



**In-between Wor(l)ds: Female Autofiction and Postcolonial Identity  
in Marie Cardinal's *Au pays de mes racines*, Marguerite Duras's *L'amant*  
and Isabela Figueiredo's *Caderno de Memórias Coloniais***

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## DECLARATION

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## ABSTRACT

Female autofiction can be considered as a form of feminist confessional since, by challenging dominant configurations of knowledge – such as those embodied by autobiographism – and drawing attention to women’s personal issues, it aims at articulating the multiplicity of the female narrative subject. Autofictional works such as Marie Cardinal’s *Au pays de mes racines* [*In the Country of my Roots*], Marguerite Duras’s *L’amant* [*The Lover*] and Isabela Figueiredo’s *Caderno de Memórias Coloniais* [*Notebook of Colonial Memories*] can therefore be viewed as dealing with female personal concerns in a political way. This is because their exploration of women’s marginal status in formerly colonial countries like Algeria, Indochina and Mozambique, functions as an empowering tool through which they challenge the structures of domination impinging on their identity while asserting their own individuality. The purpose of this dissertation is to explore how the literary genre of autofiction harmonizes with and serves to better articulate issues of female subjectivity and cultural hybridization, particularly as concerns the power dynamics at stake in the narratives’ transcultural contexts. The focus will be on the fragmented sense of self imbuing these novels and which is directly related to the liminal status occupied by the narrators who are in-between different cultures. The final objective is to investigate how the notion of in-betweenness, which underlies both the genre of autofiction itself and the structure of the texts, can function as a feminist category of representation of women’s subjectivity and which defies oppressive social conventions related to patriarchal colonial patterns.

## RÉSUMÉ

L'autofiction féminine peut être considérée comme une forme de littérature confessionnelle féministe puisque, par le défi des configurations dominantes des formes de savoir – dont celles représentées par l'autobiographisme – et en se focalisant sur les questionnements personnels des femmes, cette forme cherche à comprendre et à articuler la multiplicité du sujet narratif féminin. Des œuvres autofictionnelles telles que *Au pays de mes racines* de Marie Cardinal, *L'amant* de Marguerite Duras, ou *Caderno de Memórias Coloniais* [*Carnet de souvenirs coloniaux*] de Isabela Figueiredo peuvent être lues comme des explorations politiques de problématiques personnelles féminines. Ces romans abordent le statut marginal des femmes dans des territoires anciennement coloniaux tels que l'Algérie, l'Indochine ou le Mozambique et en cela elles sont un outil de pouvoir grâce auquel elles remettent en question les structures de domination qui pèsent sur leur identité, tout en affirmant leur propre individualité. Dans ce mémoire, nous nous proposons d'explorer comment le genre littéraire de l'autofiction aide à mieux articuler les questionnements de la subjectivité féminine et de l'hybridation culturelle, notamment dans les dynamiques de pouvoir au sein des contextes transculturels de ces récits. Nous nous concentrerons sur la fragmentation du "soi" qui apparaît dans ces romans et qui est directement liée à la place liminale des auteurs dans un entre-deux culturel. Nous chercherons enfin à comprendre comment cette notion d'entre-deux, sur laquelle est fondée le genre de l'autofiction et la structure-même des textes, fonctionne comme catégorie de représentation féministe de la subjectivité des femmes et qui défie les conventions sociales oppressives liées à un modèle colonial patriarcal.

*Alla mia famiglia:  
da sempre,  
ovunque io vada,  
casa.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The term “feminist confessional” denotes the subordinate genre of autobiographical literature portraying “the most personal and intimate details of the author’s life” so as to bring the female author closer to the female reader (Felski 88). Bearing this definition in mind, female autofiction can be viewed as a form of feminist confessional because, in defying dominant knowledge structures such as autobiographism, it offers alternative ways of representing the composite nature of the female narrative subject, thus directly addressing women’s subjectivity. Moreover, by making use of autobiographical elements, autofictional works can be regarded as aligning with the Second Wave feminism’s principle that the “Personal is Political,” in that they emphasize the fact that women’s “personal” issues have great political relevance (Thompson 346). Autofictional works such as Marie Cardinal’s *Au pays de mes racines*, Marguerite Duras’s *L’amant* and Isabela Figueiredo’s *Caderno de Memórias Coloniais*, in exposing and voicing women’s experiences in colonial Algeria, Indochina and Mozambique, tackle female personal concerns in a political way and thus function as an empowering tool. Furthermore, since Cardinal, Duras and Figueiredo were brought up in the colonies to later move to the metropole, their autobiographical anecdotes are characterized by a fragmented sense of self due to cultural hybridization as well as gender, and by the need to write about them in order to assert their identity. For this reason, their autofictional accounts can be perceived as tapping into contemporary cultural and feminist theories prompting a redefinition of the notion of the subject as multilayered, culture-specific and mediated by sociohistorical factors.

The neologism designating the “archi-genre” of autofiction was coined by Serge

Doubrovsky in 1977 and has ever since been heavily contested (R  rolle). This literary category indicates a genre in which, notwithstanding nominal identity or a correspondence of personal and sociocultural references between author, narrator and protagonist, the latter two differ from the former in their being fictionalized (Doubrovsky 256; Gasparini 24-25). For this reason, autofiction has been considered to encompass different types of writing, raising questions about its significance and legitimacy. Moreover, perhaps due to its relatively marginal status within the literary field, it has often been dismissed as a typically feminine narrative practice, inferior to other allegedly more masculine ways of writing (Jordan 77; R  rolle). Since the purpose of autofiction is to create a bond between author and reader through the presentation of fictionalized fragments of memories, it is usually characterized by a certain degree of nonlinearity, unlike other forms of self-writing, such as autobiography, which present a more linear structure (Cusset, "The limits of Autofiction" 2-3). Because of this, the hybrid status of such a narrative form in-between fact and fiction can be believed to challenge overarching representational techniques, and it can thus be related to feminist theories challenging patriarchal categorizations and putting forward alternative approaches to the portrayal of women's subjectivity.

The purpose of this dissertation is to analyze and compare how the literary genre of female autofiction intersects and exposes feminist concerns, particularly with regard to the concept of in-betweenness and the relative processes of cultural hybridization in post/colonial environments. The focus will be on questions of the formation and representation of women's subjectivity in Cardinal's *Au pays de mes racines*, Duras's *L'amant* and Figueiredo's *Caderno de Mem  rias Coloniais*, particularly with reference to the dichotomous status of the female

postcolonial subject and the articulation of themes such as colonial nostalgia and desire.<sup>1</sup> The relevance of this analysis of the three texts lies in the fact that, by focusing on the way in which the protagonists' subjectivities are depicted not only in their being shaped by the power relations impinging on them, but also in their resisting them, special attention will be given to the acquisition and creation of a sense of self. Readers will relate to such a reading of the primary sources as it investigates the process through which human subjects come to be, and, at the same time, it highlights how a seemingly marginal literary genre like autofiction can instead be considered as a powerful tool of alternative representation of women's experiences.

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<sup>1</sup> During a conversation I had with Isabela Figueiredo at the Lisbon Book Fair in May 2018, the author herself drew a parallel between the way she portrays issues of female postcolonial identity in *Caderno de Memórias Coloniais* and the manner in which Marguerite Duras addresses similar concerns in *L'amant*, thus corroborating my comparative analysis of such texts.

## 2. METHODOLOGY AND OBJECTIVES

In order to explore the correlations between the autofictional female subject and the way in which its liminal status is articulated in Marie Cardinal's *Au pays de mes racines*, Marguerite Duras's *L'amant* and Isabela Figueiredo's *Caderno de Memórias Coloniais*, this dissertation aims to apply various theories of the formation and configuration of the subject, particularly those designed by the feminist theoretician Rosi Braidotti, the social theorist Michel Foucault and the gender theorist Judith Butler. Such theorizations are extremely relevant to this study as they provide an essential background on the notion of the fragmented self, which is here believed to be crucial to understand the concerns around the post/colonial female subjects portrayed in the primary sources. In adopting a comparative approach to the analysis of these three novels, the focus will be on the notion of cultural in-betweenness, particularly with reference to the theme of colonial nostalgia and desire, and on how the role played by parental figures intertwines such concerns. So as to better situate the scope of this comparative investigation of Cardinal's, Duras's and Figueiredo's texts, it is now worth briefly presenting the theoretical concepts that will inform it.

Firstly, aiming at clarifying the extent to which the autofictional works considered here can be perceived as tapping into feminist ways of representing females' subjectivity, in section 4.1.1, a link will be established between Braidotti's nomadic political project of sexual difference and Cardinal's, Duras's and Figueiredo's display of their narrative subjects. Braidotti's model presents an approach to feminist subjectivity hinged on notions of gender nomadism and specificity, culturally embodied difference and multilayered and split identity (Braidotti 159-166). By applying such concepts to the analysis of *Au pays de mes racines*,

*L'amant* and *Caderno de Memórias Coloniais*, particular attention will be given to the ways in which these texts reflect and articulate the feminist concerns exposed by Braidotti in the working scheme of her project of feminist nomadism. Furthermore, it will be highlighted how the autofictional subjects, in portraying their personal and culturally located experiences in-between distinct ethnic realities, can be interpreted as different embodiments of female feminist subjectivities.

Secondly, so as to better comprehend the structures of domination influencing the development of the female subject in a post/colonial context, Foucault's and Butler's theorizations of the intertwining between power and subjectivity will be presented in section 4.1.2 and then adopted in the comparative analysis of the texts in section 4.2.1. According to Foucault, the self's identity does not pre-exist power relations, but is shaped, albeit not determined, by them ("The Return of Morality" 253; "The Subject and Power" 211). Similarly, Butler posits that power relations do not simply control the subject, but they are responsible for its creation (*The Psychic Life of Power* 83-84). This is denominated the paradox of "subjectivation" or "subjectivization," as the conditions underlying the subordination of the self also represent the tools by which the subject becomes a conscious agent. Since *Au pays de mes racines*, *L'amant* and *Caderno de Memórias Coloniais* portray female subjects struggling with hierarchical structures, the Foucauldian and Butlerian concepts of identification and "subjectivation" can be beneficial to the comprehension of the cross-fertilization between colonial, cultural and patriarchal conventions and the development of the female narrative self.

Finally, in section 4.2.2, Foucault's and Butler's approaches to self-writing will be employed to show how the autofictional texts, in exposing the narrators' personal concerns and struggles, besides defying the power relations which underlie their "subjectivation" and creating

new influence structures, can also be considered as a Foucauldian “[technology] of the self” enabling the narrative subjects to determine and transform their own subjectivity (Foucault, “Subjectivity and Truth” 87). Furthermore, in paraphrasing the Butlerian notion of the “performative,” Cardinal’s, Duras’s and Figueiredo’s fictional accounts of themselves can be conceived as representational instruments which, in exposing their own personal stories and identity issues, act on them and help the subject in its process of self-becoming (Butler, *Bodies that Matter* 13; Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* 81).

To conclude, the outcomes of this research are expected to contribute to the critical analysis of Cardinal’s *Au pays de mes racines*, Duras’s *L’amant* and Figueiredo’s *Caderno de Memórias Coloniais* with a yet unexplored examination of the ways in which a form of feminist confessional such as autofiction harmonizes with and serves to better articulate issues of female subjectivity and cultural hybridization. By applying theories revolving around the formation and fragmented status of the self in relation to the subject matter and structure of the novels, this dissertation will explore how the power dynamics underpinning mechanisms of identification and alienation are illustrated and developed in the three narratives. The final objective is to investigate how the mark of in-betweenness, characterizing both the genre of autofiction itself and the content and style of the texts, can be regarded as an empowering feminist tool putting forward an alternative way of representing female individuality and challenging patriarchal configurations of colonial might.

