sang coule librement quand le corps se détend. [...] Ce jour-là plus que les autres, on vit. Et on est heureux” (IG 94). Her death does not mark the end of family life, but rather a moment where aspects of family life and dynamics change drastically. Yan-Zi is no longer an active participant in daily family routines, and after her funeral, as her mother prepares tea for her father, Yan-Zi realizes that she will never again partake in this family ritual: “Maman vient fermer la porte. Je décide de rester dehors” (IG 66). The gesture of staying outside represents her recognition of the changing nature of family life and her inability to participate in that structure.

In L’Ingratitude, Yan-Zi reveals other rites and traditions. The figure of Seigneur Nilou is often mentioned by Yan-Zi’s spirit who has yet to find peace. Everything she knows about Seigneur Nilou comes from her grandmother’s stories. He controls the world, deciding where and when each human being will be born and die, how each soul will be punished, and in what form the soul will return to Earth:

Il s'occuperait de moi, ce tyran de l'univers Yin,¹⁵⁶ cette autre maman qui rendrait ma mort insupportable. Il se soucierait de nous faire naître, mourir, puis renaître, remourir, comme les insectes, comme n'importe quoi. Il ferait ce que maman ne pourra plus faire, c'est-à-dire qu'il se chargerait de me discipliner, de me punir en m'envoyant dans le monde des animaux domestiques, afin de m'inculquer davantage de sagesse. (IG 93)

This god-like figure does not conform to Christianity's perception of a benevolent god. Rather, Yan-Zi anticipates another authority figure, another *mother*, who will punish her for her wrongdoings. Upon her death, the narrator expects to be met by Seigneur Nilou, but "Il n'est pas là, ce Seigneur Nilou. Il aurait dû venir me chercher, noter quelque chose dans son cahier et me conduire dans son royaume" (IG 92). As she waits for him, she is doomed to float in a vague and indefinable space between her earthly existence and the heavenly one she anxiously awaits. She has not succeeded in fully detaching herself from the human plane that was, for her, dominated by her mother. Nor has she been able to attach herself to the heavenly refuge she seeks, one that she expects to be run by Seigneur Nilou. Much as freedom from her mother has proven to be an illusion, so too has the existence of the afterlife she had hoped to attain.

¹⁵⁶ Yan-Zi attributes unjust and severe behavior to her mother's Yin nature, that is to say, to the feminine side of her personality. She therefore attributes Yin dominance to any powerful figure. Jamieson explains Yin-Yang societies as ones that display opposing characteristics that balance one another: "*Yang* is defined by a tendency toward male dominance, high redundancy, low entropy, complex and rigid hierarchy, competition, and strict orthodoxy focused on rules for behavior based on social rules. *Yin* is defined by a tendency toward greater egalitarianism and flexibility, more female participation, mechanisms to dampen competition and conflict, high entropy, low redundancy, and more emphasis on feeling, empathy, and spontaneity." Yan-Zi's experience on Earth reflects no balance, dominated by a powerful mother figure who unwittingly subscribes to patriarchal violence. See Neil L. Jamieson, Understanding Vietnam, (Berkeley: U of California Press, 1993) 13.

Chen includes cultural references that indicate the Chinese descent of the narrator and her family, such as an allusion to President Mao (IG 54) and the names of characters (*Yan-Zi*, *Chun*, *Hong-Qi*). These indications are relevant to the unfolding of the story in that they remind the reader of the narrator's origins, suggest the restrictive environment in which she finds herself, and indicate the narrator's ambivalence towards China. Nevertheless, she creates a "placeless" city, a reflection of global urbanism, which could be almost any fairly large city with a Chinese community. We know that her father is a professor, but the name of his university is never mentioned. The park Yan-Zi visits does not have a name. Aside from the Restaurant du Bonheur that she frequents, Chen provides very few geographical indications. One reference that indicates the story probably takes place in China is an observation by the mother: "Il est trop dangereux de traiter de politique dans ce pays, déclarait-elle, on ne vit pas en Amérique¹⁵⁷ [...]" (IG 27). In spite of this one specific allusion, Chen creates a fairly anonymous setting and family that could be almost any middle-class Chinese family. Yan-Zi's tortured existence, both in life and death, is made universal by the lack of geographical references and sparse use of characters' names.¹⁵⁸ Not only does Yan-Zi's family seem to live in a "placeless" place, but they are also presented as anonymous figures. The reader senses that the narrator and her family could be from anywhere and could blend into almost any urban community. Simon Harel views migrant literature's anonymous literary places as a refusal by authors to situate themselves in a specific space: "L'écriture du hors-lieu est aussi un projet qui réfute toutes les tentatives de marginalisation rassurante, d'exotisme

¹⁵⁷ The mother's statement reminds us that for many, Quebec represents the American dream. The region is also included in Glissant's notion of *americanité*, an identity concept that groups the Americas.

¹⁵⁸ Yan-Zi, the main character's name is not used until page 53. Her parents' first and last names are never revealed, and she refers to her grandmother simply as "Grand-Mère."

convenu qui caractériseraient l'écriture migrante" (145-146). In her depiction of Yan-Zi's "placeless" spaces, Chen thus prevents the reader from making assumptions in regards to the narrator's surroundings. Rather, one has no choice but to focus on the spectral narrator's detailed chronicle of her miserable life and unfulfilling afterlife.

L'Ingratitude is not transcultural in the geopolitical sense of the word as are La Femme sans sépulture by Assia Djebar and Des rêves et des assassins by Malika Mokeddem, but the generational clashes manifested in the novel represent the meeting of two cultures: that of the adult daughter who embraces the ways of modern society, and that of the mother who anchors herself to Chinese tradition and familial expectations, as dictated by Confucian philosophy. The restrictions imposed on the narrator by her mother concerning dating and marriage are the cause of much tension and heartache in the novel. Although Yan-Zi was a young career woman and experienced certain aspects of independence, her mother demanded that she observe tradition in dating and courting rituals, going so far as to insist upon choosing her daughter's future husband and monitoring her daughter's daily comings and goings. Yan-Zi's rejection of her mother's Confucian vision of family ties creates the explosive dynamic that haunts her even in the afterlife.

At first glance, the afterlife may seem like just another "place" for the unsettled narrator, yet this is most definitely not the case. Another transcultural characteristic of the novel is Chen's treatment of the space inhabited by Yan-Zi after her death. This foggy, indiscernible space also acts as a culture different from her own where her expectations are not met: "Depuis combien de temps déjà ai-je flotté ici? Je n'ai jamais vu un endroit si neutre, si privé de couleur, de senteur, de goût, de forme, de poids et de

chaleur” (IG 129). Yan-Zi’s post-life *lieu habité* is another anonymous space difficult to distinguish from others due to its lack of landmarks and in this case, the presence of other human beings or wandering souls. In Les passages obligés de l’écriture migrante, Harel refers to the description of *espaces potentiels*.¹⁵⁹ He explains that these imagined places allow the migrant writer to cope with the many traumas brought on by displacement and to express his or her fragmentary identity (Harel 149). One can examine Yan-Zi’s afterlife through the prism of a potential space. In anticipating a more peaceful existence, Yan-Zi chose to take her life. Heaven, the imagined potential space she describes, distances her from her mother, but does not provide comfort, refuge and solace. On the contrary, the neutral, lifeless, and colorless space she occupies after her death highlights her solitude and unresolved inner conflicts. We cannot go so far as to say that Yan-Zi is homesick for her former life and her mother, but death and the afterlife challenge her in ways she had not anticipated, creating a sort of cultural shock. The afterlife does not meet her expectations, as she is still lonely, unsettled, and most importantly, not able to cut herself off from her mother.

L’Ingratitude presents stark and disturbing mother-daughter conflicts that result from the inability of the two women to accept the other’s wishes. Both women have internalized a discourse on patriarchal violence, and both women therefore seek to harm and inhibit the other. Yan-Zi and her mother are unwilling, and it would seem *unable* to achieve the entwinements described by Welsch. Their transcultural experience proves to be a very unhappy one. The nameless mother figure, both before and after her daughter’s death, serves to impose and reinforce restraints placed upon her daughter.

¹⁵⁹ *espace potentiel*—potential space

In each of these three novels, the physical absence and death of a family member is the result of a different traumatic event, reminding us that transculturality is not always a positive experience. For Zoulikha, a war of liberation separates her from her children. Keltoum's disappearance and eventual death in France stem from her husband's decision to take a second wife. Yan-Zi chooses to detach herself from her mother's oppressive influence by committing suicide. In death, each character's transcultural experience is emphasized through propagation of stories as is the case with Zoulikha and Keltoum, or in examination of the afterlife as a transcultural space, as is Yan-Zi's experience in L'Ingratitude.

The mother as a challenge to the patriarchy

Our examination of mother figures has thus far shown a variety of women representing several cultures and geographic locations. Each emerges from adverse circumstances such as exile, solitude, and even death as she fulfills what she considers to be her maternal duties. Some novels treated in this study subtly or overtly criticize the patriarchy and its role in family life. We know that the works of Colette and de Beauvoir denounce the patriarchy's dominating role in society, but given the constraints of the time period, their mother figures offer little commentary on the matter. With the fall of colonialism, the rise of feminist movements and rapid societal transformation, contemporary Francophone authors seem to feel freer to comment on the state of relations between men and women and how they consequently influence family life.

Schwarz-Bart, for example, paints a matrifocal¹⁶⁰ universe in Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle. Stories about Télumée's remarkable female ancestors serve to impart a sense of pride and strength that Télumée will fall back on during life's hard times. Her great-grandmother Minerve, a freed slave, exemplifies the strength of the Lougandor women: "Elle possédait une foi inébranlable en la vie. Devant l'adversité, elle aimait dire que rien ni personne n'userait l'âme que Dieu avait choisie pour elle, et disposée en son corps" (PV 13). Like Reine Sans Nom, Télumée inherits her great-grandmother's faith and inner strength.

Positive male figures are virtually absent from Pluie et vent,¹⁶¹ and Télumée spends most of her life surrounded by women, both relatives and close friends. The absence of men in colonial and postcolonial contexts has been examined by both Condé and Memmi¹⁶² in Portrait du colonisé and La parole des femmes. They argue that colonized men interiorize the discourse of their oppressors, seeing little value in their own presence and actions. These attitudes, assigned to them by their oppressors, have permeated the Creole culture and are reflected in Schwarz-Bart's male characters. Their presence, even their simple existence, has been devalued and minimized to the extent that many of them grow to be wandering, irresponsible adults who feel little or no need to account for their behavior. Rather than condemn Creole men for the absence from families, Schwarz-Bart's novels reflect the historical and cultural restraints placed on

¹⁶⁰ There are important nuances between the terms *matrifocal* and *matriarchal*. *Matrifocal* implies an environment in which the mother is the central figure in the family. *Matriarchal* refers to families in which power is passed through generations of women, yet those women may nonetheless perpetuate patriarchal and symbolic violence.

¹⁶¹ As noted at the beginning of this chapter, positive male figures are rarely seen in Francophone postcolonial literature.

¹⁶² See discussion of Memmi, Bourdieu, and symbolic violence early in this chapter.

them. At the same time, they recognize the essential presence of women and the multiple roles they have played over time. In an interview with Mary Jean Green, Schwarz-Bart justifies the feminine space depicted in her novels:

Ce sont les femmes qui ont tout sauvé, tout préservé, y compris l'âme des hommes. Ce sont des gardiennes jalouses qui ont toujours lutté en silence. Quand l'homme antillais faisait des enfants sans revendiquer la paternité, celle qui devait assumer la lignée, accomplir les tâches quotidiennes, s'occuper des enfants tout en leur transmettant les traditions ancestrales, c'était naturellement la femme. (Green 131)

Like Assia Djébar and other contemporaries, Simone Schwarz-Bart strives to give a voice to women who have long been silent. Rather than directly criticize the men who seem to take little responsibility for their actions, she celebrates the women who compensate for those shortcomings. Pluie et vent is thus not an attack on the patriarchy, but rather a way to commemorate Creole women who have suffered at the hands of men, both colonizers and colonized, and who have somehow mustered the strength and courage to persevere in the midst of so many hardships.

In La Femme sans sépulture, Djébar's Zoulikha is a fighter in Algeria's war of liberation. She is going up against two different patriarchal systems: the French colonial power and Algeria's traditional society which is not comfortable with a woman in battle. In Zoulikha's last monologue, Djébar attacks the collective masculine voice which suppressed the heroine and which exerts similar pressure on today's Algerian women:

Je l'imagine aisément, cette adresse masculine, au nom de la bienséance ou de la tradition islamiques, maraboutiques, Dieu sait quoi d'autre, mais tradition certes avec son plomb—une mise en garde entre complices, d'un air de dire, comme au Café du Commerce des colons du village, ou des fidèles de la mosquée, les fidèles

aux parties de dominos des cafés maures : ‘Où allons-nous si vos femmes, si vos filles se trompent de rôle !’, ou quelque phrase, conventionnelle à souhait, pour, sur mon corps mis à bas, jeter l’opprobre !” (FS 223)

Zoulikha’s spirit benefits from the freedom of expression that Algerian women do not possess. Death is a sheltered space which prevents the heroine from experiencing further suffering. It is only in death that she is able to openly confront the two systems that inhibited her during her lifetime: that of French colonization as well as that of traditional Algerian society.

Like many of Djébar’s works, La Femme sans sépulture emphasizes woman’s voice and space in an attempt to give her dignity and recognize her worth as a thinking being.¹⁶³ One way to do so is to assess the distinction between feminine and masculine spaces, the former private the latter public. Additionally, the novel questions the role of the veil. Once again, it is the voice of Zoulikha that is able to broach a politically sensitive topic : “...j’allais de nouveau me déguiser, sinon ce voile accepté jusque-là deviendrait linceul, ou prison, il me fallait l’arracher, ou alors le mettre comme costume pour quel théâtre, pour quel jeu immense, quel affrontement nouveau ?” (FS 192).

Zoulikha’s language is explicitly provocative, indicating her opposition to the veil which she sees not only as an offense to women, but as a way to imprison them.¹⁶⁴ Although Zoulikha presents no definitive answers concerning a woman’s place in society, Djébar uses this character to underscore inherent problems of feminine agency in Algeria. In

¹⁶³ See, for example, Femmes d’Alger dans leur appartement. Assia Djébar, Femmes d’Alger dans leur appartement (Paris : Des femmes, 1980).

¹⁶⁴ Djébar’s take on the veil differs from Frantz Fanon who, in A Dying Colonialism, supports the veil as a revolutionary instrument against the French colonizer. See Frantz Fanon, A Dying Colonialism, trans. Haakon Chevalier (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1965) 13-45.

Ces voix qui m'assiègent, Djébar articulates the evolution of her own attitude regarding the wearing of the veil. Whereas in her childhood, the veil represented feminine beauty and mystique, as an adult, Djébar began to perceive a veiled woman as “Une femme-fantôme” (Ces voix 98-99). Draped in multiple layers of flowing fabric, this so-called ghost-woman, who stands for the collectivity of Algerian women, comes to represent repression. It is only in detaching herself from the expectations of her native culture that Djébar can begin to see the inhibitive aspects of the veil.

Reine Sans Nom and Zoulikha refuse to submit themselves to the demands of a patriarchal society. Each mother, in her own way, subverts the pervasive patriarchal power, and through example encourages her children to do the same. These two mother figures, along with the others I have analyzed, embody contemporary Francophone societies' realities, reflecting hardships linked to wars of liberation, challenges faced while living in exile, and refusal to conform to a patriarchal system's expectations. They represent numerous ethnic backgrounds and languages, yet each can be linked to the others through common struggles experienced while raising children in a postcolonial society. Each of these Francophone mother figures composes her own transculturality, shaped by her associations and interactions within the society in which she raises her family.

CHAPTER 3

THE PLACE OF PLACE

The notions of place and space and appropriation and reappropriation of space are important elements of postcolonial literature. One only has to consider such well known texts as Cahier d'un retour au pays natal¹⁶⁵ by Aimé Césaire, “Les Femmes d’Alger dans leur appartement” by Assia Djebar and Traversée de la Mangrove by Maryse Condé, to recognize the importance that space can hold for those in postcolonial areas. These authors, amongst others, explore postcolonial spaces, depicting dwellings and landscapes that continue to represent associations between the present moment and attitudes and customs carried over from colonial times.¹⁶⁶

Many critics, including Deleuze, Guattari, and Glissant, choose to play down the importance of *lieux habités*, or “occupied places.” Rather, they favor the notions of deterritorialisation and wandering as ways to form and express one’s identity in a globalized, postcolonial world. Yet, as Simon Harel notes in Les passages obligés de l’écriture migrante, examination of place is necessary so as to better annunciate the

¹⁶⁵ One can surely place Cahier d'un retour au pays natal in the Francophone corpus, due to its form, rhythm, and treatment of language. This text is closer to postcolonial than colonial tradition because of these elements and the subject matter of the poem.

¹⁶⁶ Recent efforts at land reform or redistribution of land, in countries such as Zimbabwe and Namibia reflect the preoccupation with space often seen in former colonies. The desire or need to control land is an indication of power struggles between the oppressor and the oppressed. Possession of land symbolizes power.

realities of the exile experience (111). The commotion created by change of scenery and landscape is an important element in identity formation in postcolonial contexts. Moisan, too, supports consideration of place and displacement as a way to better assess postcolonial literature:

Le déplacement dont il s'agit n'implique plus la question d'un ailleurs, d'un lieu à atteindre, de personnes à mettre en contact, de rapports conflictuels ou non lors de ces rencontres, mais d'efforts et d'effets plus profonds de l'ordre de la transposition, de la transmutation, voire de la transcription, tous ces termes en 'trans' indiquant à la fois le passage et le changement d'un lieu, d'un état ou d'un moment à un autre. (208)

Moisan argues that examination of Québécois literature requires an understanding of the complex modes of displacement experienced by immigrants. A *here* and *elsewhere* dichotomy does not suffice to explain Canada's *littérature migrante*,¹⁶⁷ nor does it do justice to the literature of other Francophone diasporas. Rather, Moisan underscores the movement and transformation that the displaced person encounters, both of which contribute to identity formation. As time passes, both people and places change. It is therefore necessary to consider the role a specific place can have in the representation of literary figures.

Several postcolonial critics have written on the challenges presented concerning the reappropriation of space from the oppressor and subsequent inhabitation of that space. Edward Said describes the "primacy of the geographical," indicating that strong

¹⁶⁷ According to Moisan, the term *littérature migrante*, or "migrant literature" is now exclusively used: "L'écriture *immigrante* a pris le nom d'écriture *migrante* au milieu des années 1980 et dans les années 1990. [...] l'expression a pris forme, s'est définie, a été systématisée. Depuis, on ne parle plus que de littérature migrante, qui pose d'ailleurs le problème de savoir s'il s'agit ou non d'une 'littérature' autre que québécoise" (54).

connection to place manifests in response to European territory aggression during colonial times:

...if there is anything that radically distinguishes the imagination of anti-imperialism it is the primacy of the geographical in it. Imperialism after all is an act of geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control. For the native, the history of his or her colonial servitude is inaugurated by the loss to an outsider of the local place, whose concrete geographical identity must thereafter be searched for and somehow restored.¹⁶⁸

Said's assertions incite perplexing questions, all relating to the identity of the postcolonial citizen: How is one to reappropriate that which was taken so long ago? Can and should the newly reappropriated space be transformed so as to erase remnants of colonial history? Who should have the right to inhabit that space? Finally, how does space evolve through time? This chapter discusses works of postcolonial writers who interpret and respond to these questions in varying ways through description of different postcolonial spaces.

As discussed in the second chapter of this project, Edouard Glissant's Poétique de la relation is in part concerned with identity formation in a world where seemingly limitless contacts are possible between human beings of different races and ethnicities. Place plays a role in the evolution of personal identity, inasmuch as travel and wandering serve to enrich identity. Glissant does not encourage that one foster his or her connection to the homeland, but rather to seek the "Other" and create a placeless, relational, Creole identity. Reappropriation of territory is not a primary concern of Glissant's cultural

¹⁶⁸ Edward W. Said, "Yeats and Decolonization," Nationalism, Colonialism, and Literature, eds. Terry Eagleton, Fredric Jameson, Edward W. Said (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota, 1990) 77.

theory, but the space which one inhabits in a given moment contributes greatly to the creative process and development of the individual. It is therefore important to explore and come to know a variety of geographical areas in order to better cultivate a diverse, Creole self.¹⁶⁹

Postcolonial literature can provide a middle ground between Said and Glissant's contrasting arguments. The texts examined in this chapter put forth a great variety of landscapes and domestic spaces, demonstrating different degrees of attachment *to* and relationships *with* space. Whereas Schwarz-Bart presents mother figures integrated into the landscape through metaphor, Pineau's literary mothers experience adversarial relationships with their unwelcoming, sometimes violent environments. Dounia, Farhoud's mother figure, is forced to adapt to numerous spaces throughout her life, hence creating a character who easily detaches herself from different domestic spaces and landscapes. The mother in Ying Chen's L'Ingratitude is tied to patriarchal tradition and dominates family space to such a degree that her adult daughter eventually commits suicide to escape her mother's domination. We will see that the various representations of literary mother figures are tightly linked to the environments in which they raise their families.

The notion of postcolonial space is not uniquely physical, as evidenced in Bhabha's theory of a Third Space of enunciation. We recall that this proposed space is a result of cultural hybridity and allows for a rereading of history and tradition so as to give a voice to the oppressed. Bhabha's description of space is vague and difficult to discern

¹⁶⁹ See Chapter 1 for a thorough explanation of Glissant's cultural theory.

compared to Said and Glissant's explanations of postcolonial spaces. His proposed Third Space is in part influenced by the colonizer's discourse and traditions. Yet, the oppressor is not supposed to have access to this space, as the Third Space seeks to subvert the colonizer's authority and influence over the colonized. Since domination of space involves control of power and knowledge, the Third Space of enunciation seeks to strip the oppressor of his power to silence the oppressed, thus breaking the bonds imposed by colonialism. Liberation is to be achieved through subversion of the oppressor's authority, thus creating hybrid individuals with the ability to express him or herself in the ambivalent Third Space.¹⁷⁰

Just as Bhabha's Third Space aims to situate itself outside the influence of the oppressor, expression of feminine spaces lingers outside the patriarchal realm.¹⁷¹ Contemporary literary and cultural theory, whether or not it be of a postcolonial nature, is replete with references to "feminine space." Writing Women and Space, edited by Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose, examines women and their relationships to community through different representations of space, including landscapes, war fronts, and suburbia.¹⁷² Although not in a Francophone context and not directly related to the study at hand, Writing Women and Space provides many examples of spaces that can be considered specifically "feminine." Condé's La parole des femmes, as we saw in the

¹⁷⁰ Numerous critics have criticized Bhabha's theory on the Third Space, including Doneday, Fisher, Parry, and Dirlik, citing his lack of regard for gender, historical specificity, and his unorthodox reading of Fanon. For further discussion of Bhabha's Third Space, see Chapter 1.

¹⁷¹ In this context, the patriarchy refers to two distinct groups: the men of her family and community, such as fathers, husbands, brothers, and neighbors as well as the foreign colonizer whose influence is evident in both subtle and obvious ways.

¹⁷² Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose, Writing Women and Space: Colonial and Postcolonial Geographies (New York: Guilford Press, 1994.)

second chapter, describes a Caribbean Francophone feminine literary space distinct from that of a masculine space in its treatment and representation of women's roles in a given society. That feminine space is expressed through a woman's life experiences and the roles she plays within society, including those of wife, single mother, and daughter. Natasha Dagenais' article "L'espace migrant/l'espace de la mémoire : *Le bonheur a la queue glissante* d'Abla Farhoud" analyses feminine postcolonial space in conjunction with life lived in exile.¹⁷³ She argues that various spaces, including physical, geographic, symbolic, metaphoric and imaginary ones, all play a role in the formation of the principal mother figure as well as in her ability to express her own exile experience (125).

The preceding examples go to show that postcolonial concepts of space are wide-ranging and diverse, represented geographically, through travel, subversion of colonial power, or from a uniquely feminine perspective. There is not a unified expression of postcolonial space, but rather an array of perceptions, each undoubtedly influenced by elements such as neocolonial discourse, postcolonial educational systems, meetings between individuals, and personal reflection. This chapter examines spaces that are

¹⁷³ See Natasha Dagenais, "L'Espace migrant/l'espace de la memoire: *Le Bonheur a la queue glissante* d'Abla Farhoud," *Intercultural Journeys/Parcours interculturels*, eds. Natasha Dagenais and Joana Daxell (Baldwin Mills, Québec : Université de Sherbrooke, 2001, 2002) 125-139. Other articles examining feminine spaces include Indira Karamcheti, "The Geographics of Marginality: Place and Textuality in Simone Schwarz-Bart and Anita Desai," *Reconfigured Spheres : Feminist Explorations of Literary Space*, eds. Margaret Higonnet and Joan A. Templeton (Amherst: U of Mass Press, 1994) 125-46; Jacques Le Marinel, "La Femme et l'espace dans l'oeuvre romanesque de Simone Schwarz-Bart," *Women in French Studies* 5 (Winter 1997) 49-57.

simultaneously feminine and postcolonial and which serve to form the principal mother figure.¹⁷⁴

Maternal spaces: when the feminine meets the postcolonial

The first chapters of this study show how various mothers evolve in a transcultural environment. As we have learned, transculturality favors diversity, insomuch as contact between individuals fosters personal transformation. One's surroundings, both natural and manmade, are also a factor in formation of the mother figure evolving in a transcultural context. How is a mother's behavior influenced by her surroundings? How does she use her experiences in her environment to enrich understanding of herself, her family, and her community? As we shall see, different backdrops, whether they are rural or urban, affect mother figures in different ways. Their surroundings thus prove to be of importance in the formation of their maternal identities.

In this chapter, we shall see mother figures almost wholly defined by their active role in the household such as Dounia, the narrator of Farhoud's Le bonheur a la queue glissante and the mother in Chen's L'Ingratitude.¹⁷⁵ Others, including those of Scwharz-Bart and Pineau, are heavily influenced by their natural environment, a force which is a

¹⁷⁴ The field of cultural geography complements literary examinations of space. William Norton explains it as follows: "Cultural geography is about understanding people and the places they occupy by analyzing cultural identities and cultural landscapes. [...] It is concerned with the local and the global, and acknowledges that much of what is evident at the local scale is linked to global matters." William Norton, Cultural Geography: Themes, Concepts, Analyses (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000) 1. Consideration of space and the way in which it is utilized by human beings is a broad subject, lending itself to interdisciplinary studies. See Jeanne Garane, ed. Discursive Geographies: Writing Space and place in French (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi BV, 2005).

¹⁷⁵ The mother's name is never revealed to the reader. The narrator simply refers to her as "Maman."

source of both comfort and hardship. Still others, such as Man Ya in L'Exil selon Julia, also by Pineau, are at least partially defined by the cityscapes in which they are raising their children. This chapter takes into account the variety of environments, natural and manmade, in which a mother in a postcolonial context may find herself. Each work presents a mother who thrives or struggles due to the surroundings in which she raises a family, and in some instances the mother figure both thrives *and* struggles because of that environment.

Caribbean mothers: identity formation and the natural world

When considering the role of nature in literature, one often thinks of pastoral scenes or of Romantic poets wandering through the woods, seeking inspiration in the landscape. Yet, the role of the natural world is not always idyllic and comforting, as French Caribbean literature demonstrates. Eric Prieto's chapter "Landscaping Identity in Contemporary Caribbean Literature" calls attention to the "determinant role played by the landscape in shaping the character and identity of the populace,"¹⁷⁶ citing novels by Glissant, Chamoiseau and Condé to underscore the central role of the landscape in Creole literature.¹⁷⁷ Prieto briefly recalls the history of the islands, pointing out the fact that virtually no one can claim a privileged connection to the land,¹⁷⁸ and so "This absence of

¹⁷⁶ Eric Prieto, "Landscaping Identity in Contemporary Caribbean Literature," Francophone Post-Colonial Cultures, ed. Kamal Salhi, ed. (New York: Lexington Books, 2003) 142.

¹⁷⁷ Moudileno, too, cites the Caribbean landscape as an important element in Glissant's works (L'écrivain antillais 113-140).

¹⁷⁸ The original inhabitants of the French Caribbean were the Arawak and Carib tribes, but they have been all but wiped out by European presence.

an originary bond—aggravated by the injustices of colonial history and the absurdities of its ideology—seems to have instilled in West Indian Writers a particularly acute sensitivity to the landscape’s power as a symbol of regional identity, but also to the unstable, ideological nature of all such symbols” (142). As Prieto explains, geographic landmarks help form and reinforce a group’s Creole identity. The literature of the region reflects the inextricable link between people and the unpredictable natural world. Through literature, their relationship with their environment therefore manifests in both positive and negative representations, some of which will be explored in this chapter.

The study of people’s relationship to and interaction with their surroundings calls to mind a fairly new field of study that has thrived in English departments in the last several years—that of Ecocriticism.¹⁷⁹ Ecocriticism “takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature.”¹⁸⁰ It is a field that studies the relationship between literature and the physical environment, which, of course, can be composed of both natural and manmade landscapes. At first, Ecocriticism was considered primarily as an offshoot of American studies and concentrated on the work of American literary figures such as Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Aldo Leopold and Annie Dillard.¹⁸¹ Yet recent years

¹⁷⁹ ASLE, the Association for the Study of Literature and the Environment, was founded in 1992 to “promote the exchange of ideas and information about literature and other cultural representations that consider human relationships with the natural world” <<http://www.asle.umn.edu>>. There are currently several international divisions, including Japan, India, Canada, and a European branch.

¹⁸⁰ Cheryl Glofelty, “Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis,” *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, Eds. Cheryl Glofelty and Harold Fromm (New York: U of Georgia Press, 1996) xix.

¹⁸¹ Rob Nixon, “Environmentalism and Postcolonialism,” *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*, eds. Ania Loomba et al. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005) 234.

have seen a wider application of its principles, taking into consideration diverse urban and rural environments, such as inner city America or the environmental disasters brought on by development in rural India. In a special issue of New Literary History, Herbert Tucker pares the field down to its most basic principles: “Ecocriticism thus claims as its hermeneutic horizon nothing short of *the literal horizon itself*, the *finite environment*”¹⁸² that a reader or writer occupies thanks not just to culturally coded determinants but also to natural determinates that antedate these, and will outlast them.”¹⁸³ One of Ecocriticism’s central concerns is, understandably, the state of the environment, but as Tucker explains, the *literal horizon* and the *finite environment* that people know and see every day play an integral role in the unfolding of their lives. This holds true for any landscape or environment, whether one live in a bustling city, a steamy tropical climate, or a small rural village.

In his article “Environmentalism and Postcolonialism,” Rob Nixon calls for a meeting of postcolonialism and Ecocriticism, two schools of thought which have rarely crossed paths. According to Nixon, divisions exist because of inherent differences in philosophies of the two movements. He explains that while postcolonialism focuses on hybridity, Ecocriticism often favors “discourses of purity,” such as virgin wilderness or the preservation of “uncorrupted last great places.” Displacement and migration are

¹⁸² My emphasis.

¹⁸³ Qtd. in Glen A. Love, Practical Ecocriticism: Literature, Biology, and the Environment (Charlottesville, VA: U of Virginia Press, 2003) 1.

important themes in postcolonialism, contrary to the literature of place¹⁸⁴ that dominates Ecocriticism (235). Nixon encourages a meeting of the two groups, insisting that literary environmentalism should not be a uniquely American domain: “By integrating approaches from environmental and Black Atlantic¹⁸⁵ studies, we might help bridge the divide between the ecocritical study of America’s minority literatures and the ecocritical study of postcolonial literatures, which remains extremely rudimentary” (244). Study of the novels of Simone Schwarz-Bart and Gisèle Pineau respond to Nixon’s call to analyze postcolonial literature from an ecocritical perspective. Colonialism and postcolonialism have the potential to play a significant role in ecocriticism because, as discussed at the beginning of the chapter, possession of land is a central concern in postcolonial societies. Furthermore, both colonizer and colonized have an affinity for the same land, oftentimes both claiming it as their homeland.¹⁸⁶

Kenneth White’s theory of geopoetics has much in common with ecocriticism. At first concerned with conservation, White explains that “il m’était toujours apparu que la poétique la plus riche venait d’un contact avec la terre, d’une plongée dans l’espace

¹⁸⁴ The term “literature of place” is used in discussions of nature writing. It refers to the strong pull a particular region, landscape, or even small plot of land has on a person, calling him or her to write about the spot.

¹⁸⁵ When using the term “Black Atlantic,” Nixon refers to writers such as Derek Walcott, Aimé Césaire, Wilson Harris, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Michelle Cliff.

¹⁸⁶ Algeria was held by France from 1830-1962, an exceptionally long occupation by a foreign power. Residents of European descent inhabited the most desirable land, and after liberation were referred to as *pieds-noirs*, or “black feet.” The *pieds-noirs* were attached to Algeria and considered it their homeland. Marie Cardinal, a French author raised in Algeria, recounts her first post-independence visit to Algeria in *Au pays de mes racines*. In this work, she reveals the connection she feels to her Algerian homeland and the traumatic separation from the familiar surroundings she experienced upon her forced departure. Marie Cardinal, *Au pays de mes racines*, (Paris: Broché, 1998).

biosphérique, d'une tentative pour lire les lignes du monde."¹⁸⁷ The "biospheric space" referenced by White encompasses not only the ground, trees, mountains and clouds that one might imagine in considering discourses on the environment and literature, but all that falls within that "biospheric space," including developed city centers and overcrowded shanty towns. "Nature" is thus all that the biospheric sphere encompasses and all that constitutes one's horizon, whether it is natural or manmade, clean or polluted, beautiful or unsightly. Through geopoetics, one attempts to come to an understanding of the interaction between human beings and their environment.

Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle and L'espérance-macadam demonstrate the tenuous relationship between the Creole people and that which surrounds them, showing the deep connection that exists between a mother and the landscape with which she is most familiar. The principal mother figures in these two novels remind us of Prieto's assertions in that the trajectories of the characters' lives depend in part on the capricious nature of their surroundings. The natural world and island landscapes can also provide a comforting sense of permanence in the midst of life's difficulties, such as physical abuse, abandonment, and poverty.