### 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 3.1 In-between genres: Autofiction

##### 3.1.1 Autofiction and life-writing in France and Portugal

Over the last forty years, the genre of autofiction has been the center of heated discussions especially among French literary critics. The specialist in autobiography Philippe Lejeune posits in *L'Autobiographie en France* and *Le Pacte autobiographique* that referentiality and literarity are mutually exclusive, and that the former, ensured by the nominal identity between author, narrator and protagonist, can only be used in relation to autobiography and not to autofiction (Jones 175). Conversely, Serge Doubrovsky shows in his novel *Fils* that the referential traits present in autofictional works do not invalidate their literarity, as they combine the real events underlying them with fictional language (Cusset, "The limits of Autofiction" 1). Moreover, he portrays the autofictional subject as composite and fragmented, thus revealing the influence of the work of psychoanalysts such as Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan (Jordan 76). The Doubrovskian definition of autofiction is opened up by the prolific theorist Vincent Colonna, who posits in *Autofiction et autres mythomanies littéraires* that autofictional novels can dispense with nominal identity and are rather focused on a writer's fictionalization of his/her own persona (196). Going a step further, in his monograph *Est-il je? Roman autobiographique et autofiction*, the essayist Philippe Gasparini stresses the fact that the referential nature of an autofictional book is constructed through personal and sociocultural references, and not merely through nominal identity between author, narrator and protagonist (24-25). Finally, in her article "L'Autofiction, un genre pas sérieux," Marie Darrieussecq argues that autofiction belongs to the literary canon since, in requiring a



double pact between author and reader – a factual and a fictional one – it defies Genette’s definition of fiction as literary by definition and of factual accounts as such only by virtue of their aesthetics (Jeannelle et al. 22-23).

Despite the troubled process of legitimation of the genre of autofiction in France, it can be said that the term has gained more popularity over the last few years, especially thanks to the biographical turn in French contemporary literature. This is also shown by the flourishing of literary prizes devoted to the autobiographical/biographical canon from the 1980s onward, such as the “Prix Goncourt de la Biographie,” the “Prix de la Biographie de L’Académie française” and the “Grand Prix de La Biographie Politique” (Moulin 610-611). Furthermore, Ivan Jablonka’s concept of “method fictions,” presented in his essay *L’histoire est une littérature contemporaine: Manifeste pour les sciences sociales*, sheds new light on the value of autofictional accounts. Since “method fictions” are defined as aiming at investigating and interpreting reality, autofictional works can be considered as “fictions de méthode” in their mingling fact and fiction, thus constructing a different type of truth (Moulin 609).

Quite differently from France, the culture of life-writing, and hence of its subgenre of autofiction, is still in its early stage in Portugal. For instance, even though it has been documented to be present in Portuguese literature since the seventeenth century, the practice of diary-writing became popular only after the publication of Vergilio Ferreira’s *Contracorrente* in 1980 (Faria 648). This tendency toward a lack of interest in the autobiographical/biographical canon can be ascribed to two main reasons. On the one hand, there is the fact that forms of life-writing are seen as being paraliterary and therefore not fully belonging to the literary genre (Faria 649). On the other hand, as remarked by Marilyn S. Zucker, “Portuguese people,” due to both the lingering power exerted on them by Catholic precepts and Salazar’s coercive

dictatorship, “don’t like calling attention to themselves” and therefore perceive self-writing as an unusual practice (qtd. in Faria 650). However, during the twentieth century, increasingly more Portuguese writers experimented with the life-writing genre, as it can allow for greater freedom of expression and the debunking of prevailing systems of representation. For instance, Clara Rocha’s 1992 *Máscaras de Narciso*, together with the above-mentioned *Contracorrente* by Ferreira, is considered one of the literary diaries which started the trend of life-writing in Portugal (Faria 648).

This brief excursus on the theoretical disputes surrounding the definition and legitimacy of autofiction shows how this relatively newly-born genre challenges dominant configurations of knowledge adopted in more traditional forms of autobiography. To be more specific, the autofictional narrative form articulates its subject as different from the autobiographical omniscient narrator, as characterized by a fragmented identity and a preoccupation with memory (Contat 119; Jones 176-177). Indeed, the autofictional subject has often been referred to as a “post-Freudian” one, whose narrative is “prospective rather than retrospective” (Jordan 76). Moreover, by taking issue with the autobiographical norms concerning the reconstruction of one’s historical truth, autofiction has shown itself to be more appropriate for women writers experimenting new forms to express female issues, as it will be discussed in the next section.

### 3.1.2 Female autofiction

The autofictional pluralized “I” can be seen as a tool functional to the articulation of the multiplicity of the fragmented identity of the female subject, thus giving new voice to women’s subjectivity. In order to better understand how autofiction can enable women to redefine their identities through the use of alternative narrative strategies, it is useful to refer to the brief analysis that Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska makes of women’s writing in her book *Autofiction et dévoilement de soi: Essai*. In it, she relates the autobiographical component of autofiction to forms of self-writing, such as the personal diary, letters, poetry, which women made use of during the past centuries when they were confined to the domestic sphere and excluded from the outer, public world. In this way, Ouellette-Michalska posits that women could vocalize their “I” in a discreet way (80). Similarly, Béatrice Didier affirms in *L’écriture-femme* that feminine literature has mostly been represented by forms of self-writing (19). This was also because, until the twentieth century, most women were forced to play the role of the “angel in the house” and could only access culture in an indirect way, such as through the education of their children, thus securing the link between nature and culture (Ouellette-Michalska 81). Ouellette-Michalska adds that in occupying such a liminal position, women gained a taste for the unspoken, for being concealed and at the same time exposed (81). Even though this claim seemingly implies that female individuals belong to a unitary entity, it is nevertheless worth considering it, for it presents autofiction as a tool allowing them to be what they have always been historically: a figure in-between two worlds (Ouellette-Michalska 81). Moreover, although this position can be regarded as oversimplifying the issues concerning women’s writing, one could push such considerations further by saying that, even if autofiction can be seen as a way

in which women fall back into the role that has traditionally been assigned to them, at the same time, it can be considered as a way to liberate themselves from constraints and labels. This is because, by exposing the self while at the same time concealing it, autofiction empowers female authors to write about themselves by creating a safe space, a space where the hierarchical configurations of reality and fiction, domestic and public world are disrupted. While writing autofiction, the female self can locate itself in a mobile structure, one that does without the fixity of literary and social conventions.

Additionally, by aiming at conveying an honest display of human emotions, autofiction goes deep into them, therefore universalizing them, making them speak to multiple subjects (Cusset, “The limits of Autofiction” 2). This is also why autofictional novels are rarely characterized by a linear narrative, as they are more of “a spiraling movement towards the resurrection of a buried fragment of memory” (Cusset, “The limits of Autofiction” 2). Such memories are usually focused on painful personal experiences, as these are considered to be more universally relatable. From this point of view, then, autofictional practices can be seen as a way by which the narrative self takes care of itself by processing traumatic events. As Ouellette-Michalska puts it: female identity can reconstruct itself through the act of self-writing, which is a symbolic, coded act that can function both as a tool of expression and as a shelter (82). Autofiction can thus be considered as a Foucauldian “technology of the self” through which the narrating subject reconfigures itself, as it will be further explained in section 4.2.2.

The hybrid, hence problematic, nature of autofiction, a literary genre in-between fact and fiction, makes it particularly suitable to voice concerns about the transcultural status of female colonizers in post/colonial countries – women who are torn between being faithful to

the metropole, and their love for the colony in which they grew up. Such a yet unexplored correlation between form and content is evident in *Au pays de mes racines*, *L'amant* and *Caderno de Memórias Coloniais*. These three novels portray their first-person narrators as female subjects split between two worlds and two ages – childhood/adolescence and adulthood. Indeed, Cardinal, Duras and Figueiredo present their narratives in the form of an adult's recollection of a child's memories of the colony. In this regard, the fact that autofictional works are characterized by the nonlinear portrayal of autobiographical anecdotes as fragments of images from the past, makes it even more interesting to look at how this literary genre is in a dialogic relation with the subject matter of these texts. Moreover, the fragmentary construction of autofiction is rooted in the conception of the narrating subject as provided with a fragmented memory and identity. Again, this is another aspect which is prominently displayed in the three novels considered here, as they all expose a type of female subjectivity which is split, as its identity is located in a liminal, transcultural space. Furthermore, the three female protagonists all have a somewhat troubled relationship with either their mother or their father, whose role in the narrative is crucial not only to the development of their identity, but also because it can be interpreted as a symbol and reenactment of the ambiguous bond between the female child/adult narrator and her motherland/fatherland. As the primary sources analyzed in this dissertation draw heavily on their authors' personal lives, subchapter 3.2 will be dedicated to a synthesis of Cardinal's, Duras's and Figueiredo's most salient autobiographical information, and of the critical reception of their works.

## 3.2 Liminal lives: Cardinal, Duras and Figueiredo

### 3.2.1 Marie Cardinal

Almost all of Marie Cardinal's fictional work is deeply rooted in her personal experiences. Simone Odette Marie-Thérèse Cardinal was born in Algiers on March 9, 1929, in a middle-class "pied-noir" (i.e. of French settlers in Algeria) house. Since her parents divorced shortly after, she was brought up by her mother, whose family had lived in the French colony since mid-nineteenth century, and who sent her to religious educational institutions and, later, to the Sorbonne where she obtained a degree in philosophy (Johnson). In 1953, she married the theatre director Jean-Pierre Ronfard, with whom she had three children: Benoît, Bénédicte and Alice. Due to her job as a philosophy teacher in French "lycées," she lived in Lisbon, Montreal, Salonika and Vienna. In 1956, at the age of 27, Cardinal moved to France to escape from the Algerian War (Johnson). After stopping teaching, she began psychoanalysis, which enabled her to recover from the traumas connected to leaving Algeria, her troubled relationship with her mother and mental instability. She also worked as a journalist for magazines such as *L'Express* and *Elle*, as a ghost-writer, a researcher, an actress in Robert Bresson's film *Mouchette* and in Jean-Luc Godard's film *Deux Ou Trois Choses Que Je Sais D'elle* (Johnson). During the 1960s, she wrote the novels *Écoutez la mer*, for which she received the "Prix International du Premier Roman," *La mule de corbillard*, *La souricière*, and *Cet été-là*, an account of her participation in the production of films (Johnson; Thomas and Webb 38). She gained international fame and started to be considered as a feminist figure after the publication of *La clé sur la porte* and *Les mots pour le dire*, thanks to which she was awarded the "Prix Littré" for the best novel about an illness (Lorcin, *Historicizing colonial Nostalgia* 176; Thomas and Webb 38). She also got

elected as president of the Union of Writers in the French Language, while continuing to write autobiographical novels set in Algeria such as *Autrement dit*, the sequel to *Les mots pour le dire*, *Au pays de mes racines*, *Amour... Amours*, and bestsellers such as *Les grands désordres* (Johnson; Lorcin, *Historicizing colonial Nostalgia* 176). She died in Valréas, France, on May 9, 2001.

In spite of the fact that Cardinal's bestsellers made her a public celebrity in France, with *Les mots pour le dire* included among "the most influential texts of contemporary feminism," she was never viewed as a writer worth belonging to the French literary canon (Thomas and Webb 38). Indeed, she has been more recognized and appreciated in the French departments of anglophone universities than in France. This could be due, on the one hand, to the fact that there is a tendency in France to give less academic attention to women writers than in the US and UK (Thomas and Webb 35). On the other hand, as French women's movements were generally associated with extremely innovative and philosophical texts, Cardinal's work, characterized as it is by a strong autobiographical component, was perceived as more traditional and less fashionable (Thomas and Webb 27, 30). Indeed, the academic anglophone world was noticeably fascinated by the work of exponents of the French current of "écriture féminine" through authors such as Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray and Julia Kristeva, thus neglecting those who did not adhere to this strain of feminist writing (Felski 20). Such authors focused their work on the intertwining between women's corporeality and female difference in language, and made use of linguistic and textual strategies aimed at disrupting and "opening" language structures to defy the repressive masculine symbolic order (Felski 6). In relation to such texts, Cardinal's novels might seem less experimental as concerns her linguistic and textual choices. However, it must be recognized that, despite making use of allegedly more conventional modes of

expression, in exposing herself and her personal female point of view, she produced works that were no less political than the texts associated with “feminine writing.” It is also interesting to note that such texts have been criticized for being too distant from women’s everyday reality, while Cardinal’s works, in telling about her intimate life, could certainly not be accused of taking this distance (Rye and Worton 5). The author herself argued that dismissing female writing as “merely” autobiographical represents an attempt by male critics to exclude women from the literary canon (Royer). On the whole, even though Marie Cardinal did not receive the recognition she deserved, her novels are far from being merely autobiographical, as shown by how she masterfully challenged autobiographical conventions while constantly rewriting and fictionalizing her life, thus distancing herself from traditional forms of autobiography. Moreover, her work is still extremely relevant as it explicitly tackles topical issues such as gender inequalities in France and power relations in post/colonial countries.