Pluie et vent recounts the hardships and joys experienced by four generations of the Lougandor women, from Minerve the former slave to the narrator Télumée who carries on the family tradition of feminine strength and optimism in moments of sadness and adversity. The novel brings the reader's attention to politically and socially sensitive topics, including Guadeloupe's history of slavery and the resulting social stratification of

¹⁸⁷ In 1989, White formed the Institut international de géopoétique. Born in Scotland, White has lived in France for decades, and served as chair of Twentieth Century Poetics at L'Université de Paris IV-la Sorbonne from 1983-1996. Kenneth White, "Texte Inaugural," 5 December 2006 <http://www.geopoetique.net/archipel_fr/index.html>.

modern times, as well as violence against women and the undesirable family structure that exists due to abandonment of mothers and children. While refusing to condemn any one group for Guadeloupian society's downfalls, Schwarz-Bart addresses the oftentimes unpleasant realities so as to make them known to the western reader. Through the stories of *Reine Sans Nom* and *Téluée*, the reader is made aware not only of the negative effects of slavery and colonialism which permeate daily life, but also of the beauty and richness of the Creole culture. Storytelling is presented as a means to preserve culture, as a family's history is passed down from one generation of women to another. Spirituality is expressed through an amalgam of traditions—Catholic practices intermingle with religious rituals brought from Africa and an inherent trust in feminine power, resulting in goddess-like women characters that draw on their well of strength to cultivate and preserve their culture.¹⁸⁸

An essential element of the female spirituality cultivated by the Lougandor women is that of communion with nature, as evidenced in *Reine Sans Nom*'s creation story: "[...] au commencement était la terre, une terre toute parée, avec ses arbres et ses montagnes, son soleil et sa lune, ses fleuves, ses étoiles. Mais Dieu la trouva nue, et il la trouva vaine, sans ornement aucun, c'est pourquoi il l'habilla d'hommes" (80). According to *Reine Sans Nom*'s Bible-like creation story, man and nature have been interconnected from the genesis of human existence. Human beings, placed on the Earth to make it more interesting and colorful, use their innate powers of perception to mold their own image of the Earth. One evil man from Fond Zombi fails to appreciate the

¹⁸⁸ For more on religion in *Pluie et vent*, see "Espace féminin et image divine : vers une définition de la religion dans *Pluie et vent sur Téluée Miracle* de Simone Schwarz-Bart" by Maria Anagnostopoulou-Hielscher.

beauty which surrounds him, and therefore creates negative feelings: “Puisque les hommes n’étaient pas bons, les fleurs n’étaient pas belles, la musique de la rivière n’était qu’un coassement de crapauds. Il avait des terres, une belle maison de pierre que les cyclones ne pouvaient renverser, et il jetait sur tout cela un regard de dégoût” (80-81). The women of *Pluie et vent*, unlike the evil man in *Reine Sans Nom*’s tale, choose to cultivate their relationship with the Earth, accentuating the natural splendor that makes life bearable. Their stories and proverbs are sprinkled with references to the landscape, resulting in a text saturated with images of mountains, rivers, vegetation, and animals. The ideas of the *literal horizon* and *finite environment* referenced earlier in the chapter are fully pertinent to *Reine Sans Nom* and *Télumée*. The *Lougandor* women are keenly aware of their horizon and its active role as backdrop to their lives and witness to their dramas.

Reine Sans Nom and *Télumée* know elation and unhappiness, as the reader is reminded with this proverb : “La femme qui a ri est celle-là même qui va pleurer, et c’est pourquoi on sait déjà, à la façon dont une femme est heureuse, quel maintien elle aura devant l’adversité” (157). The ups and downs they experience, including abandonment, death, and poverty are always accompanied by the permanence of their natural surroundings. The island’s landscape links each resident of *Fond Zombi* to one another, creating and reinforcing a sense of community. Shortly after *Télumée* leaves her grandmother’s home to start a life with *Elie*, she feels that an invisible force seems to be “knitting itself” around her *case*.¹⁸⁹ *Reine Sans Nom* explains to her : “Tu le vois, les cases ne sont rien sans les fils qui les relient les unes aux autres, et ce que tu perçois

¹⁸⁹ *case*—hut

l'après-midi sous ton arbre n'est rien d'autre qu'un fil, celui que tisse le village et qu'il lance jusqu'à toi, ta case" (131). One of the threads that joins Télumée to the other villagers is the landscape that acts as a common denominator between them.

References to nature and natural phenomenon paint characters who maintain a close connection to their environment, oftentimes going to far as to directly associate woman to natural elements. Yet, this environment is also hostile. In her article "Créolité and the Feminine Text in Simone Schwarz-Bart," Karen Smyley Wallace notes the extended metaphor of a woman's life as water:¹⁹⁰ "Often the phases of a woman's life are referred to as 'les eaux de ma vie' (46), as she, symbolized by 'la barque enlisée' (26) launched upon these waters. At all times a woman must learn to navigate successfully on these waters to be prepared to face the constant currents of life itself [...]" (556).

Wallace also notes the "fusion" between woman and land, citing the following images in which the woman becomes: "basilier rouge," "peau d'acajou," "un fétu de paille sèche," and "une gousse de vanille" (556). As Wallace explains, these associations help weave a text that is both feminine and Creole.

In a culture that favors orality and storytelling, one employs similes, metaphors, and proverbs to facilitate understanding, foster memory, and convey emotion. In "Oralité et écriture dans *Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle*," Nathalie Buchet Rogers enumerates some of the many functions of proverbs in the novel, revealing the tension between oral and written culture (435), the use of proverbs as a way to teach a lesson in few words (437) and as a way to contemplate the meaning of life (438). Rogers also notes the

¹⁹⁰ Karen Smyley Wallace, "Créolité and the Feminine Text in Simone Schwarz-Bart," The French Review 70.4 (1997): 554-561.

abundance of proverbs in Pluie et vent, both from African and French sources. She explains that the proverbs have been modified to suit specific situations: “Ils existent sous forme interrogative, négative, abstraite ou personnalisée, et ne tirent leur signification que du contexte” (436-437). The incorporation of traditionally French proverbs, undoubtedly familiar to the French reader, represents a subversion of the colonizer’s own language : “De cette façon, non seulement la parole du blanc est retournée contre lui, mais l’expression française, usée par l’emploi familier jusqu’à en perdre sa dénotation première, est ici resourcée, rendue à sa signification originale” (436). Rogers uses the example of Amboise’s proverb to relay the following judgment of Europeans : “[les blancs sont] ‘des bouches qui se gavent de malheur, des vessies crevées qui se sont érigées en lanternes pour éclairer le monde’ (Pluie et vent 223). She explains that the harsh evaluation of the oppressor comes from the French proverb “prendre des vessies pour des lanternes” (436). Although Amboise echoes the original French saying, he turns the words in such a way so as to criticize the oppressor with images from French culture. This displays both an understanding and subtle rejection of the colonizer’s ways.

Roger also observes that Schwarz-Bart’s proverbs link the characters to the landscape : “Par l’emploi d’images familières, les proverbes inscrivent les êtres au cœur même du paysage qui les entoure, et ces rapports de l’être au monde deviennent signifiants” (438). For instance, when Reine Sans Nom loses a daughter to a fire, her emotional spiral is likened to a fallen leaf decaying in a pond: “La feuille tombée dans la mare ne pourrit pas le jour même de sa chute, et la tristesse de Toussine¹⁹¹ ne fit qu’empirer avec le temps, justifiant toutes les mauvaises présages” (27). Her emotional

¹⁹¹ Toussine is given the name “Reine Sans Nom” after the birth of her daughter Victoire, so until that point in the novel she is referred to as “Toussine.”

state mirrors a natural occurrence that any man, woman or child can understand, and the audience will likely retain the poignant image of the leaf withering away in the pond as well as the association to Reine Sans Nom. Another metaphor referring to that difficult time alludes to the inner strength for which the Lougandor women are known :

Ils songeaient à la Toussine d'autrefois, celle en haillons, et puis la comparaient avec celle d'aujourd'hui qui n'était pas une femme, car qu'est-ce qu'une femme ?... un néant, disaient-ils, tandis que Toussine était tout au contraire un morceau de monde, un pays tout entier, un panache de négresse, la barque, la voile et le vent, car elle ne s'était pas habituée au malheur. (29)

The images of her as *a piece of the world, a country upon herself, a ship, and the wind* make Reine Sans Nom a truly exceptional human being who refuses to be defeated by the tragedies she faces. These kinds of metaphors, as Wallace notes, place the woman in her environment, demonstrating her interconnectedness with her surroundings. Additionally, these steadfast images are used to help ease the suffering inflicted by slavery and poverty. They underscore Reine Sans Nom's will to persevere and give hope to the reader. It is important to understand that Pluie et vent does not attempt to explain the reasons for suffering, nor does the novel offer solutions. However, descriptions of the connections between human beings and nature is one way in which the characters are able to face painful situations and then to carry on.

The previous examples show that suffering is a shared experience which Schwarz-Bart relates in part through natural images. Reine Sans Nom also employs rich images to relate stories about acceptance of others. When Victoire leaves Télumée to be raised by her grandmother, many criticize her actions. Reine Sans Nom, aware of her daughter's shortcomings as a mother, refrains from judging Victoire: "... mes amis, la vie

n'est pas une soupe grasse et pour bien longtemps encore, les hommes connaîtront même lune et même soleil, même tourments d'amour..." (46-47). In this instance, Reine Sans Nom refers to nature to demonstrate the senselessness in rebuking another for his or her behavior. The moon and sun are concrete images that remind Reine Sans Nom's audience of the similarities which link all human beings. Her dependence on concrete images as a way to reinforce her teachings is a cultural statement opposed to western Cartesian logic. In Cartesian tradition, perception and the five senses are unreliable tools in one's search of knowledge. It is only through reason that one attains knowledge, which in turn is represented through one's ideas. Schwarz-Bart's use of concrete natural images to demonstrate a truth is both a significant break from western thought and an assertion of a Creole view of a human being's relationship with his or her surroundings.

The metaphors employed in Pluie et vent, brimming with strong associations between woman and nature, are part of what Jacques Le Marinel refers to as the quest for an *espace identitaire*.¹⁹² Such a space allows for personal evolution in spite of the alienation one experiences in a racist society. Reine Sans Nom and Télumée do not isolate themselves from their community, but as exceptionally strong characters, they grow in a separate space that allows them to overcome some of the obstacles created by slavery and economic hardship. Their strong ties with nature show an effort to foster a Creole culture far from the reaches of the misery left by colonialism (Le Marinel 49). One of the most important elements of the search *for* and realization *of* an *espace identitaire* is the garden cultivated by Reine Sans Nom, and after her death, by Télumée.

¹⁹² *espace identitaire*—identitary space. An identitary space is one in which a person comes to understand him or herself far from the reaches of a society which could hinder or taint that process.

In this novel, grandmother and granddaughter each construct a feminine universe¹⁹³ in the garden:

Si on m'en donnait le pouvoir, c'est ici même en Guadeloupe, que je choisirais de renaître, souffrir et mourir. [...] je préfère rêver, encore et encore, debout au milieu de mon jardin, comme le font toutes les vieilles de mon âge, jusqu'à ce que la mort me prenne dans mon rêve, avec toute ma joie. (11)

The garden is central to Télumée's identity, as it the place where her grandmother's stories were woven and passed on to her. The above passage reveals the sense of stability her garden provides, and the reader imagines her taking a tree-like stance in that feminine domain.¹⁹⁴ This *espace identitaire* provides comfort and a sense of permanence.

Télumée's sense of place contradicts that expressed by Glissant in Poétique de la relation.¹⁹⁵ Télumée is not tempted by travel, nor does she ever seem to have left her island, which can most likely be attributed to her lifelong socioeconomic situation.

Rather, she finds comfort in the scenery of Guadeloupe, and especially in her garden, surrounded by a landscape that tells the story of a people and unfailingly reflects their tragedies and triumphs.

¹⁹³ That space is feminine in that it is devoid of patriarchal influence.

¹⁹⁴ Casteel's article "New World Pastoral: The Caribbean Garden and Emplacement in Gisèle Pineau and Shani Mootoo," provides an interesting analysis of the role of gardens in postcolonial literature. Casteel contradicts predominant theories of displacement and placelessness through discussion of the Caribbean garden as a means to express postcolonial identities, therefore "rerooting" postcolonial theory, reviving the importance of place often neglected by postcolonial theorists such as Glissant. Sarah Phillips Casteel, "New World Pastoral: The Caribbean Garden and Emplacement in Gisèle Pineau and Shani Mootoo," Interventions 5.1 (2003): 12-28.

¹⁹⁵ Pluie et vent was published well before Glissant's essays on Creole cultures and also pertains to Guadeloupe rather than Glissant's native Martinique.

The setting of Pluie et vent, expressed through description of landscape and numerous metaphors associating the mother to the natural world, proves to be a nurturing space where mothers cultivate courage and self-worth. Gisèle Pineau's L'espérance-macadam shares several characteristics with Pluie et vent, as remarked by Chantal Kalisa:

The two novels both highlight the relationships between women and space, more specifically, the ways in which women achieve self-realization within such an ambiguous site where deterritorialized, and transplanted people attempt to *se change[r] en autre chose*.¹⁹⁶ (108)

Yet, Pineau paints a harsher, more violent picture of the Guadeloupean climate and the way it affects mother figures. Whereas Scwarz-Bart's mother figures find reassurance in the landscape used to illustrate their stories, Pineau's vision of nature is one that is more combative, oftentimes seeming to pit itself against the inhabitants of Savane Mulet. Our examination of this novel will nonetheless demonstrate the existence of certain associations between humans and landscape in L'espérance-macadam. Although that relationship is at times portrayed as adversarial, we shall see the dependence that the characters have on their island and its unpredictable meteorological behavior.

Eliette, a childless widow, makes her home in the town, remaining on the fringes of society and at times sharing her reflections on her neighbors and life in the village.¹⁹⁷ Although much of the story is told by a third person omniscient narrator, Eliette's first person interventions inform the reader of Eliette's loneliness, her yearning for a child, as

¹⁹⁶ *se changer en autre chose*—to change oneself into something else, or to transform. This notion is borrowed from Glissant's Discours antillais. Chantal Kalisa, "Space, Violence, and Knowledge in Gisèle Pineau's L'espérance-macadam," Discursive Geographies: Writing Space and place in French, ed. Jeanne Garane, (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi BV, 2005) 108.

¹⁹⁷ See discussion of Savane Mulet, Chapter 2.

well as memories of growing up in Savane Mulet.¹⁹⁸ The town has always had the reputation as a place of *mauvaiseté*¹⁹⁹ (8), as a feeling of wickedness pervades life in the settlement. Initially settled by Eliette's stepfather, her mother was always uncomfortable in that place: "Mais Séraphine se croyait en l'enfer. Partout où son regard échouait, La Bête avait fait des petits qui se multipliaient. Le grand-vent Cyclone ne cessait de souffler. [...] Combien de fois ma maman a maudit mon beau-père Joab de l'avoir enterrée vive à Savane Mulet" (23). The combination of nature's brutality and humankind's subversive behavior makes for a seemingly miserable existence in Savane Mulet, yet Pineau succeeds in creating a place where hope does not die. The title of the novel, *L'espérance-macadam*, connotes an internal human drive to persist and a desire to overcome as well as a closeness to the landscape.

Although Eliette has always wanted a child, she was never able to conceive, and so has spent her life as a "childless mother,"²⁰⁰ hoping against hope for a child, and even visiting a fortune teller inquiring about the possibility of becoming a mother: "Après la mort de Renélien, une Haïtienne lui avait fait comprendre qu'elle était trop vieille pour porter encore l'espérance d'un petit sorti de son corps. La femme disait pourtant la voir clairement avec une enfant... Une enfant, une fille, jurait l'Haïtienne" (9). Her visit to

¹⁹⁸ Jumping between narrators incites a sense of imbalance on the part of the reader, as well as a holistic picture of the community of Savane Mulet, since different points of view are expressed.

¹⁹⁹ *mauvaiseté*—"badness." The use of this term, rare in modern French, is important in that it indicates a belief in the occult, astrology, and other practices not explained by science and often shunned by mainstream societies.

²⁰⁰ I choose the term "childless mother" to describe Eliette because although she has never mothered a child, she *perceives* herself as a mother throughout her adult life. At different times she either waits for or searches out a child to mother, as she sees this as the principal role she is to fulfill in her life. (EM 8-9, 20, 64)

the Haitian fortune teller and the thought that she may mother a child stays with Eliette into her old age, acting as a ray of hope in the lonely circumstances of her life.

Eliette and the other citizens of Savane Mulet lead lives with the constant threat of natural disasters such as cyclones. Tales of past tragedies such as the Cyclone of 1928 and the current destruction left in the wake of another hurricane,²⁰¹ paint a people and a town repeatedly ravaged by Mother Nature's aggressions. The cyclone also acts as an allegory, representing not only its inherent destructive energy, but also as a "rapist," both of the landscape and of the people. The debilitating effects of incestual rape experienced both by Eliette and Angela, the daughter she finally adopts in her old age, are equated to the raw power of a hurricane:

C'était sa maman qui lui racontait toujours la nuit où le Cyclone avait chaviré et pilé la Guadeloupe. Elle criait ce cauchemar : "Le Passage de La Bête." Et, pour mieux embobiner l'histoire dans la mémoire d'Eliette, elle ne cessait de faire défiler le souvenir de la blessure à la tête et au ventre, le sang dans les draps, la grosse poutre tombée qui avait manqué fendre Eliette en deux parts, le vent entrant méchant, bourrant, calottant. (93)

In a close reading of L'espérance-macadam, "La Bête" simultaneously represents the father, the storm, and the life-long emotional scars they leave on Eliette. She recalls little about that night, but throughout her life, her mother's incessant retelling of the story burns itself into Eliette's memory. The two evil, enigmatic forces, the father and the hurricane, leave her with unanswered questions alluded to throughout the novel. Why is

²⁰¹ The most recent hurricane referred to in L'espérance-macadam is hurricane Hugo, one of the most destructive hurricanes in history, which struck Guadeloupe in 1989.

Eliette sterile? Is the Cyclone to blame, or the other *Bête*,²⁰² her father? Did that violent time damage her for life, or in her old age will she be able to let go of the painful images instilled in her by her mother's repeated recounting of those stories? The Cyclone of 1928 and the father are intertwined in her memory and therefore in the novel, as she shares the story of her life.²⁰³

The hurricane, or rather, the *possibility* of a hurricane is an obsessive, omnipresent threat in Savane Mulet, so much that stories about these storms have become part of the internal landscape of the people. In her article "Cyclone Culture and the Paysage Pineaulien," Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw refers to this as a "cyclone culture" in which lore and legends form around stories of past hurricanes and in anticipation of future ones.²⁰⁴ The first paragraph of the story, for instance, describes the ruins left by a hurricane: "Restait rien de bon. Que des immondices. Y avait pas même une planche debout, une tôle en place"²⁰⁵ (7). The reader is immediately surrounded by the destruction left by the storm, but in the midst of the bewildering images of suitcases hanging from the sky and mattresses strewn about, he or she has no geographic or

²⁰² The *Bête*, or beast, represents the dual nature of allegories, alluding to both the hurricane and the violent father.

²⁰³ In an interview with Nadege Veldwachter, Pineau reveals her implicit intention to associate human behavior and nature: "[...] I had a structure to follow since I had a theme: incest. I wanted to bring to life the forces of nature, their violence, and the violence of human beings. I wanted to evoke the whirling winds of the cyclones through a circular construction that grows denser and denser until you see the father commit this act of violence" (paragraph 6).

²⁰⁴ Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw, "Cyclone Culture and Paysage Pineaulien," Kunapipi: Journal of Postcolonial Writing 26:1 (2004) 111.

²⁰⁵ Destruction is also reflected in the language employed by Pineau. The choppy rhythm, orality, and dropped words hint at the damage caused by the hurricane.

temporal clues to indicate the setting or time period in which the story will unfold.²⁰⁶

These images of destruction set the tone for the forthcoming story, which sheds light on both the natural and human destruction to which the Guadeloupean people are submitted.

Images of destruction and sadness saturate the pages of L'espérance-macadam, but these startling descriptions are complemented by a vague, ever-present hope expressed at different points in this book. In the first paragraph of the book, one that is filled with images of the violence inflicted upon Savane Mulet, images of optimism linger with those of hate and despair: "Odeurs de l'amour et des femmes en chaleur, odeur du pain chaud de Sonel, [...] Parfum de rêves d'or, espoir d'enfantement... Et aussi, relents des bouches amères de jalousie crachant des prières au suppôts de Satan" (7). The calming and reassuring scenes of writers such as Colette and Schwarz-Bart are gone, but dreams and hope juxtapose the surplus of negative images that meet the reader in the first lines of the story. Hope is never totally quashed by all that is evil.

Hope also weaves itself into the story through the use of allegorization, creating a destabilizing format akin to the complicated structure of Colette's La Naissance du jour where different voices and forms of text are pieced together to tell a story. In L'espérance-macadam, the narrator explains that Angela's mother Rosette gives her daughter lengthy, story-like dictations in the afternoons. These are interspersed throughout the book, often without introduction, and set off in italics:

²⁰⁶ Throughout the story, temporal indications are lacking, as the reader jumps from storm to storm and decade to decade. This unsettling, rather baffling technique is useful in creating confusion, reinforcing that which is characteristic of the storms depicted in the novel.

Il se trouvait un jardin magique et magnifique²⁰⁷ de l'autre côté d'un pont. Les gens qui y vivaient disaient que le paradis était là. [...] Mais le travail n'avait pas la figure de l'esclavage, parce que la pluie et le soleil aimaient l'Espérance. L'espérance n'était pas comme maintenant, juste un mot de bouche sans forme ni contour. L'espérance avait de grandes ailes, une tête bien pleine et un cœur sans faille. (EM 147)

Hope, like the Cyclone, is an allegory. In L'espérance-macadam, Pineau presents the two as opposing, yet complimentary forces like the Chinese Yin-Yang symbol. The storm and Hope are present, balancing one another, yet also struggling to overtake the other. The Cyclone never succeeds in destroying Hope, and Hope is eternally threatened by the possibility of a storm or other heartbreaking tragedy. In Angela's dictation, the allegory alludes to a time before slavery and racism, a period where there was optimism and justice, and when the land had not been destroyed by man and nature. The passage illustrates a criticism of history in a way that a child would be able to comprehend. In spite of the difficult life in Savane Mulet, one defined by poverty, violence against women, and crimes that go unpunished, there is a grain of optimism represented by *l'Espérance*.

The destruction brought by various storms is one of the central themes of the novel, but the startling violence of a storm can also act as a cathartic element, as we also see in L'espérance-macadam. Stories of the Cyclone of 1928 and the events of that night have haunted Eliette throughout her life, and it is thanks to the arrival of another hurricane as well as the arrival of Angela into her home, that she is finally able to come to terms with her sad past. The idea of mothering the young girl, also a victim of incest,

²⁰⁷ The beginning of the dictation, "*Il se trouvait un jardin magique*," reads like a children's fairy tale.

and the need to protect her from the hurricane, help Eliette in her own journey of emotional healing.²⁰⁸ Angela, too, sees the value of the oncoming storm as a cathartic tool, as shown in the following passage: “Angela fit un vœu et demanda au cyclone de nettoyer son corps au plus profond, de la remettre tout entière comme avant, au temps de l’innocence” (207). *L’espérance-macadam* ends with a series of beginnings—a new outlook on life for Eliette, a new home and mother for Angela, and a new community responsibility to rebuild Savane Mulet.

One could say that Pineau’s descriptions of the natural forces that play out on the island of Guadeloupe are more realistic than those of Schwarz-Bart.²⁰⁹ Walcott-Hackshaw points out, however, that one must keep in mind both the generational differences and distinctive literary styles of the two authors:

Unlike earlier Guadeloupean writers such as Simone Schwarz-Bart and Maryse Condé, Pineau tackles questions of female sexuality and sexual violations against the female body in a more explicit, probing manner. Whereas Schwarz-Bart’s language remains suggestive on these subjects Pineau uses them as primary themes. (116)

There are also a few important differences in the presentation of the characters that are worth mentioning. Although both writers present mothers who strive to overcome the difficulties they know as black women living in Guadeloupe, their problems are not identical, and nor are the ways they deal with them. *Reine Sans Nom* and *Téluée* each

²⁰⁸ At the end of the story, Eliette learns that Angela is actually her niece, daughter of a half-brother Eliette never knew she had. Although an interesting twist, this information is not essential to Eliette’s maternal quest nor to her path of healing.

²⁰⁹ Maryse Condé, too, presents rather violent images of nature. See Maryse Condé, *La Belle Créole* (Paris: Mercure de France, 2001).

hold a privileged place in Fond Zombi as respected, mythical women who hold and share knowledge and history with others. Eliette has never been granted that status, nor has she sought to attain it. She has chosen to stay in the margins of society, emotionally and physically damaged from incest, while Schwarz-Bart's characters are constantly held up as examples within the context of their community.

All three of these figures are victims of violence, whether it be domestic, sexual, or the symbolic violence²¹⁰ inherited from slavery and colonialism. Eliette is unique in that she is a victim of incest, a form of violence that debilitates her for most of her life. The violence she experienced as a child is primarily expressed through the allegory of the cyclone that also plagues the island, for the Cyclone of 1928 coincides with her childhood rape. The contrasting natural images put forth by the two authors hold important similarities. First and foremost, through the act of storytelling the Caribbean landscape comes to parallel human emotion. Just as Schwarz-Bart represents female strength through metaphors of woman as earth and water, the emotional whirlwinds and traumatic moments experienced by Eliette are expressed through the allegory of cyclones. Second, in spite of its intimidating raw energy, nature can be a protective, purifying force which provides comfort or catharsis.

As one can see, natural surroundings can incite both calm and turmoil for a mother figure. Nature is, in a way, demystified, at least for the western reader whose vision of the natural world tends to be serene and inviting. We will also see that a change in surroundings can impact a mother figure in a postcolonial context, creating upheaval through displacement and changing backdrops.

²¹⁰ For discussion on symbolic violence, see Chapter 2.

Mothering in a strange land

Postcolonial literature often deals with characters that have experienced a dramatic change of scenery, thus creating mother figures exposed to new countries, traditions, and languages, but also suffering from homesickness, isolation, and in many cases inability to communicate with those in the host country. Consequently, living in a new land often proves to be a traumatic endeavor. The exile experience is a familiar current running through postcolonial literature and one of the primary concerns of many contemporary Francophone writers, including Maryse Condé, Assia Djebar, and François Cheng. Exile is pertinent to writers of the former colonies who live in France or elsewhere and who feel disconnected from their homelands. It is also a theme for those living in exile in France or Canada and for whom French is a second language, such as François Cheng, Kim Lefèvre, and Abla Farhoud.

Living and writing removed from one's home country has an understandably profound influence on the character and tone of an author's literary works. In Lettres parisiennes: Autopsie de l'exil, Leïla Sebbar explains the place of exile in her life and writing: "[Exile] is the only place where I can enunciate the contradictions, the division... If I speak of exile, I speak also of cultural crossings; it is at these points of junction or of disjunction where I am, that I see, that I write" (qtd. in Orlando, Nomadic Voices 213). The exile experience, lived by numerous Francophone authors throughout the world, most certainly informs and enriches the literary works of those who live or have lived in exile. This prevalent theme has also been examined from most every angle

possible by literary critics.²¹¹ Although this chapter does not deal directly with exile and its place in contemporary Francophone literature, we will see that exile plays a large part in the relationship a mother has with her environment.

As more people make their homes in cities, urban settings become commonplace in postcolonial works. Having considered the impact of rural landscapes on literary mother figures in postcolonial contexts, it is fitting to turn to literary mothers depicted in an urban environment. Capitol cities, suburbs, and other urban areas are often the focal point of a story in postcolonial literature. Sherazade by Leïla Sebbar,²¹² L'Exil selon Julia by Gisèle Pineau, and Assia Djebar's collection of short stories Oran, Langue morte²¹³ all highlight characters who are strongly influenced, positively or negatively, by an urban landscape. In his article "From Wide Open Spaces to Metropolitan Places: The Urban Challenge to Ecocriticism," Michael Bennett supports the inclusion of urban areas in the field of ecocriticism:

There is a growing body of cultural criticism engaged with urban ecology that tends to reject mainstream ecocriticism's focus on the genres of nature writing and pastoral, insisting on the incapacity of these genres to represent the complex interactions between political choices, socioeconomic structures, and the densely populated ecosystems that shape urban environments.²¹⁴

²¹¹ A subject search of the term "exile" in the Modern Language Association database returns more than 3,800 hits. Some terms included in titles are: "internal exile," "exile and nomadism," "language of exile," "poetry of exile," and "gender and exile."

²¹² Leïla Sebbar, Sherazade (Paris: Editions Stock, 1982).

²¹³ Assia Djebar, Oran, langue morte (Paris: Broché, 1999).

²¹⁴ Michael Bennett, "From Wide Open Spaces to Metropolitan Places: the Urban Challenge to Ecocriticism," The Isle Reader: Ecocriticism, 1993-2003, ed. Scott Slovic (Athens, GA: U of Georgia Press) 296.

The contrasting qualities of urban and rural settings compliment one another, thus carving space for both rural and urban Ecocriticism. Study of urban settings calls attention to many of the diverse populations which make up a given society. Although Bennett's work does not address specifically postcolonial populations in urban centers, his work on the United States' urban areas and their social dimensions applies to Francophone postcolonial communities with similar issues of immigration, social inequality, and urban development. While there are marked differences between North American and Francophone communities, all share common concerns involving conservation of natural resources, urban development, and housing. Urban areas, although administered differently from region to region and country to country, very often house diverse populations in which transcultural encounters transpire on a regular basis.

Man Ya: a liminal mother figure

In L'Exil selon Julia, Gisèle Pineau turns from the controversial topic of incest treated in L'espérance-macadam to that of her own family, choosing to write about her childhood in a Paris suburb: "In L'Exil selon Julia, I wanted to come back to the story of my family. It was more a question of gathering memories."²¹⁵ This autobiographical work celebrates the eponymous character, Julia, or Man Ya, as she is addressed by the young narrator. She moves to Paris as an old woman, virtually kidnapped by her adult children as they try to save her from her abusive husband. Her presence in the household

²¹⁵ Nadege Veldwachter, "An Interview with Gisele Pineau," Research in African Literatures 35.1(2004):183.

strikes a cord in her grandchildren who were born in Paris and do not know Guadeloupe. Their Creole speaking grandmother is a perplexing oddity: “Elle est là, inoffensive en quelque sorte, pareille à un vieux meuble démodé taillé grossièrement dans un bois dur” (15). Man Ya’s foreignness incarnates not only the enigma that surrounds their background, never having lived in Guadeloupe, but also the mystery of the world, which is knowledge gained through experience and shared with her grandchildren : “On la garde en affection et en respect, se disant que, peut-être, le grand mystère du monde est coulé dans les veines de son bois, écrit dans les débris qu’elle serre encore dans ses tiroirs” (15). Early in the story, the grandmother is likened to a strong and steady yet mystifying tree, set apart from other authority figures. Her grandchildren have not yet grown to know and admire their grandmother who has come from a faraway place that they themselves claim as home, but even as they are just getting acquainted with her, they are keenly aware of the stability and permanence symbolized by the image of the tree and emanated by her presence.²¹⁶

Man Ya, out of place in the Paris suburbs, can be compared to other mother figures such as Reine Sans Nom, who express emotional ties to Guadeloupe’s landscape. Although Man Ya is physically in Paris and interacts with her French speaking grandchildren on a consistent basis, her heart remains in Guadeloupe, and she constantly

²¹⁶ Pineau also employs the tree metaphor to describe the family structure: “En ce temps, nous étions comme les branches d’un seul arbre. Chacun se trouvait souvent seul face au vent, mais fort, nourri d’une même sève et lié aux autres par des fibres invisibles, une écorce solide” (79). So, in *L’Exil selon Julia*, the tree symbolizes not only the individual strength of Man Ya, but also the way in which family members support one another in times of adversity. According to Moudileno, this symbol brings to mind the use of the tree and its roots by other authors, including *Mahagony* by Edouard Glissant and *Roots* by Alex Haley. Moudileno explains the diverse use of this symbol : “Il existe cependant un symbolisme particulier de l’arbre dans les cultures antillaises, hérité de l’Afrique: la coutume de planter ensemble placenta et arbre. L’arbre séculaire est aussi le lieu du rassemblement et de la parole, l’‘arbre à palabre.’ Dans le vaudou, l’arbre est un des ‘reposoir’ ou lieu de résidence des *loas*, lieu intermédiaire entre le terrestre et le divin” (*L’écrivain antillais* 119).

talks of returning home. Gisèle, the child narrator, begins to understand that for her grandmother, France is a cold, grey country in which nature does not come alive: “Alors, je comprends mieux la mélancolie de Man Ya, sa peur de mourir ici là, sur une terre muette où les arbres n’ont pas d’oreilles, le ciel et les nuages barrent le souffle des anges, où le temps marche en conquérant, sans jamais regarder derrière lui, piétinant toutes choses” (117-118). It would seem that for Man Ya, the Paris cityscape offers no possibility of communication between nature and human beings, a facet of life that is most definitely lacking throughout her stay. Her Paris existence, characterized by suburban apartment living,²¹⁷ is undoubtedly more restricted than life back in Guadeloupe. This is not only due to the linguistic obstacles she faces, but also to lack of social ties and to the stark, comparatively harsh natural environment in which she now lives.

As the story develops, Man Ya becomes progressively more implicated in the lives of her family, eventually transforming into a liminal mother figure, straddling the boundaries of cultures, not able to firmly implant herself in one or the other. She yearns to return to her island, never letting go of the desire to go home, yet little by little she is transformed by her new surroundings, discovering cultural icons such as Edith Piaf by way of the television and even learning to write her name. The narrator never indicates that Julia experiences increased comprehension of the French language nor that she speaks in French, but extensive contact with her grandchildren paired with excursions out of the apartment, all contribute to the formation of this mother figure.