### 3.2.2 Marguerite Duras

Due to the autobiographical nature of Marguerite Duras' work, one cannot but draw a correlation between her personal experiences and the critical reception of her novels. She was born on April 4, 1914 in Gia Dinh, a city north of Saigon, in the then region of French Indochina, as her parents had settled there in response to a French government campaign. Her father Henri Donnadiou, a professor of mathematics, had to go back to France because of an infectious fever and died there in 1921. The surname "Duras" is related to this tragic event, as it is the name of a small French village next to which her father bought a house for his family before passing away. In 1923, Marguerite, her mother Marie Legrand and her brothers Pierre and Paul moved to Vinh Long, on the Mekong Delta. A year later, they went bankrupt and had to face financial difficulties. This caused a great distress to her mother, who consequently and gradually became mentally ill (Cusset, "Marguerite Duras" 61-62). The hardship experienced during this period of her life deeply influenced Duras' work, as it represents the subject matter of some of her most successful novels such as *Un barrage contre le Pacifique* and *L'amant*, which was awarded the "Prix Goncourt" in 1985 (Cusset, "Marguerite Duras" 61). In 1932, after finishing high school, she moved back to France where she earned a degree in law and worked for the Colonial Ministry from 1935 to 1941. In 1939, Duras married Robert Antelme, whose deportation to a concentration camp she described in *La Douleur*. Although she helped him recover after his return, the two divorced shortly after the war (Cusset, "Marguerite Duras" 61; Günther 8). Rumor had it that they had formed a trio with Duras's lover Dionys Mascolo, whom she later married and with whom she had a child. Over the years, she became known for her many lovers, among whom was Gérard Jarlot, to whom she dedicated *Moderato cantabile* and the film

adaptation codirected by him in 1960 (Winston 469). She was an extremely eclectic woman, who liked to be “involved in men’s things” such as politics (Duras, “Marguerite Duras” 77). After beginning to publish around 1941, she became engaged in journalistic writing, as well as in writing and directing plays and films (Winston 467). She joined the French Communist Party (PCF) and continued to actively participate in left-wing politics even after she left the PCF, for example, by becoming a member of the “Comité des intellectuels contre la poursuite de la guerre d’Algérie” and of the “Comité d’action étudiants-écrivains” (Winston 468). In *La vie matérielle*, she presents her life as revolving around three main elements: alcohol, love and writing (Cusset, “Marguerite Duras” 62). Indeed, despite recurrently struggling with alcoholism, she managed to publish forty-seven books in total throughout her life. She died of throat cancer in Paris in 1996.

It is interesting to note that all of her fictional works, such as *Le marin de Gibraltar*, *Le ravisement de Lol V. Stein*, *Hiroshima mon amour* and *L’amant*, are organized around the theme of love between a man and a woman. However, on closer inspection, it is evident that the subject of the narrative is always a woman; she is the one who recollects the memories from the past and gives her personal take on love (Cusset, “Marguerite Duras” 62). This aspect of Duras’ writing is all the more relevant if one considers her conception of literature as being essentially about women, and about the silence to which they have historically been confined, as she states in *La vie matérielle*: “[...] depuis des millénaires, le silence c’est les femmes. Donc la littérature c’est les femmes” (103). Moreover, such a definition of literary works as feminine is telling of how Duras positioned herself in relation to twentieth-century French literature.

French female novelists such as Simone Weil and Simone de Beauvoir, in their defiance of the patriarchal understanding of women as secondary, contributed to galvanize French fiction

during the period following World War II (Cismaru 14; Rye and Worton 2). Similarly, Nathalie Sarraute, with her book *Era of Suspicion*, drew attention to the relation between the female self and the others (Cismaru 14). Weil, Beauvoir and Sarraute are just few examples of late century female writers who strived to assert women's identity. Such an agenda was also prompted by the sociopolitical instability affecting postwar France (Cismaru 15). Going a step further, Duras answered the question "What does it mean to be a woman?" which underlies Beauvoir's work on women's objectification and subservience, by reconsidering, through her experimental and unique style, the effect that heteronormative categorizations have not only on female but also on male human beings (Cismaru 16-17). For this reason, during the 1950s and 1960s, some conservative critics of Duras such as Jacques Guicharnaud, mistakenly portrayed her as distant from politics, as a literary woman who, unlike Beauvoir, was not interested in defying the patriarchal notion of femininity and who, on the contrary, fully embraced it (107). Likewise, Jacques Lacan depicted Duras as exclusively focused on the functioning of desire rather than on sociopolitical issues, and as the symbol of a passive femininity (13-14). In 1991, aiming at depoliticizing her work, Alain Vircondelet's *Duras : biographie* christened her as a purely feminine and maternal figure and dismissed her militant activity within the Communist party (161). However, such rather essentialist considerations which perceive Duras only in terms of her femininity clearly ignore her claim that her political beliefs and writings are deeply interconnected (Duras, "Marguerite retrouvée" 61). By acknowledging Duras's passion for sociopolitical concerns, Marcelle Marini stressed how the theme of desire is strongly gendered in her texts, as the author was well aware of the oppressive effect of male desire on female subjectivity (26). In a similar way, Gennie Luccioni had argued in 1956 that Duras's fiction essentially revolved around the female condition (150). Such a conception was still strong

almost twenty years later, when Hélène Cixous, in “Le rire de la Méduse,” defined Duras’s writing as centered around the feminine (Sankey, “The Duras Phenomenon” 63). Moreover, thanks to the 1985 “Prix Goncourt,” she gained in popularity and started to be seen as “the model woman writer of the Left” (Sankey, “The Duras Phenomenon” 64). In this way, her public image changed from representing an isolated literary personality to embodying an intellectual playing an important role in the French feminist debate over women’s legal rights (Sankey, “The Duras Phenomenon” 63). By and large, in spite of the quite numerous conservative portrayals of Marguerite Duras, the autobiographical nature of her texts requires one to go beyond patriarchally feminine images of the author, and to look at the complexity of her works through the lenses of her political and personal experiences.

### 3.2.3 Isabela Figueiredo

Just like in the case of Marie Cardinal and Marguerite Duras, the life and literary work of Isabela Figueiredo are extremely interconnected. Isabela Almeida Santos was born in Lourenço Marques (now Maputo), the capital of Mozambique, into a family of Portuguese colonizers in 1963. When the colony declared independence from Portugal in 1975, her parents sent her to Portugal, where she attended the Nuno Álvares School in Tomar and obtained a degree in Modern Languages and Literatures from the Universidade Nova de Lisboa. She later graduated in Women's Studies from the Universidade Aberta. Her writing career began in 1983, when she started publishing for the literary supplement of the *Diário de Notícias* (Ferreira Gould 133). At the age of twenty-five, her novel *Conto é Como Quem Diz* [*A Tale, So to Speak*] was awarded the first prize in the “Mostra Portuguesa de Artes e Ideias” [“Portuguese Exhibition of Arts and Ideas”]. She worked for the *Diário de Notícias* until 1994 and has been a secondary school Portuguese teacher since 1990 (Ferreira Gould 133). In 2009, after spending more than twenty years developing her authentic literary voice, she published her autofictional text *Caderno de Memórias Coloniais*, which has been published in multiple editions ever since (Figueiredo, “Isto é a serio” 16-17).

The impact of Figueiredo's work lies in the fact that it challenges traditional representations of Portuguese colonialism. Indeed, *Caderno de Memórias Coloniais* has caused much discussion about Lusophone colonial memory, especially as concerns Portuguese racism in Africa and Portugal (Ferreira Gould 134; Pimentel 237). Moreover, her text has provided the opportunity to reinterpret power relations and inequalities among Portuguese colonists and women's experience in the patriarchal colonist society. It could therefore be said that her literary

production is germane to the unveiling of subjective memory and identity, particularly with regard to how female individuals situate themselves in relation to Portugal's national identity and colonial past in Africa.

### **3.3 The sociohistorical background of *Au pays de mes racines*, *L'amant* and *Caderno de Memórias Coloniais***

#### **3.3.1 French colonial Algeria and Indochina**

As references to colonial Algeria's political situation are scattered throughout Cardinal's autofictional novel, it is important to take into consideration the most significant sociohistorical factors leading to the development of the colony and its attainment of independence. In 1830, after almost three centuries of Ottoman rule, Algiers came under the control of the French army. Despite facing resistance from the local population during the following two decades, in 1848, Algeria was declared to be a "département" of France (Zack 62). As a consequence of the Revolution of 1848, many French citizens exiled from the metropole found in Algeria their chance at redemption – the possibility to make economic and estate investments (Cooke 57). Twelve years later, shortly after the establishment of the French Third Republic, the government of the colony, which had been a military one up to that point, was replaced by the settlers' civil administration (Zack 64). In 1871, as a result of the Franco-Prussian War, even more French fled France and sought shelter in the North African colony. During this period of consolidation following the conquest, French colonizers struggled to cohabit with the indigenous people, whose Islamic culture presented itself as the complete opposite of French Christianity (Cooke 57).

Such a coexistence was further complicated by the fact that the natives were not a homogenous group but rather a multicultural entity composed of Arabs, Berbers, Jews, North Africans, Southern Europeans and Turks (Zack 62). The colonizer-colonized conflict was then exacerbated by the assimilation policy put into place by the French government, which was

aimed at culturally and economically incorporating Algeria into the Hexagon. For this reason, during the 1870s and 1880s, almost 300,000 Southern European settlers and 30,000 Jews residing in Algeria acquired French citizenship, thus fuelling discontent among Muslim Arabs and Berbers, as well as among the colonists identifying themselves as “français de naissance” (Zack 64). Concomitantly, the French, in order to disseminate their Christian values and beliefs, deemed it necessary to eradicate Islam from the colony by ostracizing it. For example, in 1881, the “Code de l’indigénat” was enacted by the French Chamber of Deputies, which established not only that Algerian Muslims accused of crimes would suffer more severe consequences than their non-Muslim compatriots, but also that they would be judged by a court solely composed of lay colonizers (Cooke 58). For this reason, it became particularly difficult for Muslim natives to be educated on Islamic precepts (Cooke 60). Moreover, French settlers exploited indigenous resources both from an economic and from a religio-cultural point of view, therefore impinging on the Arab-Berber population’s interests. Because of this, before the end of the nineteenth century, Muslims, representing eighty-five percent of the individuals populating Algeria, became excluded from the major cities and towns of the northern coast, which were instead inhabited by European colonizers and Jews, who, in total, amounted to only eight percent of Algeria’s residents (Zack 64). Hence, Algerian society was marked by a dichotomy between Muslim population and French citizens, with the former becoming increasingly disadvantaged in terms of financial, literacy and political opportunities (Cooke 61).