²¹⁷ Contrary to American suburbs, French suburbs are populated by immigrants and other underprivileged groups. Consequently, poverty and crime often create tension and worry. Newcomers such as Man Ya would likely not spend much time alone outside of the apartment, due to her age, sex, and inability to communicate.

Man Ya's deep faith and courage emerge when she decides to venture out in Paris, after having spent most of her time isolated in the family home: "Si la brebis égarée a pu trouver son chemin dans les pages de la Bible, Man Ya peut trouver le sien dans Paris."²¹⁸ Les rues de Paris ne peuvent pas être plus tortueuses que les voies insondables des Ecritures" (84-85). She sees the Basilica of the Sacré Cœur²¹⁹ from the kitchen window, and has had much time to contemplate this religious and cultural symbol. She wants to visit the church and does not understand why she should wait to be driven there: "En Guadeloupe, elle savait marcher, des kilomètres. Routhiers-le bourg de Capesterre. Pour aller à la messe, elle se mettait en route avant le premier chant des coqs. Elle marchait, marchait. Ses jambes ne faiblissaient jamais" (85). Man Ya does not have the practical knowledge to understand the vast, circuitous layout of Paris, nor the sense of direction required to reach it in a reasonable amount of time. She sets out with her seven year-old grandson, guided by her ardent faith in God, and much like the lost sheep in the book of Matthew, she loses her way. By some extraordinary turn of events, by some *miracle* one might say, she not only succeeds in reaching the basilica, but also in returning to the apartment unharmed, though late in the evening and after having caused the family much worry. The narrator never shares any details concerning the actual visit of the basilica, but the reader learns that Man Ya's faith has only grown during her day long journey: "J'ai cru, j'ai vaincu ! Je suis parée pour les autres

²¹⁸ During Man Ya's time in Paris, she is much like the lost sheep from the 18th chapter of Matthew, who eventually rejoins the flock. That is to say, that after enduring the trial of separation from her Guadeloupean society and home, she is able to return to her island. In referring to the lost sheep, Pineau gives an allegorical dimension to Man Ya.

²¹⁹ The *Basilique du Sacré Cœur*, or Basilica of the Sacred Heart, was constructed after the Franco-Prussian war to celebrate peace. Construction was started in 1875, completed in 1914, and dedicated after the First World War. The basilica, which sits on the Butte de Montmartre, is a Paris landmark, at least partially visible from many parts of the city.

épreuves...” (93). The depression and shock that characterize her first months in Paris are replaced by the reserved optimism and enthusiasm she feels after her courageous excursion. Life in France is no longer as tragic as before, and from that moment, Man Ya faces her trials with more courage and resolve.

What does Man Ya’s basilica quest reveal about this mother figure and her surroundings? The unexpected stay in France causes a great deal of suffering, both physical and emotional, including her shock at being surrounded by white people, her inability to adjust to winter weather, and the initial difficulty she has in communicating with her grandchildren (64-65). Yet, Man Ya does not lose her faith, nor does she ever question God for leading her to France. The unknown and incomprehensible of all that is France does not crush her spirit, and she finds the courage to explore the intimidating world that lies outside the apartment. Her visit to the Sacré Cœur imparts a new energy and enthusiasm as well as a confirmation of her faith. It is also a proof of Man Ya’s independence. The Sacré Cœur adventure is thus a transformative experience. Man Ya will never wholeheartedly embrace French life or culture, but she learns to function in her new surroundings, becoming an important and admired mother figure for her grandchildren. The instability she experiences, that is to say, the sensation of living between two cultures, contributes to her liminality in a transcultural environment.

Man Ya is a singular figure in the lives of her grandchildren, an essential link in the formation of their identities as Creole children raised in France. She is alarmingly out of place in this environment, and although she becomes slightly more at ease in France and with her family members, she never alters her core beliefs and insists that her grandchildren come to know their homeland through her. Unlike the generation of her

children, Man Ya insists upon telling her grandchildren about slavery: “On nous demande seulement de vivre au jour présent, laisser reposer la lie du passé, [...] Seule, Man Ya ose nous instruire” (111). She may not be their *only* link to Guadeloupe, its people and history, but she is their strongest connection to a place they must create in their minds, awaiting the day the family returns. The place Man Ya represents is, however, one that no longer exists, for the Guadeloupe of her memories is not the Guadeloupe the children will find when they finally go home. The Guadeloupe she knows and remembers is what Harel would call an imaginary space (149). It is an exotic space that exists in her memories, but a space nonetheless.

The home as primary landscape

In the first lines of the novel Le bonheur à la queue glissante, Dounia, the narrator who speaks by mediation of her daughter, announces to her grown children: “Le jour où je ne pourrai plus me suffire à moi-même, mettez-moi dans un hospice pour vieillards”²²⁰ (9). This abrupt command, which serves as an introduction to the novel, announces a consideration of space that will weave itself throughout the story as Dounia recounts the various migrations her family has undergone throughout her lifetime, from her native village in Lebanon, to her husband’s village, to Canada, back to Lebanon, and finally to settle once again in Canada. Natasha Dagenais’ article “L’espace migrant/l’espace de la mémoire” elaborates on the concepts of space treated in the novel, identifying physical,

²²⁰ In French, the term *hospice* is employed in two distinct contexts. First, as a nursing home for the elderly or chronically ill, oftentimes for those who are alone and economically deprived. Second, as a shelter for religious pilgrims.

geographic, symbolic, metaphoric and imaginary spaces (125). Dounia has occupied a multiplicity of spaces throughout her lifetime, each which has formed her in a certain way. In this section, I will examine how she situates herself in those spaces. Dounia develops little attachment to domestic spaces, which in turn prevents these domestic *spaces* from becoming *places*, endowed with sentimental value.²²¹

Like Man Ya, Dounia experiences shocking changes of scenery that profoundly affect her as a mother and wife. First, she leaves her native Lebanese village for that of her husband. A number of years later, she joins her husband in Canada with their children. They return to live in Beirut for a short while, and then return to Canada definitively. In each country, they live in a number of different homes. Although Man Ya and Dounia experience many of the same emotions brought on by geographic upheaval, including depression and homesickness, Dounia's situation is considerably more volatile and unpredictable than that of Man Ya, who is forced to make only one unwanted move across the ocean.

Le bonheur a la queue glissante pays tribute to Dounia, the narrator who tells her life story by mediation of her daughter, since she does not know how to read or write. Her dedication to her adult children and to her grandchildren is evident throughout the novel as she prepares meals for them: “Mes mots sont les branches de persil que je lave, que je trie, que je découpe, les poivrons et les courgettes que je vide pour mieux les farcir, les pommes de terre que j'épluche, les feuilles de vigne et les feuilles de chou que

²²¹ See Yi-Fu Tuan's book Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience, a classic in the field of human geography. He asserts that place represents security and space represents freedom: human beings are attached to the one and long for the other. Yi-Fu Tuan, Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience (U of Minnesota Press, 2001).

je roule” (14). Food and meal preparation are a constant in Dounia’s life, something consistent she has been able to carry with her through consecutive moves, from continent to continent. She regrets her inability to express herself well with words, but realizes that cooking and food preparation are forms of language as well as a way to preserve and transmit her culture. Dounia considers food as her primary form of expression, since words often fail her: “Je ne suis pas très bonne en mots. Je ne sais pas parler. Je laisse la parole à Salim. Moi, je donne à manger”²²² (14). Dounia tells the reader that she depends on food for communication, an ironic statement on the patriarchal structure of her household and her illiteracy. Farhoud employs culinary terms, creating concrete images which function similarly to those in the stories of *Reine Sans Nom*. Food represents an important part of her life story—not only that of her native culture, but it also illustrates the hours she has spent procuring and preparing meals as well as the time she has spent in the kitchen.

At one point in the book, Dounia reveals that her name means “universe” (95). The notion of space and the space that she inhabits is thus significant as she tells her story. This mother figure, although illiterate and often unsure of herself, nonetheless proves to be the force that holds her family together through numerous moves and difficult times. She is keenly aware of space, homes, and how her presence influences a given situation. This may be due to the fact that she has known so many different domestic spaces throughout her life: her father’s home, her mother-in-law’s home in

²²² Food preparation, much like storytelling, is a means of preserving and transmitting culture. See “Reconstruire dans l’exil: la nourriture créatrice chez Gisèle Pineau” by Valérie Loichot and “Culinary diasporas: identity and the language of food in Gisèle Pineau’s *Un papillon dans la cité* and *L’Exil selon Julia*” by Brinda J. Mehta. Loichot and Mehta both argue that when in exile, food is used not only to transmit culture, but to recreate the homeland. Valérie Loichot, “Reconstruire dans l’exil: la nourriture créatrice chez Gisèle Pineau,” *Études Francophones* 17.2 (2002) : 25-44.

Canada, as well as a series of rented apartments and houses, some shared with landlords. She has learned the importance of possessing one's own space, no matter how humble it may be: "A cette époque, j'ai compris qu'il vaut mieux vivre dans une mansarde à soi que dans le château d'un autre" (72). However, Dounia expresses no attachment to the various houses she has lived in, claiming that one must be ready to adapt and learn:

Pour moi, une maison est une maison. On y habite toute sa vie. Celle des parents d'abord, puis celle du mari qui devient notre maison si tout va bien avec le mari. Quand on change de pays, on doit changer aussi tout ce que l'on connaît sur la vie. On doit apprendre vite. Ça ne m'a jamais dérangée, au contraire, j'aime apprendre des choses nouvelles. (69)

Dounia's attitude protects her from becoming attached to a certain space, as Man Ya is to her garden. Although she is at times nostalgic for childhood and her native village, Dounia generally does not mourn lost space and former homes. "Her" spaces do not seem to transform in to loved places, teeming with memories and emotion. The familial and financial instability that she has known all her adult life has not given her the opportunity to become attached to the spaces she has occupied. "Home" is therefore represented by her family: "Mon pays, ce n'est pas le pays de mes ancêtres ni même le village de mon enfance, mon pays, c'est là où mes enfants sont heureux"²²³ (22).

Dounia's comments are also a reflection on traditional society, the patriarchy and masculine violence. As a woman, Dounia's only choice was to live with her father, and then with her spouse. These two men prevented her from learning to read, and her husband is physically abusive. The life she has led, one that has left powerless and

²²³ The redefinition of homeland is a common theme in migrant literature.

virtually voiceless, is the only one she could have led, due to her society and the circumstances of her life.

Dounia has lived on different continents and in both rural and urban settings. Continual relocation has defined her adult life, unlike the Caribbean mothers we have seen whose surroundings forge a sense of permanence. Is there a landscape or a place that Dounia claims as her own? She explains that relocation and displacement have provided her with different perspectives : “Emigrer, s’en aller, laisser derrière soi ce que l’on va se mettre à appeler *mon* soleil, *mon* eau, *mes* fruits, *mes* plantes, *mes* arbres, *mon* village. Quand on est dans son village natal, on ne dit pas *mon* soleil, on dit *le* soleil [...]” (42). Memories of Dounia’s native village will always hold *her* sun, *her* fruits, and *her* water, but no space could be home without *her* family because of the structure of patriarchal violence that has always inhibited her.²²⁴

Throughout Le bonheur a la queue glissante, Dounia always returns to the idea of home and to the space she occupies. For instance, she remarks that in her old age it has become easier to occupy space: “Chez mes enfants, surtout chez ceux où je vais plus souvent, je suis comme chez moi. Maintenant que je suis vieille, partout c’est ma place” (77). The novel is sprinkled with references to space, evidence of Dounia’s need to consider the spaces she has known. The ideas of *space*, *country*, and *home* are all fluid to her. She has and continues to inhabit a variety of spaces. She even anticipates the last space she intends on occupying before death, the hospice to which she refers several

²²⁴ It is interesting to note the lack of landscape description in the novel. Compared to other mother figures who for one reason or another feel the need to describe and equate themselves to the landscape, Dounia possesses a detachment from the different backdrops she has known. Although she continually refers to the different spaces in which she has lived, she provides scant details on the physical aspects of the landscapes, homes, and apartments in which she raised her family.

times throughout the book. She claims no country, and makes a home wherever she must. *Her* landscape is therefore defined by the present moment: “Pour moi, ici ou là-bas, j’habiterais là-bas, puisqu’ils sont ici, c’est ici que je suis. La seule différence, c’est le climat. Plus de calme ici à cause de la neige, plus de joie là-bas à cause du soleil” (36). Wherever she makes her home and cares for her family becomes Dounia’s landscape.

An interesting difference between Dounia and her Caribbean counterparts examined earlier in this chapter is that Dounia’s horizon is mostly limited to the home—both her home and the homes of her children. Contrary to Man Ya, she does not mourn the loss of the countryside, for she has redefined the notions of country and home. Nor does she express any fascination with or connection to any urban landmarks in Canada or Lebanon. The home is thus her primary landscape.

Each of her landscapes, that is to say, each of her homes, is linked to specific family memories, most of them negative, since the novel is a critique of nostalgia for the homeland. Her childhood landscape is linked to the image of her orthodox priest father who did not feel the need to teach his daughter to read; the landscape of her newlywed years is marked by images of her husband’s village; later years and travels show that *le monde continuait*,²²⁵ and in her old age her landscape is defined by interaction with family members, often taking place over a shared meal. Dounia’s household is her domain—the space where she feels the most comfortable and in control, where she is able to communicate with food. Yet, the specific domestic space is much less important than the people who occupy that space. She does not come to know and understand the

²²⁵ *le monde continuait*—the world continued. In this context, Dounia begins to realize the vastness of the world.

world through interaction with nature. Nor is she likened to natural elements from the landscape. Rather, movement and upheaval define this mother in a transcultural context whose name signifies the universe. She achieves understanding and gains wisdom through those changes of country, language, scenery, and landscape. In spite of the many obstacles she encounters as an immigrant, Dounia is nonetheless an encompassing mother figure who demonstrates a great amount of resolve as she is able to detach herself from, and even denounce different domestic spaces she has known.

Placeless spaces

There are many ways in which Ying Chen's L'Ingratitude sets itself apart from the other novels treated in this study, some of which include the daughter's bitterness towards the mother and the mother's relative "voicelessness" as her daughter explains the process of her own suicide.²²⁶ As discussed in the second chapter, it is also a seemingly "placeless" novel with few geographic references that help the reader situate the characters and better imagine the setting in which Yan-Zi's story unfolds. Is it therefore useful to discuss these "placeless" places, an anonymous city, an anonymous home, in a chapter dedicated to place and the mother figure?

In L'Ingratitude, the maternal voice is transmitted by the voice of her daughter who committed suicide to escape from her domineering mother who has latched on to patriarchal authority. This voice differs greatly from those in Le bonheur à la queue glissante and L'Exil selon Julia, novels which strive to give the voiceless mother a voice.

²²⁶ Lucie Lequin calls the novel "the journal of a suicide" (210).

In this case, Yan-Zi seeks to condemn her mother and the way in which she chose to raise her daughter by revealing only the most unpleasant aspects of the mother's controlling personality. For example, in the following passage, the reader is aware of the guilt the mother imposes on her daughter as she grows up: "Or, maman disait toujours qu'il lui était mille fois plus pénible de me voir grandir que de me mettre au monde. Car, en grandissant, je lui ressemblais de moins en moins" (20). Towards the end of the novel, as the mother spends final moments with her daughter's ashes, she declares: "Je te préfère ainsi, commence-t-elle tout bas. Oui, je te préfère en poudre. Tu es très douce comme ça, très mignonne, sans épingles ni cornes" (111). Yan-Zi paints a harsh and bitter mother bent on controlling even the minutest details of her adult daughter's life. She employs verbal violence to harm her daughter, even in death. This violence is much subtler than physical violence, and in this case, is invisible to outsiders since nobody witnesses the post-funeral mother-daughter encounter. The verbal violence thus allows the mother to maintain the appearance of the suffering mother, without revealing her excessively harsh treatment of Yan-Zi.

In L'Ingratitude, the maternal voice is transmitted by the voice of her daughter who committed suicide to escape from her domineering mother, a sharp contrast to the voice of Dounia who recounts her own travails. She manages every aspect of the familial space, the family home. Her daughter and husband are expected to respect her authority. When the mother decides that Yan-Zi is to give up her room to a sickly uncle, she effectively kicks her daughter out of the house, announcing: "Ses ailes ont durci, elle va s'envoler maintenant" (107). The narrator returns to her room one last time to pack her suitcase, remarking that she has no place: "Je contemplai cette pièce où j'avais

longtemps vécu. Comme si elle se trouvait au milieu d'un désert de sable traversé par le vent, les traces de ma vie y seraient vite effacées" (108). Yan-Zi is attached to her bedroom, but she realizes that this family home is a place that negates her presence. She believes that she will soon be forgotten and that "her" bedroom is in reality a blank canvas waiting to be occupied by its next inhabitant. Unlike Dounia, Yan-Zi's mother fosters an unwelcoming, hostile environment as a way to demonstrate her power over her daughter.

The urban setting, although indistinguishable from descriptions of other cities, is also linked to Yan-Zi and her relationship with her mother. Having grown up in this city, feeling stifled by her mother's control over her, the narrator associates images of the city with the negative feelings she harbors towards her mother: "Les taxis y passaient fréquemment, dépassant les bicyclettes avec fierté et ne pouvant s'empêcher de klaxonner de triomphe. Ces bruits aigus et secs rappelaient la voix de maman" (20). The city may resemble other cities, but for the spectral narrator, it is a suffocating space that reminds her of the mother she abhors.