Another reason for discord between colonizer and colonized people was represented by the status of women in colonial society. Europeans found it difficult to accept Algerians’ mores such as gender segregation in social settings and the Islamic tradition of dowry. This misunderstanding contributed to aggravate the existing tensions in the country (Heggoy 325-



326). Furthermore, the discord between these two factions of Algerian society was reinforced by the fact that only a very small number of mixed marriages took place during the colonial period. This was due not only to the antipathy between Europeans and Algerians, but also to Islamic society's paternalistic framework. As Muslim family fathers were deemed to be totally responsible for their daughters until marriage, they could easily prevent them from marrying non-Muslim men, out of fear that their children would not be raised Muslim (Heggoy 327). The discontent among Algerians was also fuelled by the expropriation of lands operated by French colonizers, which forced many of the natives to move back from rural to urban areas. There, out of necessity, some of their women were employed as "fatmas," maids, and worked for rich Europeans, thus getting scorned by both colonizer and colonized cultures (Heggoy 330). On the other hand, European women were considered by the French as powerful instruments of assimilation of the local population and, at the same time, as living epitomes of metropolitan culture and were therefore required to preserve their integrity (Heggoy 324). Such an obsession with white females' purity will be discussed in section 4.2.1 with reference to Cardinal's description of the ritual of the Holy Communion as intertwining notions of gender and cultural "pureté" (Cardinal 60). Moreover, women colonizers were seen to be capable of encouraging Algerian women to work for the benefit of the colony. For this reason, female settlers often found themselves in the position of having to reconcile their patriarchal heritage – as many of such women came not only from France but also from countries like Italy, Malta, Portugal and Spain, whose societies were marked by deeply entrenched patriarchal structures – with the colonist expectations placed on them (Lorcin, "Mediating Gender, Mediating Race" 45, 48).

In 1907, the political group called "Jeunes Algériens" was created with the aim of urging the French government to grant Muslim Algerians equal rights as the French. As

assimilationists, they strived for the integration of indigenous Algerians with the colonizers. Because of this, after the outbreak of World War I, the Jeunes Algériens joined the French army, also in an attempt to get reforms approved as a reward for their loyalty. At the same time, due to France's high need of armed forces, thousands of indigenous Algerians were conscripted (Cooke 64-65). Their taking part in the war side by side with Frenchmen changed the perception that both colonized population and colonizers had of each other. On the one hand, native Algerians began to better comprehend the values of the French democracy they were fighting for. On the other hand, the issue of ensuring citizenship rights for North Africans became increasingly topical in Metropolitan France (Cooke 65; Zack 77). Indeed, during the war, many French newspapers applauded Muslim Arabs' and Berbers' strenuousness. However, between 1914 and 1917, military matters remained the French Republic's top priority, causing colonial issues to take second place (Cooke 65).

After the war, some opportunities for reform were put forth in Algeria. The French administration in Algiers granted North African males primary education. Shortly after, in 1919, the "Loi Jonnart," named after the French politician Charles Jonnart, was passed, thus giving political rights to the Muslim men who had fought the war – yet, paradoxically, indigenous women who were responsible for the upbringing of such men still had no right to vote (Cooke 67; Lorcin, "Mediating Gender, Mediating Race" 48). Thanks to the opportunity to actively engage in the activities of the local administration, some representatives of a list created by the "Jeunes Algériens" were elected to the Algiers' municipal council in 1920. Yet, despite this glimmer of hope for change, their leader Emir Khaled was expelled from the country and elections were declared void. As a reaction to the French government's opposition to the improvement of legal conditions of Muslims, the "Parti communiste Français" (PCF) supported

Khaled in denouncing France's social oppression of people in the colony in various conferences throughout the Hexagon (Cooke 68-69). In 1926, encouraged by the PCF, Messali Hadj, a native of Algeria residing in Paris, founded the Algerian nationalist organization called "Étoile Nord-Africaine" (ENA) which advocated, among other things, the abolition of the "Code de l'indigénat" (Zack 77). As a result of Algerian Muslims' discontent, in 1931, Abdelhamid Ben Badis founded the Association of Muslim Algerian Ulama, campaigning for the national revival of Algerian people through the promotion of a more authentic Islam. Sparked by the same nationalist momentum, in 1937, Hadj formed the "Parti du Peuple Algérien" (PPA) in reaction to the dissolution of the ENA. Both Ben Badis's and Hadj's expressions of Algerian nationalism, despite French attempts to control and suppress them, succeeded in igniting the political extremism of the colony, which would eventually lead to the breaking out of the Algerian Revolution (Cooke 70-71; Zack 81).

After World War II, Algeria acquired a new status, the "Statut d'Algérie," which finally granted French citizenship to all Algerian residents, regardless of their religious affiliation. Nevertheless, the violent French repression of the parade organized by the Algerian Muslims of Sétif to celebrate the end of the war in May 1945, heightened antagonism between the French government and indigenous Algerians (Zack 82). Moreover, between 1947 and 1954, only very few Frenchmen and Muslim Algerians showed themselves to be open to dialogue (Cooke 72). France's overt aversion to Islam, combined with the lack of communication between the parties involved, eventually led to the outbreak of the Algerian War.

On 1 November 1954, the fighters of the "Front de libération nationale" (FLN), a socialist party created the month before, staged a rebellion in Eastern Algeria. Simultaneously, through a declaration transmitted via radio, the FLN prompted all "Algerian people" to take part

in the anticolonial revolution (Zack 82-83). The war between FLN guerrillas and the French military was marked by violent assault operations, terrorizing acts and revolts. Due to demonstrations for independence throughout Algeria and to political pressure from the United Nations, in 1961, the general Charles De Gaulle declared the imminent independence of Algeria, thus causing “pieds-noirs” to carry out terrorist attacks through the “Organisation armée secrète” (OAS) (Zack 85). Even so, in March 1962, De Gaulle and the FLN signed the “Évian Accords,” therefore putting an end to the Algerian War. In the following months, both the French and the Algerian expressed their approval of the Algerian independence in two different referendums (Paul et al. 88; Zack 85). In July 1962, after eight years of war, the death of 17,500 French soldiers and of between 200,000 and one million Muslim Algerians, Algeria finally became an independent country (Paul et al. 89). Overall, during the years following the independence, 1.2 million “pieds-noirs” left the country for mainland France (Lorcin, *Historicizing colonial Nostalgia* 171). Among these, was Marie Cardinal who fled the colony for the metropole in 1956 (Johnson).

Quite differently from Cardinal and Figueiredo, Marguerite Duras seldomly refers to colonial Vietnam’s political situation in *L’amant*. This could also be related to the fact that she did not leave the country because of social upheavals leading to its independence, but was sent back to France by her mother. However, since the autofictional account of her youth is anchored in French Indochina, it is worth briefly considering the cultural and political situation of that country at the time. French colonialism in Vietnam lasted more than six decades, from 1883 until 1954 (Rydstorm 191). Despite the fact that France profited economically from the colonial regime, it was presented by the French government as a “mission civilisatrice” (Rydstorm 195). Vietnam started falling under the control of French troops during the 1860s, when several of its

southern provinces were either ceded by the Emperor Tu Duc to France or occupied by French colonial forces. France's regiments in Vietnam were divided into four areas: Annam-Tonkin, Cochinchina-Cambodia, the Mountain section and the artillery division. In particular, Saigon, Cochinchina's first capital, became the base of the French conquest of East Asia. Even after the French expansion in northern Vietnam and the establishment of Hanoi as the capital of French Indochina in 1902, Saigon remained Vietnam's principal financial centre. Indeed, its population grew from 232,100 in 1918 to 324,000 in 1931, thus becoming Indochina's most populated city (Peycam 501).

Being the most populous and economically flourishing city of Vietnam, Saigon was also the one most affected by French imperialistic measures. First of all, French colonialists enforced modern state centralization on the natives by pairing a European model of the nation-state with the legal and political administration and arrangement of official coercion aimed at surveilling them. This was enacted through the creation of forty-one posts of "gendarmerie," a local "garde civile" and the "Sûreté générale de police" throughout Cochinchina (Peycam 502). Moreover, the colonial administration imposed on indigenous people rigid racial categorizations and hierarchization based on cultural and ethnic diversity. Thus, Cochinchina's inhabitants were broken down into three different categories: "French citizens," the "natives," and "foreigners" (Peycam 503). Secondly, Saigon was deeply affected by the imposition of the metropole's educational system. In 1879, Cochinchina saw the introduction of a series of "Franco-Vietnamese education" schools characterized by the use of French and Vietnamese languages at different stages of learning. As a consequence, the number of children enrolled in primary institutions increased from 53,000 in 1913-14 to 90,000 in 1922-23 (Peycam 506). Lastly, Saigon was transformed by the accelerated assimilation of southern Vietnamese possessions

into the world economy imposed by the French. As Saigon-Cholon became one of the world's main exporters of rice, an increase in cultivated land in the western part of the Mekong Delta was strongly encouraged by colonial power (Peycam 508). In this way, by creating large estates and conceding them to Vietnamese entrepreneurs who, in turn, assigned them to peasants in the role of tenants, individual salaries were introduced and the economy saw a rapid shift to the individual-based model (Peycam 509). This was also due to the individual-centered tax policies imposed by French colonization which resulted in the development of an economic bourgeoisie. Yet, as shown in Duras's *L'amant*, Cochinchina's and especially Saigon's societies remained very stratified, not only because of matters concerning economic and education status, but also because these areas represented the meeting points between colonizers and colonized.

### 3.3.2 Portuguese colonial Mozambique

Since, similarly to Cardinal's novel, Figueiredo's autofictional memoir often hints at the events leading to and following Mozambique's independence from Portugal's colonial power, it is necessary to consider the colony's sociopolitical development. Mozambique's first contact with European colonizers dates back to the beginning of 1498, when Vasco da Gama's ships to India reached Mozambique's southern coast (Cabaço 27). Yet, it was not until the Berlin West Africa Conference in 1884 and 1885 that Portugal could claim its colonial rights over Mozambique (Cabaço 31). At that time, the Portuguese crown ruled over the coastal area stretching from Ibo to Lourenço Marques (Penvenne and Sheldon, "Colonial Mozambique"). As part of their colonial conduct, the Portuguese exploited already-existing social and political frictions in order to achieve territorial hegemony (Cabaço 41). For instance, in 1897, they helped African armies defeat the Gaza Empire occupying the southern part of Mozambique to later take over that region. By the 1920s, thanks to the numerous military operations Portugal had carried out, it extended its control over Mozambique by colonizing the central district of Bàrué, the Maganja da Costa district, the northern areas populated by the Yao and Makua people and the sheikhdoms around Angoche (Penvenne and Sheldon, "Colonial Mozambique").

Initially, the colonial policy adopted by the Portuguese government consisted in chartering Mozambican lands to private companies. For this reason, in the 1890s, so as to ensure the agricultural, commercial, infrastructural and social development of Mozambique, entire estates were entrusted to chartered companies. Such a practice was later abandoned: all of Mozambique was then ruled directly by the Portuguese crown through a private capitalization

of the Mozambican population and natural assets (Penvenne and Sheldon, “Colonial Mozambique”). Such an exploitation can be considered at the same time the cause and consequence of the polarization of the colonizer-colonized relationship in Mozambique. On the one hand, it was based on ethnic and socioeconomic assumptions according to which the Portuguese perceived indigenous people only as a source of cheap labour functional to the satisfaction of the metropole’s economic interests (Cabaço 34, 36, 40). On the other hand, the establishment of the domination of a foreign minority over an indigenous majority reinforced the idea of the existence of two distinct societies reflecting a multiplicity of dualisms, such as: white/black, pure/impure, civilized/primitive (Cabaço 35). Such a dichotomy was based on racist assumptions on the part of the Portuguese colonists, who placed themselves in a hierarchical position of superiority in relation to the native population (Cabaço 36).

The influence of the colonial regime, together with the economic exploitation it perpetrated, also had an impact on gender dynamics within the colony. Along with the patriarchal structures framing Mozambican society, men, due to the increased importance that capitalist mechanisms acquired and to the ensuing opportunity of being remunerated regularly for their work, became entitled to greater governmental responsibilities (Jacobson 177-178). As a consequence, indigenous Mozambican women became relegated to the domestic sphere to such an extent that any attempt on their part to get involved in the public life could jeopardize their safety. For this reason, female individuals were deemed to be the ones solely taking care of the household (Jacobson 178). This is also why native women in Mozambique were excluded not only from the public domain in general, but also from the political scene. On the contrary and similarly to female settlers in colonial Algeria, Portuguese women in the colony were seen



as ensuring its stability, particularly as concerns the preservation of colonist traditions and catholic culture (Magnante 29).

Another factor that contributed to the transformation of the Mozambican society was the influence of European churches. The Portuguese were mainly Catholics and therefore envisioned the dissemination of Roman Catholicism as part of their programme of colonization. They aimed not only at christianising the Mozambicans, but also at making them adhere to Portuguese cultural norms and give up any sort of nationalism (Serapião 111-112). However, as Portugal complied with international treaties, Protestants were given free access to the colony and, in turn, tried to evangelize the Mozambican population (Serapião 111). Protestant mission churches were partly responsible for the educational and public health development of the colony as they funded a series of schools and hospitals around the country (Serapião 112). Even though Protestants were less numerous than European Catholics and indigenous Muslims, they played an important role in the events contributing to the independence of Mozambique (Serapião 115). For example, Protestant churches provided the leaders heading the “Frente de Libertação de Moçambique” [“Mozambican Liberation Front”] (Frelimo) from 1962 until 1970 (Serapião 114).

Before analyzing how the Mozambican revolution unfolded and progressed, it is worth briefly considering the factors leading to such an event. After the coup of 28 May 1926 in Portugal and the establishment by António de Oliveira Salazar of the authoritarian “Estado Novo” regime in 1933, policies were adopted in order to favour the country’s economic growth. For this reason, over the 1950s and 1960s, improvements were made to boost Mozambique’s economy: the colony’s communication and transit systems were enhanced, and thousands of Portuguese colonizers moved to Mozambique attracted by its promising economic outlook.

While promoting Portuguese resettlement to the colony, the “Estado Novo” hindered the indigenous people’s freedom to move and to dispose of their financial resources, thus fuelling great discontent amongst them (Penvenne and Sheldon, “Mozambique under the New State regime”).

In 1960, the “União Democrática Nacional de Moçambique” [“National Democratic Union of Mozambique”] (Udenamo), the first political party in Mozambique, stemmed from the indigenous people’s dissatisfaction with the colonial power. One year later, the “União Nacional Africana de Moçambique” [“Mozambican African National Union”] (Manu) was founded and eventually merged with Udenamo to constitute, in 1962, the Frelimo party (Hastings 264). As political freedom had been suppressed in the colony, such factions came to light thanks to the work of political exiles in Tanzania (Penvenne and Sheldon, “Mozambique under the New State regime”). Frelimo was led by Eduardo Mondlane, who belonged to a Protestant mission which had enabled him to study in the United States (Serapião 114).

The Mozambican war of independence started on 25 September 1964, when Frelimo’s guerrilla fighters, supported by China and the Soviet Union, attacked Portuguese forces in northern Mozambique (Penvenne and Sheldon, “Mozambique under the New State regime”). When Mondlane was assassinated in 1969, Uria Simango, a protestant pastor and Vice President of the party, took the lead together with the Marxist Samora Machel and Marcelino dos Santos. Shortly after, Simango was expelled from the front and Machel and Dos Santos were elected as Frelimo President and Deputy President respectively. From 1970 until 1974, Portugal endeavoured to counteract Frelimo’s military offences and succeeded in wiping the front out from the northern provinces of Cabo Delgado and Nissan (Hastings 265).

However, Frelimo's fighters, with their small-unit operations, eventually prevailed over the Portuguese army (Hastings 263, 266). In April 1974, when the "Movimento das Forças Armadas" ["Armed Forces Movement"] (MFA) launched a military coup in Lisbon and put an end to the regime of Marcelo Caetano (Salazar's successor), Frelimo, relying on the fact that Portuguese people were fed up with the "Estado Novo"'s colonial wars, succeeded in negotiating a ceasefire. On 7 September 1974, Frelimo and the Portuguese government signed the Lusaka Accord which enabled the front to lead the newly independent Mozambique. Despite an attempted counter-coup staged by Portuguese settlers in Lourenço Marques on the same day and some insurrections in October, the independence of Mozambique under Frelimo's leader Machel was formally declared on 25 June 1975 (Machava 595-596; Penvenne and Sheldon, "Mozambique under the New State regime"). As a result, 230,000 out of the 250,000 Portuguese colonizers living in Mozambique up to that point had to flee the country and go back to Portugal as "retornados" ["the returned"] (Serapião 120). Isabela Figueiredo, too, left the colony a few months after it had declared independence, as her parents sent her to go and live with her father's family in Lisbon (Figueiredo, *Caderno* 106). Because of this, she found herself so in-between different cultures that she would not feel at home anywhere anymore, as it will be discussed in the next chapter.

## 4. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

### 4.1 In-betweenness as a mode of inquiry and narration

#### 4.1.1 The nomadic narrative subject

As stated in the introduction to this dissertation, the aim of this work is to discuss the points of contact between female autofiction and feminist issues about the notion of in-betweenness, particularly with regards to the post/colonial contexts in which the three novels analyzed here are set. By illustrating the working scheme of Rosi Braidotti's feminist nomadic project of sexual difference, a link will be established between the principles of this theory and the main characteristics of the autofictional narrative subjects portrayed in *Au pays de mes racines*, *L'amant* and *Caderno de Memórias Coloniais*.

In her book *Nomadic Subjects: Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory*, Braidotti states that within the phallogocentric scientific, religious and legal domains, women have traditionally been relegated to the role of "Other," as opposite to the figure of "Self," which has for centuries been symbolized by the white, middle-class, heterosexual man (98, 152). Yet, as Western modernity witnessed the calling into question of such a classical and rational definition of the subject of knowledge, new modes of inquiry were put forward by the women's movement so as to tackle the concept of the "Other" (Braidotti 125). Braidotti ascribes the decline of the model of the Cartesian subject to the theorizations formulated by Nietzsche, Freud and Marx, that introduced the idea that subjectivity does not depend solely on consciousness, but is tethered to unconsciousness as well as sociohistorical factors (149). In the wake of such a crisis of modernity and of the notion of masculinist "Self" attached to it, in the 1990s, postcolonial feminist theorists such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak

emphasized the need to focus on the “otherness” and “situatedness” of female subjectivity (Braidotti 155-156). In particular, in her essay “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” Spivak asserts that European ethnocentrism has often led to the construction of the “Other” as a homogeneous entity, therefore obliterating the experience of all those not falling within the realm of the “Self” (289, 293). Indeed, she insists on the fact that this “Other,” which she refers to as the “subaltern subject,” is “irretrievably heterogeneous” (Spivak 284). Following the same line of thought, Braidotti describes the stance adopted by feminist philosophy as germane to a redefinition of female subjectivity which encompasses sexual difference as well as ethnicity (98). For this reason, she urges to rethink the link between portrayals of women complying with the male gaze and their actual realities (Braidotti 124). Thus, so as to rework the notion of difference in terms of positivity and empowerment, she comes up with a nomadic political project of sexual difference (Braidotti 149).

The working scheme of the project of feminist nomadism consists of three levels which all deal with the theme of sexual difference from various standpoints. The first phase is called “Difference Between Men and Women” and is aimed at untethering the concept of difference from its century-old link with inferiority (Braidotti 159). Drawing from Simone de Beauvoir’s and Luce Irigaray’s theories, Braidotti builds the rationale of her work not only on the lack of truthful representations of women’s difference, but also on the impossibility of exposing such difference within the phallogocentric realm which only contemplates the male “Self” as the universal subject of knowledge (160). Hence, the feminist nomadic project focuses on promoting women’s experience as different from the pseudo-universalistic male stance, while providing tools of inquiry allowing to turn difference from being synonymous with devalorization to equating positivity. By making her own Duras’s statement that “women

who can get beyond the feeling of having to correct history will save a lot of time,” Braidotti suggests a model of investigation of female subjectivity which does not comply with the masculinist paradigm of the “Self,” but which, on the contrary, strives for the construction of “an alternative female subject” (Braidotti 148, 161; Duras, “Marguerite Duras” 74).

The second level of the project of sexual difference, called “Differences among women,” is meant to go beyond the dichotomy “Self”/“Other,” male/female subject, so as to address the specificity of women’s embodied experiences. This phase can be seen to be underpinned by Spivak’s affirmation that the female “Other” is “irretrievably heterogeneous” and that, therefore, female subjectivity cannot be reduced to a general notion of “Woman,” as this is too much of an all-encompassing and oversimplifying term (Braidotti 162). Thus, the author calls for the need to distinguish between the “Woman” as “the culturally dominant and prescriptive model for female subjectivity” and its real-life epitomizations (Braidotti 164). In this way, she opens up the notion of difference to variables such as age, class, race, sexual preferences, thus stressing the importance of women’s cultural situatedness as opposed to their generic portrayals (Braidotti 163).

The third and last level of sexual difference as a nomadic political project, named “Differences Within Each Woman,” is not centred around the macroscopic differences between male and female subject or between distinct female subjectivities, but it focuses on women’s identity from a microscopic point of view. To be more specific, this stage of the scheme tackles the multiplicity of the female subject by describing it as layered, material, “slit, fractured,” “relational,” “made of successive identifications.” Such attributes are all related to the fact that every woman’s subjectivity is compound in its being engendered by the recollection of memories – hence “made of successive identifications” – and the establishment of a relation

to the “other” – hence “relational.” This causes “each real-life woman” to be bound to continuously identify herself with fragmented and irrational images springing from such processes. For this reason, the “female feminist subject” cannot be fully grasped nor reproduced in its entirety (Braidotti 165-166). By and large, by highlighting the prominence of sexual difference as cultural situatedness and positivity, Braidotti’s scheme not only defies phallogocentric configurations of power, but it also prompts for alternative practices representing the fragmented and multilayered female subjectivity.

The potential Braidotti’s feminist nomadic project holds for the analysis of the autofictional narrating subjects presented in *Au pays de mes racines*, *L’amant* and *Caderno de Memórias Coloniais* is clear. Firstly, in all three works the narration is carried by female individuals who also embody the protagonists of such autofictional stories. In this manner, they bring women’s subjectivity to the fore, thus counteracting its obliteration on the part of the pseudo-universal male “Self.” Moreover, in combining autobiographical facts with fiction, the three feminine narrators construct their own system of representation dispensing with hierarchical structures. A criticism could be made here about the use of fiction in Cardinal’s, Duras’s and Figueiredo’s novels: their adoption of fictional elements could be seen as impinging on the creation of authentic portrayals of women’s experiences. As a counterargument to this, it is worth taking into account again the parallel, presented in section 3.1.1, between Ivan Jablonka’s concept of “method fictions” and the genre of autofiction, as autofictional texts, in adopting fictionized components, can be considered as “fictions de méthode” which effectively represent and reflect on concrete issues (Moulin 609). This is particularly true considering how both autobiographical and fictional elements appear as essential to the reconstruction of the autofictional subject’s fragmented memories.

Secondly, Cardinal, Duras and Figueiredo, by adopting a first-person narrator – even if not consistently, as it shall be discussed in section 4.2.2 – expose their personal and semi-autobiographical lived experiences. By doing so, they depict the embodied standpoints of three distinct real-life women, as opposed to the global and abstract notion of “Woman.” In calling attention to the specificity of their nomadic stories, caught in-between different worlds and cultures, they epitomize the heterogeneity of the “Other,” of the “subaltern subject.” Indeed, their autofictional novels intersect not only issues pertaining to gender, but also questions of age, class and racial domination. In particular, their narratives are all hinged on the protagonists’ transcultural predicament, for they appear to be torn between the culture of the metropole and that of the colony, and to have contrasting feelings about both.