Before her death, she often frequents le Restaurant Bonheur to escape the maternal influence and contemplate her impending suicide. Yan-Zi often visits le Restaurant Bonheur as she plans her vengeful death. The restaurant represents neither happiness nor distraction for Yan-Zi, and she even announces to the owner: "Je viens ici [...] parce que je ne sais pas où aller" (19). She spends her time in the restaurant contemplating her mother: "J'y dessinai le mot Maman avec application. [...] Le mot s'était trempé de crépuscules rougeâtres qui provoquaient mon écoeurement" (19). Even in a public sphere that her mother has likely never visited, Yan-Zi allows herself to be

overcome by the pressure she believes that her mother exerts on her. Yet, as Yan-Zi reveals, the restaurant never really allows her to evade reality: “J’avais l’impression d’avoir passé ma vie à boire du thé dans ce restaurant, à attendre” (72-73). Her visits to the restaurant quickly become part of the monotony of her life, along with days at the office and dreaded family meals.

In L’Ingratitude, space is important in that it illustrates the tension between the mother’s authoritarian ways and her daughter’s appetite for freedom. Both in life and death, the mother-daughter culture clash is Yan-Zi’s principal focus and one could even say, her obsession. The maternal voice and nameless mother are both overshadowed by the narrator who looks back on her life after her shameful suicide. Surprisingly, the city’s busy streets and park do not allow her to escape from her mother. It would seem that the mother’s influence is so strong that no earthly place could provide refuge for Yan-Zi.

In this chapter, different representations of space have demonstrated a variety of manners in which a mother interacts with and manipulates her environment. Reine Sans Nom and Eliette are tightly linked to their island landscapes, although one in a positive way and one in a mostly negative way. Man Ya, far from home, mourns the loss of her home and garden, but finds spiritual comfort and inspiration in a Paris basilica, which gives her the strength to persevere in France. Dounia, a mother figure whose life is defined by displacement, possesses a certain detachment from specific domestic spaces. For her, each new home where she spends time with her family becomes her primary landscape. Finally, the nameless mother in L’Ingratitude functions in the anonymous setting depicted by her daughter. The reader is aware of no sentimental link to any

landmark, garden, or even to her home. Rather, Yan-Zi's mother fights to control all that pertains to the family home, including her husband and grown child. The home and city only reflect the mother's power and her daughter's frustration. The image of this mother is negative in every respect.

These novels put forth a mosaic of spaces that are both feminine and maternal. As we have seen, each mother figure functions differently in her given space. Climates, traditions, and personal stories contribute to the array of spaces and the roles they play in formation of the mother figure. Some of these *spaces* become *places* charged with emotion and sentiment. Surroundings can be of importance in a mother's image, expression, and relation to those around her. For others, especially the mother figures of Farhoud and Chen, place carries negative connotations and memories of past traumas.

CHAPTER 4

DEATH: AN EMOTIONAL EXILE

The death of a loved one is an event that touches people across all social, economic, and ethnic groups, making it one of humankind's shared experiences. The multitude of rituals linked to the burial and mourning of a deceased person shows the great variety of ways in which ancient and modern societies have dealt with death: from the ancient Greek practice of laying out the body in a public place prior to cremation, to Roman Catholic ceremonies which send people to the afterlife with the aid of bells and incense, to the practice of some Muslim communities in which women wail, oftentimes violently, for the recently deceased.²²⁷ The diversity of practices related to death, bereavement, and mourning does not negate the common sense of loss one feels following the death a loved one. Rather, it underscores the different manners in which people feel comfortable expressing their sorrow and in gaining acceptance of the deaths of those who have passed away.

This chapter examines the ways in which death influences family dynamics in three Francophone novels: La femme sans sépulture by Assia Djébar, Des rêves et des assassins by Malika Mokeddem, and L'Ingratitude by Ying Chen. Each novel shows how the death of a central family member, either mother or only child, affects the family she has left behind. The death of that person, whether recent or long ago, reverberates in

²²⁷ Katherine Ashenburg, The Mourner's Dance (New York: North Point Press, 2002) 41.

the daily existence of family members, both on a collective and individual level. Each work treats death as a principle theme, and we will see that in all three novels, death is represented as a form of exile as well as an imaginary space of cultural exchange.

Mourning and bereavement

The loss of a loved one not only has the potential to release a flood of emotions, but also calls for a period of suffering in which one adjusts to the absence of that person. The words *mourning* and *bereavement* make up part of the jargon employed by self-help books claiming to aid in the time following the death of a family member or close friend. While this study does not turn to that kind of text to understand the literary depiction of death and grieving, it is useful to distinguish between the two terms. What do these words mean and what do they imply? The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines the word *bereavement* as: “the fact or state of being deprived of anything, especially by death” and *mourning* as “the expression of deep sorrow, especially for a dead person, by the wearing of solemn dress” (COD). The two terms surely go hand-in-hand, but while *bereavement* can be a wholly private experience, *mourning* possesses a community-oriented dimension involving a public display of one’s anguish.²²⁸

In her book The Mourner’s Dance, Katherine Ashenburg traces the development of various mourning practices from antiquity to modern times, comparing and contrasting the ways different societies mourn. She explains, for example, that the grieving share

²²⁸ In the French language, there is no distinction made between the ideas of mourning and bereavement. The term *deuil* is used to express both notions: *faire le deuil*—to mourn, *porter le deuil*—to wear mourning clothes.

sorrow in a number of settings. Jews perform Kaddish, a daily public prayer said in Aramaic for 11 months after the death of a family member (Ashenburg 209). In secular societies, bereavement support groups, oftentimes meeting weekly, give mourners the opportunity to talk about their departed loved one with others who have experienced a similar loss.

Ashenburg notes that in most societies, gender plays a role in mourning rituals. She cites a traditional Ghanaian practice in which women enter a trance-like state so as to channel the spirit of the dead, as well as *sati*, the Indian practice of widows throwing themselves in the funeral pyres of their deceased husbands (157-158). Although certain religious groups assign specific mourning “tasks” to men, such as ministers, rabbis, and priests who perform funeral ceremonies, it is women who perform most mourning rituals, including preparation of the corpse and organization and distribution of personal affairs: “Women, for whatever reason or reasons, appear to have a penchant for mourning” (Ashenburg 158). Traditionally confined to the domestic sphere, mourning practices have more or less stayed in the hands of women: “For most of the world’s history, death, like the life of a woman, was intensely domestic. It still is in some parts of the world”²²⁹ (Ashenburg 159). Our discussion of the selected novels will show that in Francophone postcolonial societies, bereavement and mourning rest solidly in the feminine domain. We will see that a mourning period adheres to no strict guidelines and respects no time limit imposed by society.²³⁰ Even if an official mourning period has come to a close, it is

²²⁹ In Ireland, for example, Catholic wakes are still held in the home.

²³⁰ Of course, many societies used to observe rigid and visible mourning periods. In the short story “Le rite,” Colette’s mother Sido rebels against the cumbersome clothing she wears after the death of her husband: “J’ai horreur de ce noir! D’abord c’est triste. Pourquoi veux-tu que j’offre, à ceux que je rencontre, un spectacle triste et déplaisant ? Quel rapport y a-t-il entre ce cachemire et ce crêpe et mes

an individual experience whose beginning and end cannot be determined by outside forces. The process can, in fact, continue years after the death of the family member.²³¹ In Djébar's La femme sans sépulture, for instance, the adult daughters of the legendary Zoulikha grapple with their mother's death and heroic heritage that haunts them, some twenty years after her disappearance. Never having been able to provide their mother with a proper burial, their mourning does not follow a trajectory that society might expect. The mourning process can start at a very late point as it does for Kenza in Des rêves et des assassins by Mokeddem. Never having known her mother, it is only as a young adult that she seeks to understand her plight and finally to mourn the loss of the mother she does not remember. The mourning period can also be tainted by bitter mother-daughter disagreements carried over from life, as evidenced in L'Ingratitude by Ying Chen.

Although mourning and bereavement are common, sometimes shared experiences, individuals live those experiences differently. In her book Comment j'ai vidé la maison de mes parents, Lydia Flem recounts her own process of bereavement and mourning after the death of her parents. She explains that mourning is ultimately a solitary experience: "L'expérience du deuil se vit dans la solitude. Il n'est pas seulement douleurs et chagrins. Agressivité, colère, rage sont aussi au rendez-vous."²³² Her

propres sentiments ? Que je ne te voie jamais porter mon deuil ! Tu sais très bien que je n'aime pour toi que le rose et certains bleus..." (La Maison de Claudine 114).

²³¹ In his essay "Mourning and Melancholia," Sigmund Freud claims that at the end of a mourning period, "the ego becomes free and uninhibited again" (245). He does not, however, discuss the difficulty in determining an official "end" to mourning. Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," The Standard Editions of the Complete Psychological Works Vol. XIV (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1957) 245.

²³² Lydia Flem, Comment j'ai vidé la maison de mes parents (Paris: Seuil, 2004) 149.

mourning period coincides with the process of emptying her parents' home and sorting through all sorts of keepsakes and personal effects. Thus, this difficult period also entails moments of discovery or rediscovery of family history and of herself: "Je voulais savoir. Non plus être le contenant passif d'une trop grande douleur mais assumer l'histoire qui avait précédé ma naissance, comprendre l'atmosphère dans laquelle j'étais née" (75). Flem reveals previously unknown details about her parents' lives as European Jews in the twentieth century, and in their absence she finally begins to understand how their hardships influenced family relations. The emptying of their house, an emotionally wrenching project, ends up facilitating healing and advancing the mourning process:

Se réconcilier avec ses morts, atteindre la sérénité du souvenir exige le lent dépôt du temps. Les saisons doivent reparaître une à une et la vie, pas à pas, geste après geste, l'emporter sur la mort. Si l'on traverse la tempête des sentiments sans en exclure aucun, aussi vif ou vil qu'il paraisse, si l'on donne son consentement à ce qui surgit en nous, peut éclore une légèreté nouvelle, une renaissance après le déluge, un printemps de soi-même. (12)

In fully living her emotions, both positive and negative, Flem begins to understand the stories of the women who preceded her. She comes to realize that writing is her contribution to the "matrimoine" that has been passed on to her through generations of handmade objects, including her mother's array of dresses, grandmother's embroidered table linens, and clothes hangers with covers crocheted by her great-grandmother (Flem 100-101). Although she is not capable of the same kind of domestic creations accomplished by her foremothers, she preserves the "matrimoine" in telling her story of grief and her quest for healing.

What link does Flem's memoir of mourning have with the novels examined in this chapter? Does her mourning experience parallel those of other Francophone women? Although she does not write in a postcolonial context, Flem's Jewish heritage indicates a family history of discrimination, war, and displacement, experiences common to families living in a postcolonial setting.²³³ Her experience shows that the process of mourning is riddled with past misunderstandings and unrevealed secrets. Emptying her parents' house forces her to unravel some of the enigmas that have defined her existence. The personal renaissance Flem experiences does not put an end to her grief. The last sentence of her book declares : "Je n'ai pas envie de mettre un point final à ce livre" (152). She ends her story with no punctuation, indication of her desire to allow her evolving mourning process to continue. While she may have reconciled with her deceased parents, she has not finished mourning their loss. The works examined in this chapter also evidence multi-dimensioned mourning processes with no clear finishing point. In some cases, the spectral presence of the deceased seeks to participate in the earthly matters of her family members, which leads us to ponder the question: what roles do the dead play in the lives of survivors?

Phantoms, spirits, specters, and ghosts: "living" after death

When speaking and writing about those who have passed on, some assume the existence of life after death, imagining that the soul of the recently deceased leaves the

²³³ Although the details Flem shares are sparse, one can imagine that the road that brought her family to Brussels was one paved with religious persecution.

shell of the body, eventually reaching some form of paradise, hell, or purgatory.²³⁴ This belief undoubtedly aids in the mourning process, providing the comfort that those who have died are not really gone, that they have simply assumed another form of existence. Yet, the question remains: Are there spirits who do not proceed to the next stage, who consequently are “stuck” on Earth? Debate on the existence of life after death is evidently not a focus of this study, but supernatural intervention proves to be of great interest in Francophone literature, providing commentaries on some of the challenges faced by postcolonial societies, such as the struggle between tradition and modernity and the place of women in the public sphere.

The function of spectral characters in a postcolonial context is often linked to traumatic events experienced during the lifetime of that person, of either a personal or political nature. The spirits of the deceased seem to have unfinished business that prevents them from leaving the human plane, thus maintaining an earthly presence after death. In her book Histoires de fantômes, Martine Delvaux elaborates on the importance of the dead in the lives of the living : “Le travail du deuil est un travail possible-impossible, une tâche accomplie dans la mesure où elle ne doit pas l’être. Ce serait là une exigence éthique : ne pas enterrer les morts, ne pas oublier les fantômes, et les laisser nous hanter” (20). The dead therefore maintain a presence, and whether or not one “sees” a ghost, the memory of that person forever functions as a ghostly presence. The spirits discussed in this chapter each has a distinct purpose in the lives of survivors. Their ghosts thus manifest differently for their loved ones. In Djébar’s La femme sans

²³⁴ Catholic doctrine holds that those who die in grace can proceed to purgatory for a period of cleansing before being permitted to enter heaven.

sépulture, Zoulikha rests on Earth in hopes of providing guidance for her daughter. In L'Ingratitude, by Ying Chen, an angry daughter who committed suicide to escape from her mother, deals with the same harsh sentiments in the afterlife. Keltoum, the mother figure in Des rêves et des assassins by Malika Mokeddem, is voiceless both in life and death. The mystery surrounding her mother haunts Kenza, and as a young adult she feels compelled to seek clues about the last years of her mother's life, finally resuscitating her mother's memory. We will see that the loss of life, whether it be one's own or that of a family member, incites confusion, plunging characters into an emotional exile characterized by separation from the self, family members, or both.²³⁵ Yet, literature allows for the dead to speak in subtle and overt ways, through the sharing of stories by those left behind or the incorporation of spectral voices who tell their own stories.

Spectral exile: *la femme sans sépulture*

In La femme sans sépulture, Assia Djebar weaves a polyphonic chorus of women's voices whose stories celebrate the courageous Zoulikha, heroine and victim of Algeria's war of liberation. The voices of different generations of women, including her friend Dame Lionne, sister-in-law Zohra Oudia, as well as her daughters Hania and Mina, transmit varied impressions of the heroine whose loss they have not ceased to mourn.

²³⁵ I borrow the idea of exile from the self from Silvie Bernier's article "Ying Chen: s'exiler de soi," in which she analyzes the narrators in four of Chen's novels as characters whose empty existences equate to an exile from the self and one's own life and personal history. Bernier considers these characters as reflections of Chen's own choice to write in French rather than in Mandarin Chinese, representing her own exile from the self, that is to say, her separation from her culture and her past. Silvie Bernier, "Ying Chen: S'exiler de soi," Francofonie (Autumn 1999): 129-130.

These, along with the four phantasmal dialogues²³⁶ of the deceased Zoulikha, serve to create a portrait of the mythical *maquisarde*.²³⁷ Zoulikha's friends and family members portray different facets of her personality: Zohra Oudia testifies to the heroine's calm when she is being pursued by the French police (FS 82-86); Dame Lionne tells about the complicated resistance network she allowed Zoulikha to run out of her home (FS 150-164); Hania relates the ten years of happiness her mother knew with her third and final husband (FS 57), and towards the end of the novel, Mina, for the first time, speaks of the days she spent in a cave with her mother and the other members of the *maquis* shortly before her mother's torture and death (FS 211-215). Essential links between the past and present, these testimonials demonstrate many dimensions of Zoulikha's personality and serve to illustrate some of the ways in which women contributed to the liberation effort. Yet, in examining her death as a form of exile, the heroine's portrayal of *herself* is of great interest. How does the ghostly figure perceive her life and death? Is she first and foremost mother or warrior? To whom are her dialogues directed and what messages do they convey?

In the second chapter of this study, we examined how Zoulikha's absence continues to affect her daughters, years after her disappearance. The heroine's spectral voice reveals that she, too, suffers so many years after her torture and death. Laroussi views the monologues as a refusal to be buried a second time (193), and O'Reily sees them as a way to reappropriate history ("Place, Position, and Postcolonial Haunting" 66).

²³⁶See discussion of the dialogues in Chapter 2.

²³⁷ *maquisarde*—In French, the word *maquis* traditionally refers to scrubland or bush. During World War II, the Resistance was referred to as the *Maquis*, and members of the Resistance *maquisards*. The term carried over to the Algerian war of liberation, and Zoulikha is therefore a *maquisarde*, a member of the Algerian Resistance. "Maquis," *Le Petit Larousse Illustré 1997* (Paris: Larousse, 1996).

These observations are justified, as Zoulikha often refers to political topics such as the place of women in contemporary Algerian society (FS 223) and torture of prisoners (FS 217-221). Zoulikha also shares anecdotes from the happy times spent with Mina's father (FS 190-193), attesting to her desire to be remembered.