Thirdly and lastly, as explained in sections 2.1.1 and 2.1.2, the autofictional subject is by definition composite, provided with a fragmented memory and identity. Such a preoccupation with the process of recollection and the multiplicity of subjectivity is shared by Braidotti’s female feminist subject, which, as stated above, is described as split and in a constant state of becoming due to the reconstruction of past memories. By looking at the female narrators of *Au pays de mes racines*, *L’amant* and *Caderno de Memórias Coloniais*, a convergence of such characteristics can be observed, as the subjectivities depicted there are clearly presented as fragmented, as they are located in a liminal space, and having a fractured memory. So, the autofictional multilayered subject can be regarded as reflecting and unfolding the compound and split identity of the narrators portrayed by Cardinal, Duras and Figueiredo, which, in turn, can be seen as embodying distinct female feminist subjectivities.

In conclusion, by relating the three levels of the working scheme of the project of feminist nomadism to the principal attributes of the narrative subjects of the novels considered



here, it has been shown that these autofictional narrators can be assimilated to Braidotti's model of female feminist subjectivity. As a consequence, they can be defined as "nomadic" in their rendering of women's experience not only as specifically female and different from the masculinist "Self," but also in their uncovering a whole array of culture-specific relations and elements to and by which these are inevitably interconnected and affected. The use that Cardinal, Duras and Figueiredo make of the autofictional genre can be viewed as an instrument of positive representation of their works' split subjectivities. By constructing a narrative on the nonlinear overlapping of fragmented memories and images from the past, the authors put forward an alternative way of representing the female feminist subject, which, according to Braidotti, cannot be fully comprehended nor portrayed within the phallogocentric system of knowledge. Furthermore, the self-writing aspect of autofiction symbolizes not only a way in which the feminine subject produces itself, but also, as pointed out by Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska, a practice allowing for a possible reorganization of its subjectivity (82).

#### 4.1.2 “Subjectivized” subjects

Following the assumption that the way in which Cardinal, Duras and Figueiredo employ the genre of autofiction in their novels can be seen as a tool not only for the creation of an alternative way to depict female subjects, but is also germane to the restructuring of such subjects, it is now worth reflecting on the process through which subjectivities come to be. In order to do so, the focus will be shifted to Michel Foucault’s notions of power and of the practice of “subjectivation,” which will allow for a better understanding of the forces at work in the formation of the female narrative subjects considered here, and for an analysis of the manner in which they resist the phallogocentric system of Western culture. Indeed, as argued by Miri Rozmarin, Foucault’s theories on power can be seen as partaking in Braidotti’s project of sexual difference, as they tap into the realm of interrelations molding one’s specific subjectivity and making it constitutively different (6-7).

So as to better frame the feminist reworking of Foucault’s concept of “subjectivization,” reference will be made to Judith Butler’s redefinition of such a process. The discussion of such theorizations is propaedeutic to their application, illustrated in the next section, to the investigation of the mark of in-betweenness characterizing the female narrating subjects of *Au pays de mes racines*, *L’amant* and *Caderno de Memórias Coloniais*.

In the afterword to *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Foucault justifies his research interest in the topic of power by relating it to the practice through which individuals are turned, or rather they turn themselves, into subjects (“The Subject and Power” 208). To be more specific, he distinguishes three ways in which such a process takes place: the objectification of the subject of knowledge in the field of sciences, the objectification

through “dividing practices,” and the phenomenon of “subjectivation” (Foucault, “The Subject and Power” 208-209). By concentrating his attention on this last mode of objectification of human beings into subjects, he considers power relations in terms of an “antagonism of strategies” or “struggles,” which challenge the significance of individualization by stressing one’s specific subjectivity while, at the same time, stifling that very same subjectivity (Foucault, “The Subject and Power” 211). He also purports that these struggles are aimed at defying a type of power which:

[...] applies itself to immediate everyday life which categorizes the individual, marks him by his own individuality, attaches him to his own identity, imposes a law of truth on him which he must recognize and which others have to recognize in him. It is a form of power which makes individuals subjects. (Foucault, “The Subject and Power” 212)

Thus, according to Foucault, power cannot be conceived merely in terms of repression, but as synonymous with productive practices. Indeed, he argues that power “traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse” and therefore affects society in its entirety (Foucault, “Truth and Power” 119). This notion of power as a creative force leads him to deduce that “subjectivation [,] the procedure by which one obtains the constitution of a subject,” depends on relations of power which give shape to human beings’ subjectivity (Foucault, “The Return of Morality” 253). Indeed, Foucault reminds us that “[t]here are two meanings of the word ‘subject:’ subject to someone else by control and dependence; and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to” (“The Subject and Power” 212).

The power relations, or struggles, in place in the process of subjection are always tethered to dynamics of domination and exploitation. Yet, the mechanisms concerning the becoming of the subject have traditionally been given more importance in society due to the establishment, from the sixteenth century onward, of the powerful institution represented by the state (Foucault, "The Subject and Power" 213). State dominance has been characterized by a "political 'double bind'" in that it individualizes and totalizes, at the same time, power configurations and the human beings affected by them (Foucault, "The Subject and Power" 216). The individualizing aspect of state power is embodied by institutions such as family, educational organizations and medical systems (Foucault, "The Subject and Power" 215). Foucault argues that this form of power does not exist by itself, but is exercised through the relations established between subjects ("The Subject and Power" 217). In particular, power is exerted only through actions which are deemed to affect other actions (Foucault, "The Subject and Power" 219). This implies that power relations can be seen as "a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action" (Foucault, "The Subject and Power" 220). In this way, the "subjectivized" subject is presented not only as an entity engendered, shaped and constricted by power dynamics, but also as an agent capable of, in turn, producing its own influence structures. Proof of this is Foucault's assertion that "[m]aybe the target nowadays is not to discover what we are but to refuse what we are" ("The Subject and Power" 216). This means that, so as to break free from the individualizing and totalizing state dominance impinging on individuals, one needs to develop alternative subjectivities exploring different individualities (Foucault, "The Subject and Power" 216). Consequently, as explained by Deborah Youdell, Foucault's "subjectivized" subject, although formed and restrained by productive power relations, is not deemed to be

under their complete control (517). For this reason, as the subject is not determined in a definitive way by power, it can potentially resist it, as “where there is power, there is resistance” (Youdell 517; Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* 95).

This notion of the “subjectivized” subject as capable of defying hegemonic categorizations is further developed by Judith Butler in what she calls “performative politics” (*Excitable Speech* 127). She argues that, through performative discourses, performative subjectivities constitute new configurations and take issue with constraining power dynamics (Butler, *Excitable Speech* 127). By drawing from Foucault’s concept of power discourse as productive, Butler defines the performative as “that discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names” (*Bodies That Matter* 13). Moreover, in reworking the French philosopher’s definition of “subjectivation,” she points out that, so as to engage in productive performativity and “[inhabit] the figure of autonomy,” the subject needs to be “subjected to a power [...] [which] activates or forms the subject” (Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power* 83-84). In this way, in its being “subjectivated” by hegemonic mechanisms, the subject can come to be and to performatively undo the structures responsible for its subjection.

All in all, Foucault’s notions of power and of the process of “subjectivation,” and Butler’s reworking of such a definition together with her concept of the performative, offer a rendition of domination mechanisms allowing for an alternative understanding of the development of subjectivities. According to such theorizations, subjects become what they are not only because they are influenced by sociohistorical factors, but also precisely because of them. In presenting power as a productive force exerted on and by acting agents, Foucault and Butler present a more intersectional approach to subjectivity, which implements the inclusion of the element of sexual difference in discourses on subalternity. Furthermore, their postures

towards agency and influence structures prompt a reinterpretation of “subjectivized” subjects as capable of autonomy and resistance. Such considerations will show themselves useful for the investigation of the element of constitutive difference distinguishing the female nomadic narrators of *Au pays de mes racines*, *L’amant* and *Caderno de Memórias Coloniais*, and the way in which they portray and react to their becoming subjects.

## 4.2 Nomadic female subjects in-between wor(l)ds

### 4.2.1 From where do they speak?

In light of the considerations exposed in the previous section, a link can now be established between Foucault's discourse on "subjectivation," Butler's theory of performative subjects and the way in which the female narrators of *Au pays de mes racines*, *L'amant* and *Caderno de Memórias Coloniais* articulate their nomadic subjectivities. These narrative subjects, in presenting themselves as female individuals characterized by an intrinsic difference, relate their stories of in-betweenness through the disclosure of the power dynamics moulding and influencing – "subjectivizing" – the formation of their identities. Paraphrasing Butler's definition of the performative, one could say that these nomadic narrating females, by naming or exposing the normative configurations restraining them, performatively resist such constrictions. As products and vehicles of power, such "subjectivized" female narrators, albeit created yet not determined by social structures, present themselves as "agents," as "active determinants" of their own individualities (Rozmarin 7). What are, then, the influence dynamics "impos[ing] a law of truth" on the female protagonists of the texts considered here (Foucault, "The Subject and Power" 212)? What effects do such forces have on their subjectivities? And how do the narrators react to their being "subjectivized?" These are some of the questions informing the following analysis, which will begin with a brief introduction of the three primary texts and then move to a comparison of the articulation of the motif of in-betweenness in Cardinal, Duras and Figueiredo's works. While doing so, references will be made to the themes of colonial desire and nostalgia.

*Au pays de mes racines* is an autofictional novel written in the form of a diary which tells of Marie Cardinal's return journey to Algeria, the country where she was born and brought up, after being away for twenty-four years. The text is imbued with a sense of colonial nostalgia as, in it, the author mingles fiction with her impressions of the new Algerian political situation and memories of her past. While she was out of the country, Algeria shifted from being a French "département" to being an independent country, and underwent significant economic and political changes. During the twenty or so years following the independence of the former colony, even though the French government increasingly tried to divert public attention from the lost war and thus discouraged the creation of literary works on the Algerian War, there was a flourishing of texts by "pied-noir" women writers. Among them were Francine Dessaigne's *Journal d'une mère de famille pied-noire* published in 1962, Anne Loesch's 1963 *La valise et le cercueil*, Marie Elbe's 1964 *Comme une torche au milieu de la fête*, and Marie Cardinal's 1980 *Au pays de mes racines* (Stora and Mitsch 84). This could be seen as a way of dealing with the trauma of exile, of coming to terms with the loss of the country where 1.2 million "pieds-noirs" were born and from which they were evacuated to Metropolitan France following Algeria's independence (Lorcin, *Historicizing colonial Nostalgia* 171). The "pied-noir" community in France therefore developed a sense of colonial nostalgia for the native land. Cardinal, together with the other Algerian-born French female authors, gave voice to such feelings of homesickness with her fiction and challenged the French politics' tendency to ignore postcolonial concerns (Lorcin, *Historicizing colonial Nostalgia* 172).

In *L'amant*, Marguerite Duras tells, in a fictionalized way, about her adolescence in Saigon, French Indochina, during the 1920s, and about her affair with a wealthy Chinese man in his late twenties. The novel opens with the image of the fifteen-year-old Duras crossing the



Mekong river on a ferry, and closes one and a half years later, when she gets sent to France by her mother. The story, told mainly by a first-person narrator, is characterized by an extremely fragmented structure in which autobiographical anecdotes from Duras's childhood and from other times alternate with each other in a nonlinear way. Such a lack of linearity and disjointed organization of the text mimic not only the act of recovering past memories, but also the fragmented nature of the narrating self. Furthermore, the book is characterized by a certain degree of subversion, not only in its going against autobiographical conventions in its form, but also in portraying a young white girl challenging the colonial sexual norms which prevented white women from having sexual encounters with Asian men. From this point of view, then, Duras's account can be seen as the story of a French adolescent asserting her independence by breaking white colonial sexual regulations.

*Caderno de Memórias Coloniais* is a first-person narrative about Figueiredo's fictionalized childhood memories of colonial Mozambique under Salazar's repressive "Estado Novo" regime. In it, she recounts in a straightforward and at times crude way, her life in the colony before its independence from Portugal, the Carnation Revolution, the massacres of 7 September 1974 and the traumatic experiences connected to the process of decolonization. From this point of view, her literary memoir situates itself within Portuguese postcolonial literature, as it provides a personal perspective on Portugal's colonial memory, which, in diverging from historical accounts, contributes to widen its scope. This can be seen from the very first chapter of her autofictional memoir, in which she disparagingly hints at Manuel Arouca's *Deixei o Meu Coração em África* [*I Left my Heart in Africa*] – a book hinged on the nostalgic remembrance of Portugal's colonial past and privileges which were inevitably related to the violent subjugation and treatment of colonized people. In this way, Figueiredo

presents her work not only as genuinely personal, but also as going against traditional postcolonial discourses in Portuguese literature (Silva).

*Au pays de mes racines*, *L'amant* and *Caderno de Memórias Coloniais* share some common characteristics with regard to the power dynamics shaping the subjectivities of their female narrators and which make them nomadic, fragmented, fundamentally different and in-between worlds. First of all, as they all belong to colonialist families settled in a colony, they are torn between the social norms imposed on them by their colonial status and the love for the country where they grew up and for the people living there. This is clearly expressed by both Cardinal and Figueiredo when they manifest their inner struggle due to feeling, at the same time, respectively French-Arab, and Portuguese-Mozambican. At the beginning of the novel, Cardinal's narrator declares that the reason for her trip back to Algeria lies in her desire to come to terms with her personal colonial nostalgia, her being a "personne bicéphale" marked by "l'alliance ou la guerre de deux cultures" (Cardinal 17). The motif of this in-between, split self appears as recurrent throughout her work, for example when she states later on: "La coupure avec moi-même a commencé tôt: Arabe-Française, Française-Arabe?" (Cardinal 50). At times, she is also afraid that her French component has taken over and that, once back in Algeria, she will feel "étrangère chez moi" because of her "autre-moi, moi-l'ailleurs, le différent-moi," (Cardinal 72, 94). Similarly, Figueiredo's female narrative subject is aware of her in-between status when she defines herself as "uma colonazinha preta, filha de brancos" ["a darky little colonizer, daughter of whites"] (Figueiredo, *Caderno* 35; Figueiredo, *Notebook* 43). She also alludes to the difficulties related to being such a transcultural individual when remarking that: "A vida na colônia era impossível. Ou se era colono, ou se era colonizado, não se podia ser qualquer coisa de transição, no meio daquilo, sem um preço a loucura no horizonte" ["Life in

the colony was impossible. You were either a colonist or you were colonized. You couldn't be something transitional, in between the two, without paying for it with madness looming on the horizon"] (Figueiredo, *Caderno* 104; Figueiredo, *Notebook* 105).

Even though, quite differently from Cardinal's and Figueiredo's protagonists, Duras's female narrator never explicitly states her feeling in-between two cultures – French and Annamite –, her transcultural status can be clearly observed in various passages of the text. For example, by dressing in an eccentric way and starting a relationship with a Chinese man, she distances herself from other white French women in Saigon who “se gardent pour l'Europe” and “s'habillent pour rien” (Duras, *L'amant* 27). Furthermore, her emotional association with Dô, the Vietnamese household servant, brings her closer to the Annamite culture. Such identification can be attributed to Dô's affection for the protagonist's mother as well as to her enduring, just like Duras, the elder brother's abusive treatment (Duras, *L'amant* 28, 94). Moreover, “la jeune fille” is definitely portrayed as characterized by pure difference not only as concerns her behaviour and attitude towards patriarchal norms in the colony, but also as regards the perception she has of herself, as she declares: “Soudain je me vois comme une autre” (Duras, *L'amant* 42, 20). Her seeing herself as peculiar is also related to the way she looks when meeting the Chinese man on the ferry crossing the Mekong for the first time. She recalls wearing her mother's silken dress with one of her brothers' leather belt, gold lamé high heels and a man's brownish-pink fedora, which she says is in contrast with her slender body, and makes her appear ambiguous and different from anyone else in the colony, as “aucune jeune fille ne porte de feutre d'homme dans cette colonie à cette époque-là” (Duras, *L'amant* 18-20). Additionally, one could interpret her look as the epitome of the forces “subjectivizing” her and making her feel fragmented: her mother and two brothers are symbolized by the items she borrowed from them,

while the felt hat and the golden shoes give away her precociousness as well as her will to actively determine her subjectivity.

The role played by family interferences is very strong in all three books, for they embody the colonist pole of attraction partaking in the “subjectivation” process of the female narrators. Indeed, as argued by Foucault, the family institution represents one of the vehicles through which productive state power can be exerted (“The Subject and Power” 215). To be more specific, all three narrating subjects have a contradictory relationship not just with their families, but with one of their parental figures in particular. In the case of Cardinal’s and Duras’s novels, the protagonists often do battle with their mothers; in Figueiredo’s *Caderno*, the “colonazinha preta” has a love-hate relationship with her father.

In *Au pays*, Marie, or “Moussia” as the natives call her, appears to be forged by the inner struggle related to having to choose between “eux,” the Algerian people, and “nous,” her family of French settlers (Cardinal 31, 151). Her role of mediator between two cultures is further complicated by the tormented relation with her mother, which she explicitly tackles and performatively exposes towards the end of the novel. She recalls the “vilaine blessure inguérissable” that was inflicted on her: the moment when, still an adolescent, she was told by her mother about her vain efforts to abort while she was pregnant with her (Cardinal 179-180). This episode prompted her to reconsider her relationship with her mother, as she reveals that, from that moment onward, Algeria, her motherland, became indeed like a parent to her: “Je me suis accrochée à ce que j’ai pu, à la ville, au ciel, à la mer [...], ils sont devenus ma mère” (Cardinal 181; Haigh 66). It could therefore be argued that, even though her familiar nucleus definitely represents the colonist force impinging on her, in this instance, it is her own mother who, by hurting her, pushes her towards Algeria’s indigenous culture.

The dichotomy colonist/colonized affecting the protagonist's subjectivity is further accentuated in the text by the contrast between the two sides' respective religions: Islam and Catholicism. Although being born in a colonist and Catholic family, Cardinal's narrator confesses that, when she was a little girl, she secretly chose Islam as her creed and that, for that reason, she would piss on ants, which, in their being obedient and zealous, reminded her of Catholic people (Cardinal 45, 47; Chuang 18). Yet, she also reveals that, when, later on, she received the Holy Communion for the first time, she felt like she had become more French (Cardinal 59). The "subjectivizing" power of such a religious ritual lies not only in its cultural implications, but also in its related questions of miscegenation and racial purity, as exposed by the narrator herself: "Sur nous [les communiantes] reposait l'avenir de la pureté de notre peuple et de la catholicité. C'était lourd" (Cardinal 60). The protagonist's indoctrination represents just a part of the "dressage [...] des Méditerranéennes" imparted on her by her family throughout her childhood and which not only conditioned her, but also exerted a productive power on her, as it turned her into a subject desiring "la vie qu'on me prédisait" (Cardinal 21). For that reason, she states that, despite the deep suffering that such a "dressage" caused to her torn self, her conversion into a good Christian and a good French woman became almost complete when she turned eighteen (Cardinal 32). The type of education she received mirrors Algeria's sociocultural structure, which is defined by Henri Lefebvre as an abstract space, shaped by wealth and power relations and marked by a rigid categorization of social conventions and beliefs (61, 411, 421). Similarly, Gillian Rose argues that such characteristics are typical of a patriarchal environment, in which class, gender and race are defined in a prescriptive way (145). The oppression that women had to suffer in Algerian society due to male hegemonic structures is performatively reported by Cardinal, as she affirms: "L'espace vital se réduit

considérablement pour une femme ici. [...] Pour une fille c'est la maison-le lycée, le lycée-la maison. Pour une femme c'est la maison, c'est tout." (Cardinal 187-188; Chuang 22).

The female narrating subject's status of fragmentary in-betweenness, located midway between French culture and Arabic customs, is illustrated by the childhood episode of the "enterrement des petits chats noyés," which she describes as "mi-catholique mi-musulmane" (Cardinal 29). It is interesting to note that, so as to carry out the ritual, she decides to use part of her great-grandmother's French doll service, which she was not allowed to touch, thus demonstrating not only to care very little about her colonist roots and household regulations, but also to resist colonial impositions (Cardinal 29-30). This attitude is in complete contrast to her mother's inconsolable reaction to the loss of the plates, which she regarded as a symbol of the family's ties to Metropolitan France and, therefore, as something sacred (Cardinal 30). She also ascribes the disappearance of part of the doll set to her daughter's indigenous friends, whom she disparagingly calls "bicots," – an aphaeresis of the word "arbicot," which is a diminutive of the Arabic "arbi:" an offensive and racist term used during the colonization of Algeria to refer to North Africans ("Bicot"). In this way, the protagonist's mother gives away her colonist prejudices, thus causing her child to feel painfully alienated from her Algerian friends, as she states: "Tous mes amis sont des voleurs et des bicots. Quelle solitude!" (Cardinal 31). It could therefore be said that Cardinal's mother, besides hurting her daughter and therefore pushing her towards Arabic culture, further contributes to the "subjectivation" of the young Marie by instilling in her a hierarchical dichotomy between the French "raisonnable nous," "le bien," marked by an intrinsic superiority, and Algerians, "eux," "le mal," constitutionally inferior and "Other" (Cardinal 31, 40; Chuang 20).

Due to the influence exerted on her by her upbringing and especially by her mother's domineering role, the subjectivity of the female narrator of *Au pays* presents itself not only as deeply split and nomadic, but also as quite contradictory. This is exemplified by the ambivalent colonial desire she feels for Algeria and its people. Borrowing from postcolonial theory, Karen Ruddy defines "colonial desire" as "an ambivalent structure of attraction to and repulsion of the colonized other" (77). In applying such a notion to Cardinal's text, it can be observed that, on the one hand, the protagonist appears as "colonized" by the "racisme diffus" permeating the colony (Cardinal 16). For instance, she tells about a time when her twenty-year-old self, after being involved in a car accident, received help from an Arabic worker. At first, she was so happy to see another living human being that the "petite fille" inside of her "qui parlait autant l'arabe que le français" started talking to him in Arabic – something that she had not done in a long time due to her progressive "frenchization" (Cardinal 81). Then, as soon as she noticed that the Arab was staring at her bare chest, the "petite fille" disappeared and got replaced by the "jeune Française digne" who, just like her mother, saw him as nothing but a "bicot" (Cardinal 82). On the other hand, "Moussia" never stops sympathizing with Algerian people, as she confesses having felt deeply guilty for their exploitation on the part of the settlers and for the Algerian War carried out against them by the French government (Cardinal 73). Indeed, she affirms that, unlike her family, "[b]ien que pied-noir, je n'ai jamais été pour l'Algérie française," thus also making even more clear that her colonial nostalgia is not related to the colonist privileges she enjoyed while living in Algeria, but is instead engendered by her genuine attachment to the country (Cardinal 153). In addition, the adult Marie's contrasting feelings for her native land can be regarded as being due to Algeria's uncanniness, its strange familiarity. This is because, while the narrator recognizes the country of her roots in going back to her

motherland as it reminds her of her past, she is also estranged by it because of its economic and political changes. However, Algeria will never cease to represent her place of harmony, her “terre,” her “famille,” not even after having been away from it for twenty-four years (Cardinal 6, 9, 41).

Although in *L'amant* Duras never explicitly refers to French Indochina as her “terre” like Cardinal does in *Au pays*, her bond with the colony can be noticed in some of the passages in the novel in which she emotionally describes the Mekong river and the Vinhlong province as “beaux,” “incroyables,” “au-delà de toute laideur” (Duras, *L'amant* 17, 116). Additionally, what makes this novel worth being compared to Cardinal’s and Figueiredo’s works is the in-between condition of its female narrative subject. The narrator/protagonist is situated in a liminal place for a number of different reasons. As mentioned above, she is in a transcultural position as she belongs to a family of French settlers but also feels Annamite at the same time. Moreover, like in *Au pays*, the dichotomous nature of *L'amant*’s female subject is further complicated by the maternal figure with whom she has a very troubled relationship, as she confesses of having felt both love and hatred for her mother and the rest of her familiar nucleus (Duras, *L'amant* 34).