Yet, both O'Reily and Laroussi neglect the underlying maternal concern that is a motivating force behind the spirit's monologues. The heroine explains that she began speaking to Mina shortly after her death: "C'est à partir de cette aube que, dorénavant, je te parle, ô Mina, ma petite. Toi que je cherche dehors, dont je tente de deviner la voix là-bas, la présence, les mouvements, le travail et jusqu'à tes nuits de halte" (FS 222). The spectral narrator implies that she is forever at her daughter's side, both "absente et présente" (FS 71), watching, speaking, and that after twenty years her soliloquy is becoming "un chant presque glorieux" (FS 185). That song, one that serves as her chronicle of the war of liberation and her critique of the way in which society has since evolved, is principally concerned for her daughter who lives in Algeria's post-liberation society. Zoulikha's monologues are therefore comprised of interwoven and overlapping familial and societal concerns.

Addressing Mina in each monologue, the heroine admits to monitoring the young woman's activities : "Vous marchez enfin, comme tant d'autres, soudain nombreuses au soleil, et n'en déplaie à celle qui me défia, dents serrées sous le voile de blanc sali, œil unique accusateur, vous, à votre tour, et ensemble, vous marchez enfin 'nues'" (FS 189). Proud of her unveiled daughter, Zoulikha undoubtedly sees a bit of her own rebellious spirit in Mina. Her discourse emanates a sense of validation as she undoubtedly feels that her own defiant behavior in some way paved the way for her daughter. Zoulikha's "song"

touches on political questions of importance in contemporary Algeria, that of the veil and of women in public sphere, with the underlying intention of informing and supporting her daughter. Her interest in current events and politics stems from her inherent concern for her child, not necessarily from a desire to perpetuate her legendary status or to disseminate a feminist discourse. The spirit of Zoulikha has shifted its focus to her daughter. She is now “living” for her. Her after-life devotion to her child does not negate the brave actions accomplished during her lifetime, nor does it diminish her legendary status. It does, however, hint at guilt experienced by the heroine—guilt for having left her children to join the *maquis*, guilt for having died and left them to fend for themselves in post-war Algeria.

Zoulikha’s spectral voice explains that she haunts the place of her death because of fear, a fear that once pertained to the torture she underwent before her death, but that she has since transferred to Mina: “[...] ou ne serait-ce pas désormais une peur tournée vers toi, vers ton corps si frêle, vers ton visage de jeunesse, vers ton avenir?” (FS 224). She haunts that spot due to her concerns for Mina’s well-being:

Comment puis-je rejoindre le royaume des morts rassérénée si me hantent encore mon angoisse pour toi, ma curiosité frileuse, ma faim nullement rassasiée de ton destin, toi, tige de jasmin risquant de tomber avant d’exhaler son parfum tenace” (FS 224).

The myth of Zoulikha continues to trouble her daughters, but she, too, admits to being haunted by agony and curiosity linked to Mina’s unsure destiny. As a mother, she worries that her youngest daughter is stifled by her mother’s heroic legacy and terrible death, that she will never reach her full potential because of the fear connected to that

tragic legacy. Will her mother's violent and untimely death prevent Mina from living? Djébar provides no clear answer to this question, but at the end of the book, Mina does, for the first time, speak in detail about the final days she spent with her mother. Her destiny remains unclear, but in finally speaking of her famous mother, she moves towards a moment where she may be able to live outside the shadow of Zoulikha's death.

Zoulikha hovers on a border between the living and the dead, evidence of her afterlife exile. She can no longer actively participate in the life of her daughter, yet is not ready to move on for fear of relinquishing that which she perceives as her maternal duty to watch over and protect her offspring. Her spirit seeks, follows, and speaks to Mina with no sign of recognition or response. At the end of her last monologue, she tells her daughter where to find her: "Une clairière, ma chérie, où tu ne viendras jamais.

N'importe, c'est sur la place du douar, la voix de l'inconnue chantant inlassablement, c'est là, yeux ouverts, dans tout mon corps pourrissant, que je t'attends" (FS 234).

Zoulikha's monologues incite no sign of recognition or response on the part of her youngest daughter, yet the heroine lingers. She believes that Mina is the child who most needs maternal guidance, the one whose ability to live life fully is most hindered by her mother's death. Like her sister Hania, her aunt Zohra Oudia, and her mother's friend Dame Lionne, Mina continues to mourn the loss of Zoulikha. Yet unlike the other women who contribute to Zoulikha's oral memorial, Mina receives special attention from the spectral heroine who is aware of her daughter's need for maternal guidance. It would seem that Zoulikha continues to wander the Earth for the sole purpose of connecting with Mina, explaining her absence from the family, providing guidance to the young woman, and thus assuaging the guilt she feels in regards to her youngest daughter.

When escape becomes exile

In La femme sans sépulture, the reader comes into contact with a spirit that has haunted the spot of her death for some twenty years. Zoulikha, heroine of the Algerian war of liberation, refuses to leave the human sphere for fear of once again abandoning her daughter Mina. The circumstances of Zoulikha's death, both violent and mysterious, make for a *deuil impossible*, or impossible mourning, as the friends and family of the deceased are never able to mourn according to the customs of their society.²³⁸ Hence, Zoulikha and her survivors both live in exile. Zoulikha's is a solitary exile, in which she is doomed to relive painful moments of her earthly existence and in which she attempts to justify some controversial choices she made during her life. Her daughters experience an exile brought on by the knowledge that their mother most likely died a violent and humiliating death and by their inability to properly mourn the loss of their mother. Death therefore throws both the living and the dead into exile.

In Ying Chen's novel L'Ingratitude, the spirit we encounter is newly deceased, and the days following her suicide are documented by the spirit as she experiences a bumpy transition to the afterlife.²³⁹ Like Zoulikha, Yan-Zi's spirit observes her family, comments on their activities, and attempts to communicate with them. At the same time,

²³⁸ Families of those killed in Nazi concentration camps also deal with a *deuil impossible*, due to the traumatic and inhumane deaths of their loved ones. For a description of a *deuil impossible* in a Jewish context, see Le Père éternel. Anne Goscinny, Le Père éternel (Paris: Grasset, 2006).

²³⁹ Yan-Zi is an unreliable narrator whose accounts of life on Earth need to be taken with a grain of salt. In reading her stories about her traumatic relationship with her mother, it is important to remember that when one recounts an event, one can never reproduce that moment accurately. Delvaux asks: "Dire l'événement, est-ce possible ? Peut-on dire un événement, peut-on l'avouer ?"(104). In the time following her death, Yan-Zi is not yet able to admit responsibility for her part in her dysfunctional relationship with her mother. Rather, the spectral narrator feels the need to place all blame on her mother, claiming that the only way for her to separate herself from maternal power was through suicide.

she waits for the glorious moment where she will be welcomed into heaven, but that moment does not come.²⁴⁰ Contrary to Zoulikha's passionate monologues directed to her daughter, Yan-Zi's spectral discourse is one of frustration and anger with her controlling mother whose grips she attempted to escape in committing suicide.

Silvie Bernier's article "Ying Chen: s'exiler de soi" discusses an exile from the self as a theme in Chen's novels.²⁴¹ This exile involves a rejection of and separation from one's past, therefore immersing oneself in another existence, geographically and emotionally removed from one's former self. In L'Ingratitude, death simultaneously creates an exile from the self and from the mother, as the uncommonly close mother-daughter identification prevents the narrator from making a life for herself:

--J'ai envie d'être moi, maman.

--Tu ne peux pas être toi sans être ma fille.

--Je suis d'abord moi.

--Tu as vécu d'abord dans mon ventre. (IG 116)

This revelatory dialogue between mother and daughter illustrates a confining relationship where individuality and self-expression are not options. As long as she is on the Earth and living under her mother's roof, there is no identity separation between her and her mother.²⁴² As Yan-Zi looks back on her life from the foggy space she now inhabits, she admits to having wondered if she could live without her mother and what would become

²⁴⁰ See Chapter 3 for a discussion on the transcultural space Yan-Zi inhabits after her death.

²⁴¹ In addition to L'Ingratitude, Bernier examines La Mémoire de l'eau, Lettres chinoises, and Immobile.

²⁴² This attitude is a sharp contrast to Pluie et vent, by Simone Schwarz-Bart, where Télumée and Reine Nom's *espace identitaire* is developed in the garden and through storytelling. For Yan-Zi's mother, the Confucian value of obedience to one's parents takes precedent over any identity quest.

of her if she wasn't her daughter anymore (IG 98). Yan-Zi was never allowed to distinguish herself from her mother, due to the harsh rules imposed in the household.²⁴³ So, in attempting to cut herself off from her mother through suicide, she in fact imposed an exile from the only "self" she ever knew—that of her mother who was involved in every aspect of Yan-Zi's life. In the time following her death, Yan-Zi's specter comments on their tense relationship and observes her mother, hoping to see signs of sorrow and defeat. This proves to be a most unsatisfying experience for the spirit, as the mother refuses to be destroyed by grief.

After her death, the ghost of Yan-Zi quickly realizes that she has not succeeded in separating herself from the mother she detests. Rather, she is condemned to observe funeral preparations, hear the hurtful comments people make about her family, and even attend her own funeral dinner (IG 62-66). This is not the afterlife she had anticipated, and as always, she finds herself drawn to her mother:

J'inspire et retiens mon souffle pour me donner du poids. Je plonge. Je veux m'approcher de maman. J'aimerais moi aussi mettre une main sur son épaule inaccessible. Mais la fumée me repousse constamment. Sur la frontière entre la vie et la mort, cette fumée se comporte en gardienne implacable. (IG 11)

The spectral narrator sees and hears the funerary rituals, even witnesses her mother's grief, yet cannot reach her through death's fog. Her mother's expression of emotion sparks concern in the spectral narrator, and in one of her few displays of compassion, she attempts to comfort her mother. Like Zoulikha, she functions in a space somewhere between life and death. Both phantoms seek contact with someone they have left behind

²⁴³ See discussion on Yan-Zi's mother and her adherence to patriarchal violence in Chapter 2.

and both receive no response from the living, leaving them feeling unfulfilled. Being “new” to the afterlife, Yan-Zi repeatedly expresses her frustration at being excluded from earthly activities, and most of all, her inability to effectively communicate with her mother. In Djébar’s La femme sans sépulture, Zoulikha seems to accept her spectral state after twenty years of observing the world evolve in her absence. She does not expect the living to hear what she dubs her “song,” one composed out of concern for her daughter’s destiny. Rather, Zoulikha’s spirit is resigned to the fact that she will maintain her spectral existence out of need to maintain some form of contact with her daughter. As hovering spectral beings, Zoulikha and Yan-Zi both experience ineffective communication with loved ones left on Earth. The frustration they encounter is linked to their respective exilic experiences, as it reinforces the solitude imposed by death.

Yan-Zi has not yet adjusted to the exile she encounters in death, having died only recently. She continues to deal with the anger brought on by generational conflicts she and her mother never overcame. This transcultural space is therefore replete with negative feelings, as her resentment towards her mother festers. Her disquiet is also linked to the circumstances of her death. In the restrictive family environment dominated by her mother, the only thing that could possibly be worse than Yan-Zi’s blossoming sexuality was suicide. Yan-Zi’s suicide was an effort to devastate her mother and quash family dynamics dictated by Confucian values, but her death does not create the maternal misery she had intended. Contrary to Zoulikha’s heroic death, Yan-Zi’s was a shameful one. Even though both women sought liberty—Zoulikha from French oppression and Yan-Zi from maternal oppression—Zoulikha is a source of pride for her survivors, and Yan-Zi is a source of disgrace. That shame explains Yan-Zi’s need to recount the most

painful, minute details of her suicide planning, such as her consideration of ways she might kill herself: “J’avais longuement réfléchi aux méthodes. J’avais d’abord songé à sauter par la fenêtre de chez nous. De cette façon, je pourrais enfin laisser entendre à maman que je n’étais pas heureuse à la maison” (IG 55). The flood of words and images that surge from the confused, angry spirit comprise what Lucie Lequin calls the “journal of a suicide”²⁴⁴ (210). Her raw emotions are a contrast to Zoulikha’s refined tone that has undoubtedly been honed in the twenty years of her ghostly exile.

Throughout L’Ingratitude, Yan-Zi painfully unravels her distressing and negative feelings towards her mother, all while watching the mother carry on without her. This proves to be an unpleasant experience, as she discovers that her suicide did not cause as much maternal suffering as she had hoped: “Elle retient les sanglots et les larmes. Elle refuse les consolations. La mort de sa fille constitue pour elle plus un échec personnel qu’une perte sentimentale” (IG 110). Although Yan-Zi is upset by her mother’s icy reaction to her death, she does have the satisfaction of “owning” her death. In Donner la mort, Derrida proclaims that one’s death is “la seule chose au monde que personne ne peut ni donner ni prendre” (67-68). Although a person is able to give his or her own life for another, he or she can never prevent the inevitable death of another person. A person’s death can only be postponed, not prevented. The only person who possesses a particular death is the person who is to die, whether it be imminent or in the distant future. Consequently, Yan-Zi’s suicide is the one aspect of her life over which her mother had no say, and therefore the ultimate gesture of rejection of maternal control.

²⁴⁴ This genre chronicles the narrator’s mental and emotional state leading up to suicide, revealing the irrational and oftentimes tragic thought process that leads one to take his or her own life.

Does Yan-Zi, like Zoulikha, commit to staying connected to the human plane in hopes of communicating with her mother or waiting to see her suffer? She seems to have less control over her soul's movement than does Zoulikha. Little by little, she loses her earthly connections, eventually admitting that she no longer knows left from right, up from down, and has completely lost any sense of direction (IG 130). Her soul seems to be dissolving, and Yan-Zi does not care to halt the process. At the end of the book, as her spirit finally disconnects from Earth, she gains a new perspective:

Et moi aussi, je flotte. Je vais très loin. Pour la première et la dernière fois, sans doute, j'écoute les murmures des Alpes, je touche la chaleur du Sahara, je bois les eaux amères du Pacifique. Tout paraît très beau quand il n'y a plus de choix à faire, quand on aime sans objet, quand Seigneur Nilou ne vient pas,²⁴⁵ quand on n'a plus de destin. (IG 133)

Yan-Zi has lost all motivation, all contact with the Earth, and she claims that all the hate she once possessed was burned with her corpse (IG 130). Does her final departure mark an end to her self-imposed emotional exile? If the soul disappears, does the self remain? While the word forgiveness is never mentioned, the end of the book has a tone of resignation—the spirit no longer expresses her *ingratitude*. Rather, she seems to have accepted her self-inflicted death and mother's willingness to continue without her. Yan-Zi's "post-life" existence has thus far been trying, but when she finally releases the anger and bitterness directed towards her mother, her perspective changes. Life after death has not proven to be a paradise, but as she detaches herself from the human plane, she finally is able to experience, for the first and last time, the world outside the oppressive environment she has always known. In leaving the Earth, she is aware of mountains,

²⁴⁵ As discussed in Chapter 2, Seigneur Nilou is the god-like figure Yan-Zi expects to accompany her to heaven.

deserts, and bodies of water. Yan-Zi's transcultural experience has thus far been represented by a painful mother-daughter generational clash. For her, death is exile, and the tensions that weighed on her before her suicide also occupy the vague, transcultural space of death. Yet, as she floats away, anger and tension dissipate. For the first time, the narrator takes a neutral tone, and in the last moments before her soul disappears, she witnesses some of the Earth's natural splendor. Although Yan-Zi leaves her mother behind, the maternal image is a lasting one, as the last word of the book is "Maman!" (IG 133). As her soul fades away, her spirit ceases to exist, the exile comes to a close, and her last memory is of her mother.

A survivor's exilic existence

The spectral narrators in L'Ingratitude and La femme sans sépulture attest to an *existence* after death if not a *life* after death, through description of the spaces they haunt and the living family members they attempt to contact from the indistinct zones they inhabit after death. The spaces inhabited by Zoulikha and Yan-Zi embody not only their personal stories of suffering, but also come to represent exile and how it can be experienced in a transcultural context. Exile prevents one from living life fully, due to obstacles that are present in the host culture, such as the inability to communicate and homesickness. Yan-Zi and Zoulikha's after death experiences mirror those of a person living in exile. They are, at times, lonely, confused, angry, and frustrated because they are disconnected from the spaces they consider home and those people they have left behind.

In Des rêves et des assassins, Malika Mokeddem tells the story of a young woman named Kenza who has lived a “motherless” existence, with no memories and little information about her mother who had left Algeria to live in Montpellier, France: “Ma mère, elle, je ne l’ai jamais connue. Ma prime enfance est marquée par son absence autant que par les excès de mon père. Le manque et l’outrance. Deux énormités opposées et sans compensation”²⁴⁶ (RA 10). Her father, who she paints as a sexual monster,²⁴⁷ in no way attempts to fill the void left by the absent mother. Instead, he and his second wife create an atmosphere in which Kenza is not welcomed as a part of the family, isolated from her half-siblings, and sent away at each and every school vacation. (RA 14) As soon as she is old enough, she goes to boarding school, and she never returns to the paternal home: “Dès que j’ai pu me débrouiller seule, c’est moi qui ai fui mon père, sa bestialité, ses criailleries de sa marmaille, sa femme-servante, l’ambiance de cet immeuble devenu un étouffoir” (RA 15). Removed from paternal control, Kenza continues to thrive academically, but does not develop friendships with the other girls at school. The isolation she experienced in the family home has carried over to the boarding school.²⁴⁸

The bits and pieces of information she has gleaned over the years, including rumors of her mother’s attempt to “kidnap” her infant daughter during a visit to Oran

²⁴⁶ Mokeddem’s novel Le siècle des sauterelles also presents an orphan girl. Yasmine is traumatized by her mother’s murder, yet unable to cry for her. Like Kenza’s, her mourning process is delayed. Malika Mokeddem, Le siècle des sauterelles (Paris: Poche, 1996).

²⁴⁷ The narrator explains that for her father, a butcher, women are nothing but meat (12).

²⁴⁸ In her interview with Yolande Helm, Mokeddem describes school as her “premier exil.” Yolande Helm, “Entretien avec Malika Mokeddem,” Malika Mokeddem: Envers et Contre Tout (Paris: Harmattan, 2000) 39.

(RA 17), do not suffice to paint a portrait of the mother. Her mother's absence and father's rancor have created a vacuum in Kenza's life, one that she carries into her young adult years. She is never able to properly grieve for her mother, for she cannot even imagine what it might be like to have a maternal figure in her life. She lives in an emotional exile brought on by maternal absence and paternal disregard. Like Zoulikha's daughter Mina, Kenza moves through much of her life mechanically, refusing or unable to build lasting relationships. Yet, after falling in and out of love for the first time, her need to know about her mother surfaces:

Dire qu'avant de rencontrer l'amour, j'ai avancé tendue vers un seul but: un examen, un diplôme. Les uns après les autres, ceux-ci m'aidaient à occulter mes manques, mes complexités et la schizophrénie grandissante du pays. Dire que la découverte de l'amour m'a plongée dans l'urgence vitale d'y étancher mes soifs. (RA 72)

Having finally loved and been loved for the first time, Kenza knows she must seek information about Keltoum. Her need to understand her origins reminds us of Flem's mourning process and the desire she expresses to know her own family history. Kenza's decision to leave France in search of her mother's story marks the beginning of her mourning process, some twenty years after the mother's death. The need to discover her deceased mother also happens to coincide with her need to flee Algeria's oppressive, frightening, political atmosphere dominated by the FIS.²⁴⁹

When she arrives in Montpellier, the city of her birth, she sets out to find a friend of her mother's who had contacted Kenza many years prior. That mission proves to be

²⁴⁹ The FIS, the Islamic Salvation Front, founded in the late 1980s, counters the secular National Liberation Front (FLN). The FIS has been linked to attacks on government targets and other acts of violence committed by extremists in the 1990s.

difficult, as Kenza's only clue is a name—Zana Baki—and she discovers that as in Algeria, North African women tend to remain hidden in the private domain.²⁵⁰

Nonetheless, for the first time in her life, Kenza becomes aware of her mother's presence in the streets of Montpellier. She searches for Keltoum in each and every North African woman who crosses her path and tries to imagine the places her mother may have frequented. Until this moment, the place a mother might have held in Kenza's life has been a void, representative of the emotional exile in which she functioned for most of her life. She has neither a positive nor negative maternal image, due to the fact that no maternal figure has ever been in her life. Yet, in Montpellier, she begins to imagine the person her mother may have been: "Pour l'heure, la recherche de Zana Baki n'est qu'un leurre. C'est qu'en chacune d'elles, j'ai le sentiment étrange de croiser un spectre de ma mère. Comme si elle était toujours là, ma mère, fantôme errant, en plusieurs exemplaires" (RA 84). Her departure from Algeria allows the ghost of her mother to finally "come alive." In the country where she spent her last years, her daughter has the freedom to seek out those who may have known her and to "construct" a maternal vision. When Kenza does come into contact with two women who knew her mother, the stories they tell about Keltoum plant bittersweet images in the daughter's mind: after having lost her daughter, Keltoum's guilt and loneliness led her to attempt suicide (RA 147-148); mother and daughter share a fascination with the sea (RA 148); Keltoum always returned from the market with a bouquet of flowers; an illegal abortion took her life (RA 141). These personal details make the mother real. Kenza now possesses concrete images of her mother, and for the first time she is able to create and possess feelings of love and longing for her. Keltoum's story, heartbreaking for her daughter to hear, nonetheless

²⁵⁰ This phenomenon is discussed in Chapter 2.

gives Kenza a sense of validation and allows her to create a portrait of her mother—a young, troubled woman whose status as a woman and immigrant caused much suffering.

Valérie Orlando has remarked that in exile, Algerian writers like Mokeddem carve a space that is simultaneously feminine, feminist, and North African (“*Écriture d’un autre lieu*” 103). From that space, authors can express themselves freely. Similarly, for Chen and Djébar’s narrators, the spectral space is an enunciatory space free from the confines imposed by society before death. In *La Femme sans sépulture*, Zoulikha openly critiques contemporary Algerian society and strives to reconstruct a history that accurately portrays the important roles women played in Algeria’s war of liberation, two things she never could do had she been alive.²⁵¹ Yan-Zi, as she floats above the Earth, uses her words to paint the repressive symbolic violence that traps each generation of women in her family. That subtle yet strong violence impeded her in life and led her to commit suicide. Yet, as a specter, Yan-Zi is finally allowed to convey and comment on that inhibitive societal structure.

Kenza, too, creates a new space for herself, but hers is one defined first by the search for her deceased mother, then by the process she undertakes to digest the information she acquires. The knowledge Kenza garners in Montpellier allows her mourning process to move forward, and as we have repeatedly observed, mourning the

²⁵¹ See discussion in Chapter 2 on *La femme sans sépulture* as a challenge to the patriarchy.

loss of a loved one is an emotionally painful process.²⁵² The anxiety and sadness she experiences surface in a dream:

Je suis un fantôme. J'erre dans les ruines d'Oran. Sous un ciel de sang. [...] Vrille une douleur dans ma tête et mon ventre. J'essaie de me raisonner: un spectre ne peut pas souffrir. Il n'a ni tête ni ventre. Qu'est-ce qui m'arrive? Quelque chose s'est encore détraqué en moi et pourtant je suis morte. (RA 145)

Her disturbing dream, one in which she perceives herself as a ghostly being, is indicative of the instability she feels during this decisive moment in her life. Kenza is not dead, but her lack of human connection and need to wander make her existence a spectral one. Kenza has thus far led a rather mechanical life, obsessed with her studies, receiving very little familial affection and validation. She has also lived in a repressive and dangerous society and been abandoned by a man she loved. Although she is alive and has yet to experience physical death, Kenza is a specter whose unhappy existence needs to be mourned. In Specters of Marx, Derrida considers the importance of ghosts:

He should learn to live by learning not how to make conversation with the ghost but how to talk with him, with her, how to let them speak or how to give them back speech, even if it is in oneself, in the other, in the other in oneself: they are always there, spectres, even if they do not exist, even if they are no longer, even if they are not yet.²⁵³

In her unsettling dream, Kenza comes into contact with her own ghost, mourning her own sad past. Her situation is unlike those of Zoulikha and Yan-Zi in that she is a *living*

²⁵² Derrida's essays on deceased friends teach us that mourning is an exhausting process. Jacques Derrida, The Work of Mourning, eds. Pascale-Anne Bruault and Michael Naas (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 2001).

²⁵³ Jacques Derrida, Specters of Marx (New York: Routledge, 2006) 14.

person who attempts to collect information concerning someone from the other side. Yet, flesh and blood do not prevent her from leading a ghostly, wandering existence.

Montpellier is a transformational place for Kenza, and once she has discovered the truth about her mother's life, she finds herself on a threshold between her former existence and one that will undoubtedly define the next years of her life. As Kenza begins to emerge from her long-term emotional exile, she is struck by fears and emotions she previously had not had to face, not knowing that her mother's final years were solitary and painful. Unwilling to return to the uncertain and restrictive life Oran offers her, she uses Montpellier as a springboard for further travels, announcing to a new friend: "Il me prend des envies de voyage. Des envies d'aller vers des pays où je n'ai aucune racine" (RA 155). In order to overcome the fear that permeated her dream, Kenza will visit places with no personal history and painful emotional associations.

At first glance, one could say that Zoulikha, Yan-Zi, and Kenza couldn't be more different from one another. Zoulikha, warrior and mother of four, died a tragic, yet heroic death in her country's war of liberation. Yan-Zi, a young Chinese woman, commits suicide in hopes of escaping from her suffocating mother, and Kenza has yet to experience physical death. Yet, upon close examination, we see that all three women are linked by an emotional exile brought on by death. Whether they are living or dead each of these three narrators possesses spectral characteristics that separate her from other people. The chasms they seek to traverse, those that enhance their solitude, are simultaneously linked to historical memory and exile. Zoulikha, Yan-Zi, and Kenza are all affected by inaccurate or unjust "official" versions of history transmitted by patriarchal societies. Their refusal to accept "official" history contributes, in part, to their

marginalized status. They are spectral, liminal figures who float on the edges of society or on the border between life and death. Their exilic status gives them distance from an “official,” archival version of history.²⁵⁴ Consequently, that distance allows them to provide other versions of history that reveal the injustices inflicted by patriarchal societies.

²⁵⁴ In Histoire de fantômes, Delvaux examines works that criticize archives and other manners that societies use to preserve history, for the existence of archives implies the existence of secrets. The archives not only record a certain version of history, but affect future events: “Et puis, l’archive ne se limite pas à la mise en réserve du passé; par sa présence même, l’archive exerce une influence sur l’avenir” (Delvaux 88).

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This study has examined issues pertaining to the complexities of maternal roles in various Francophone postcolonial societies. Building on Maryse Condé and Lydie Moudileno's work that calls attention to the central, yet problematic place of women in Creole societies, I have drawn parallels between mother figures in the French Caribbean, North Africa and Quebec. In La Parole des femmes, Condé reveals some of the particularities of feminine expression of the French Caribbean concerning relationships between men and women, women's amalgamative religious practices, and critiques of educational systems. Moudileno discusses the resuscitation of a *parole oubliée*²⁵⁵ in the fiction of both Maryse Condé and Simone Schwarz-Bart, a voice that does not heed the patriarchal and colonial discourses that have served to stifle women of Martinique and Guadeloupe (L'Ecrivain antillais 36). Condé and Moudileno highlight women's voices as they are expressed in literature from the French Caribbean. Using their scholarship as a springboard, this study has drawn connections between women of distant parts of the Francophone world, bringing to light the nuances of the representation of mother figures in postcolonial contexts.

Keeping in mind varying histories, traditions, and socio-political realities, I have shown that Francophone mother figures are linked by their experiences in culturally

²⁵⁵ *parole oubliée*—forgotten voice

diverse societies, including life as a single parent, the inhibitive characteristics of patriarchal societies, and the consequences of symbolic violence. The novels I have examined carve a place for maternal voices, thus accounting for the specificities of women's experiences in transcultural contexts. Three novels studied from the French Caribbean, Pluie et vent sur Télumée Miracle by Simone Schwarz-Bart; and L'Exil selon Julia and L'espérance-macadam by Gisèle Pineau, show the reader a variety of mothers, both biological and adopted, young and old, positive and negative, at home and abroad. Schwarz-Bart and Pineau portray mother figures who must make a life for their families within the confines of patriarchal societies, yet at the same time who define themselves in opposition to the expectations of those societies. La Femme sans sépulture by Assia Djebar and Des rêves et des assassins by Malika Mokeddem represent a small part of North Africa's contribution to Francophone literature. As we have seen, these two novels present motherless children who suffer the loss of their mother many years after her death and who consequently struggle to find their own places in transcultural societies where contributions of women are rarely acknowledged and appreciated. Québécois authors Abla Farhoud and Ying Chen, writers from Quebec's *littérature migrante*, explore topics similar to those examined by authors from the French Caribbean and North Africa. Farhoud's Le Bonheur a la queue glissante criticizes the notions of homeland and the patriarchal systems the principal mother figure has known all her life, both in Lebanon and Quebec. Chen's L'Ingratitude presents a harsh and angry daughter whose spectral voice exposes the conflictual mother-daughter relationship.

In examining these seven novels, we have seen the emergence of concerns that span postcolonial regions, including those relating to exile, gender, and symbolic

violence. The chapters of this study have validated Anne Donadey's assertion that there is a "confluence of interests" (203) that exists between Francophone women writers and postcolonial theory. After briefly tracing the development of postcolonial studies in the last thirty years, the first chapter of this study examines issues pertaining to women that postcolonial theorists often neglect, such as women's responsibility to transmit collective history to younger generations and the literary space as a place to express problems pertaining to women and families in postcolonial societies.

Chapter two studies the evolution of the representation of the mother figure, from Colette and Simone de Beauvoir to modern mothers in Francophone areas who experience multiple levels of repression in their postcolonial societies, not only by the patriarchy of their own cultures, but also by the patriarchal systems left by the colonizers. The chapter identifies some shared characteristics of mother figures who evolve in transcultural contexts, including mothers as subtle or overt challenges to the patriarchy and the sense of isolation experienced by mothers living in exile.

The third chapter of the study examines the influence of different backdrops, both rural and urban, on the formation of maternal identities. Through examination of a variety of spaces, we have seen that a mother's primary landscape can be comprised of comforting or unpredictable natural elements. Additionally, we have seen that mothers living in exile tend to define their landscapes by the confines of the home, as their contact with the outside world is limited. The fourth and final chapter studies death as a form of exile, discussing the painful, oftentimes delayed bereavement process that survivors encounter after the loss of a loved one. Furthermore, the chapter examines the role of spectral voices in postcolonial literature as critics of postcolonial societies.

The four chapters of the study reveal maternal concerns that span the Francophone world, such as the interplay of cultures and the effects of symbolic violence inflicted by the patriarchy. In spite of differences in history, language, and personal experience, these issues prove to be reoccurring, causing us to rethink the place of the mother, both in the household and in society. The mother figures I have studied each possess certain elements of power concerning their strong influence over their children and their role as guardian of culture, yet upon close examination, we come to understand the inhibitive nature of maternal existence in culturally diverse, postcolonial societies. The connections I have drawn between mother figures in the literatures of the French Caribbean, North Africa, and Quebec are most definitely not limited to these three regions. The problematic issues expressed by the novelists treated in this study, heavily influenced by factors such as abandonment and war, are also seen in the novels of Vietnamese writers of French expression.

Anna Moï and Tuyêt-Nga Nguyễn, both part of Europe's Vietnamese diaspora, have published novels dealing with mothers, daughters, and Vietnam's war against the United States. The mother figures presented by Moï and Nguyễn raise their children in culturally diverse contexts, as do the other mothers discussed in this study. Riz noir²⁵⁶ by Moï and Le journaliste français²⁵⁷ by Nguyễn present meetings of cultures in Vietnam in the 1960s, during the country's war against the United States. Overlapping themes and concerns emerge, thus linking Moï and Nguyễn's mother figures to those studied in previous chapters, underlining a mother's concern for her children's education, the need

²⁵⁶ Anna Moï, Riz noir (Paris : Gallimard, 2004).

²⁵⁷ Tuyêt-Nga Nguyễn, Le journaliste français (Brussels: Le Grand Miroir, 2007).

mothers feel to protect their own languages and cultures in a society with a high rate of cultural exchange, and a mother's decision to participate in a war of liberation.

Tuyêt, the narrator of Le Journaliste français and Tan, the narrator of Riz noir, are young Vietnamese girls marked by the war that has overtaken their country. Their mothers, loving yet imperfect, embody the numerous roles taken on by women in transcultural, postcolonial settings. They are primary breadwinners, avid supporters of education, and models of independent women for their impressionable daughters. Like some of the other mother figures I have studied, Tuyêt and Tan's mothers challenge a rigid patriarchy by raising daughters who are aware of their inner strengths and who are willing to actively seek liberty for themselves and others. Interestingly enough, both of the young narrators experience a chasm that prevents mothers and daughters from communicating with and understanding one another. While Moï and Nguyễn do not elaborate on that gap, one can wonder if the emotional distance can be attributed to the traumatic and violent circumstances that these families experience in daily life. This and other concerns related to violence, war, and women in patriarchal societies enable analysis of literature of the Vietnamese diaspora in conjunction with that of other Francophone works.

One of the major goals of this study is to identify and discuss some of the commonalities of distant parts of the expansive Francophone world. Through study of the diverse mother figures that Francophone literatures offer us, from the French Caribbean to North Africa to Quebec, I have drawn links between women of different continents, cultural heritages, and religious traditions. With respect for, interest in, and appreciation of these differences, I have nonetheless demonstrated connections that bind

these women to one another, including the advantages and disadvantages of raising one's family in a transcultural community, the restrictive aspects of life in a patriarchal society, and the key role of environment in representation of the mother figure. In considering these and other points of similarity, we can come to a deeper understanding of the representation of mother figures in Francophone postcolonial literature.

Throughout this study we have seen that literature is a venue in which women's forgotten voices surface, weaving stories that chronicle diverse experiences in postcolonial regions. The novels I have analyzed inhabit feminine literary spaces, putting forth complex, nuanced mother figures that refuse to conform to the expectations of postcolonial, patriarchal societies. Portrayal of mother figures' transcultural experiences allow for reinsertion and exploration of forgotten voices, thus *giving* voice to the voiceless.

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