Duras herself describes how the dynamics concerning her family, and her mother in particular, were crucial to the development of her identity, as she confesses: “Elle est le lieu au seuil de quoi le silence commence. [...] Je suis encore là [...] à la même distance du mystère. [...] Je n’ai jamais rien fait qu’attendre devant la porte fermée” (Duras, *L'amant* 34-35). This silence can be interpreted as the inability to come to terms with the painful memories connected to her family history and as the result of the “subjectivizing” effect her parent has on her. Indeed, Duras’s relationship with her maternal figure was particularly troubled due to her mother’s “désespoir” (Duras, *L'amant* 22). Marie Donnadiou’s mental illness, as mentioned in section



2.2.2, was related to the death of Duras's father and to the family's economic difficulties. Such hardships marginalized them from the colonial society and made them feel closer, both economically and socially, to indigenous people. Indeed, the female narrator reports that they were disdainfully considered by the other settlers in the colony as "[une] famille de voyous blancs" (Duras, *L'amant* 109).

*L'amant's* protagonist alludes to their dire straits at the beginning of the novel when she compares her and her brothers to "les enfants-vieillards de la faim endémique," with the exception that they were "blancs" and that, precisely because of that, they were ashamed of their poverty (Duras, *L'amant* 13). She also hints at her mother's numerous debts and denial of their predicament (Duras, *L'amant* 37-38). Indeed, in spite of their desperate condition, Madame Donnadieu constantly tried to recover their bourgeois status and to reintegrate them within the French colonist community. Then, *L'amant's* female narrator's relationship with her family can be seen as the main "subjectivizing" force responsible for her in-between status, as, on the one hand, it pushes her away from the other French settlers and towards the local people, while, on the other hand, Duras's mother, like Cardinal's, manifests a preoccupation with racial purity and superiority. For instance, the female narrator justifies her getting closer to the man from "la Chine du Nord" with her desire to escape poverty, as, right after meeting him, she declares: "Dorénavant, j'aurai une limousine pour aller au lycée et me ramener à la pension" (Duras, *L'amant* 44). She is also aware that, in doing so, she inevitably distances herself from her family, when she says: "[J]e serai toujours là à regretter [...] tout ce que je laisse, [...] la famille de Sadec" (Duras, *L'amant* 44-45). Her taking such a difficult decision can be interpreted as her way of resisting the "subjectivation" related to her family power dynamics, which she also performatively denounces with her words throughout the narrative.

The protagonist's defiance of the "subjectivizing" influence of her parent and brothers is also illustrated by her urge, her personal "obligation," to go against her mother's "interdit" to mingle with non-white men, as she sees it as a form of cultural hybridization which might deprive her of her white privilege (Duras, *L'amant* 51). Indeed, in the narrative, the mother objects to the young girl's affair with the Chinese man so strongly that she even beats and verbally abuses her (Duras, *L'amant* 73). This is because she fears that her daughter's transgression of colonial sexual norms might jeopardize her future chances of getting married and settling down within the colonist society – a fear boldly confronted by the female narrator who affirms that: "[J]e peux me marier partout, quand je veux" (Duras, *L'amant* 114). However, due to their economic problems, Madame Donnadieu encourages the relationship hoping to get financial benefits in return. It is for this reason that she approves of the "chapeau d'homme" of "la petite" – a sort of synecdoche of her "tenue d'enfant prostituée" –, as "il faudra bien que l'argent arrive dans la maison" (Duras, *L'amant* 33). Moreover, both the mother and the brothers somehow exploit the protagonist's affair with "l'amant de Cholen" when, despite agreeing on going for dinner with them to expensive Chinese restaurants, they completely ignore him and expect him to pay the exorbitant bill (Duras, *L'amant* 64, 72).

Even though the protagonist's subversive act of going against the patriarchal restrictions underpinning the colony's structure can be seen as doubly rebellious, as it also symbolizes her defiance of her abusive and oppressive mother, she remains, like Cardinal and Figueiredo's female narrative subjects, in-between the "subjectivizing" dynamics of her family and her resolution to break away from them. Her nomadically orbiting between these two poles of attraction is exemplified by her contradictory attitude towards the Chinese lover. In a manner

similar to Cardinal's, her being in a transcultural position makes her a multilayered subject marked by an ambivalent colonial desire towards the colony and non-white people. As argued by Karen Ruddy, Duras, in narrating her love affair with the Chinese man, masterfully intertwines a gendered sexual discourse with a colonial one (77). She also affirms that postcolonial work on such a topic has largely been centered on applying the notion of colonial desire to the dynamics between white male colonialists and indigenous men and women. Thus, the relevance of Duras's novel lies also in the fact that, besides being an extraordinary piece of writing, it reverses such a pattern and brings attention to the colonial desire of white female subjects. Moreover, the narrative is imbued with colonial concerns about race as shown by the ambivalent nature of the female protagonist's desire, since she appears to be simultaneously sexually attracted to and repulsed by the Chinese lover (Ruddy 77). If, on the one hand, her transgressive desire for him enables her to rebel against the patriarchal system of the colony, on the other hand, the racist denial of her attraction for him seems to be engendered by her need to maintain the power related to her white privilege (Ruddy 78). For instance, at times she defines the lover as "désirable" and she opens up to him by crying in front of him – which is something she never does in front of her family (Duras, *L'amant* 54, 58). At other times, she appears as affectless and domineering towards him (Duras, *L'amant* 48-49). Such a contradictory demeanour could be ascribed to the influence exerted on her by her family, as exemplified by the fact that, when they go out for dinner all together, no one talks to him, not even "la petite." And this is "parce que c'est un Chinois, que ce n'est pas un blanc" (Duras, *L'amant* 65). Additionally, whenever her mother and elder brother corner her and menacingly question her about her interracial affair, she denies the relationship and disparagingly defines the "Chinois" as "laid, [...] malingre" (Duras, *L'amant* 74). This is also due to the extremely

oppressive power which her “frère aîné” has on her, which “partout se [répand], partout [pénètre]” (Duras, *L’amant* 78). Such an ambiguity reinforces even more the transcultural position of the young girl, as she is portrayed in a condition of in-betweenness, both as concerns her being in the middle of two different cultures and her having contrasting feelings about her lover.

The female narrative subject’s in-betweenness is also reflected by her behaviour as well as by her physical appearance. As mentioned above, her look makes her stand out in the colony as exceptionally peculiar, different. This process of estrangement from the rest of colonial society seems to be accentuated by her bond with the Chinese man, as she acknowledges acquiring “un air d’étrangeté,” as their clandestine relationship consolidates itself (Duras, *L’amant* 72). This is also proved by the fact that she becomes increasingly more isolated from the other “petites filles blanches” at school who end up refusing to talk to her (Duras, *L’amant* 110). So, her being pushed away from the French community could be seen as one of the “subjectivizing” factors contributing to her “indochinaziation.” Such detachment from the colonist culture is pointed out by “l’amant de Cholen” himself, who perceives her as “très différent des Parisiennes, beaucoup moins gentille” (Duras, *L’amant* 62). Moreover, he notices physical similarities between her and Indochinese women, as he remarks that “[...] elle a la finesse de leurs poignets, leurs cheveux drus [...], longs comme les leurs, et surtout, cette peau, cette peau de tout le corps” (Duras, *L’amant* 120). Similarly to the way in which Cardinal’s protagonist substitutes the affection for her mother for the love for Algeria, the “miliardaire chinois” becomes, in a way, a sort of maternal figure to Duras’s young narrator, as proven by the fact that he washes her and takes care of her like her mother used to do (Duras, *L’amant* 112). This can also be seen as yet another element adding to the “subjectivizing” process of the

narrative subject, as, by pulling her closer to an epitome of Asian culture, it causes her to detach even more from her French roots.

Moving on to *Caderno de Mémorias Coloniais*, the “subjectivization” of its female narrator results not only in a detachment from her family, like in Duras’s novel, but also in an attachment to Mozambican culture and people. As mentioned above, the latter element is not as developed in *L’amant* as it is, on the other hand, in *Au pays*. Indeed, the use that Cardinal makes of her narrative to tackle colonial nostalgia and postcolonial issues can be compared to the way in which Figueiredo discusses similar themes such as nostalgia, trauma, and melancholia by taking issue with some of the negative aspects of Portuguese colonialism, and thus challenging Lusophone culture’s predominant patterns. She does so by intertwining the four ways of portraying postcolonialism in contemporary Portuguese literature: nostalgia with a bad conscience, trauma, melancholia, and trace (Vieira 275). Her use of the first mode is reflected by the fact that her narrative addresses the violence for which Portuguese colonists were held responsible, while confronting the colonial nostalgia for Portugal’s lost empire (Vieira 278). Figueiredo also adopts the second approach as she crudely tells about how the Portuguese practiced racism and violence in the colony and about the horrors of the Colonial War (Vieira 280). This is all the more true if one considers how Linda Anderson connects memory and trauma, as she purports that “memory is also about the instability of memory in the face of shock” (101). Such an overlapping of memory and trauma can be seen as another factor responsible for the fragmentation of the female narrating self, whose memory is fragmented, hence unreliable, not only because it reflects her dichotomous transcultural consciousness, but also because the atrocious historical events she witnessed disrupted it. Moreover, the author appears to tap into the third mode of narrating Portugal’s imperial past in

Lusophone postcolonial literature as she illustrates the theme of melancholia. Melancholia is interpreted by Freud as the pathological incorporation of a lost object into the psyche of the melancholic subject, which is incapable of letting it go (Vieira 281). Indeed, throughout the narration, the reader is confronted with a sense of colonial nostalgia and melancholia, as the author evokes her childhood memories and the anecdotes about her dead father – both her childhood and her father can be perceived as “lost objects,” which the author associates with the colony and therefore with a sociocultural setting that inevitably changed after Mozambique achieved independence. Moreover, as argued by Joana Pimentel, such a nostalgia is related to the liminal condition of the narrator, as she lies in-between two different nations and cultural identities, and is thus characterized by a double, dichotomous consciousness (241-242). This, in turn, results in an impossibility of belonging which causes in the protagonist a sense of alienation that prevents her from feeling at home either in Mozambique, the place where she was born but of which she has no citizenship, or in Portugal, her homeland which she does not recognize as familiar. Lastly, *Caderno* can be regarded as adopting the mode of representation focusing on traces, as it employs the process of remembering to reveal the negative aspects of Portuguese colonialism (Vieira 283-284). So, it could be argued that Figueiredo, by employing traditional Lusophone modes of representation, disrupts them as she produces an extremely personal and unconventional account of the events she witnessed while in the colony as well as of her own subjectivity.

Like the other two autofictional works analyzed here, the liminal status of the narrating subject with regard to postcolonial issues is developed in the novel through the author’s relationship with her family and particularly with a parental figure: her father – to whom the book is dedicated. Indeed, *Caderno* revolves around the emotional story of the relationship

between the author and her “pai” [“father”]. This character, together with his maternal counterpart, appears as a force essential to the “subjectivization” of the female narrative subject. She observes her parents’ domineering influence when she recalls certain childhood memories, for example: “Quando o meu pai me levantava no ar como se fosse uma coisa, [...] sentia-me fraca perante a força total, dominada, possuída por ela” [“When my father lifted me in the air as if I were a thing, [...] I felt weak in the face of his total strength, dominated, possessed by it”] (Figueiredo, *Caderno* 17; Figueiredo, *Notebook* 31). She also remembers how her mother would slap her to prevent her from saying words such as “grávidas” [“pregnant”], thus giving away her preoccupation with her daughter’s purity – in a manner which echoes Duras’s mother’s abusive behaviour and obsession with her child’s virtue (Figueiredo, *Caderno* 17). The narrator’s nuclear family represents a pole of attraction and repulsion for her, as, despite being racist colonists, it is composed of the people she loves the most. Like *Au pays*’s female narrator, Figueiredo performatively exposes and condemns her family’s colonial misdeeds, as, on one occasion in the text, she refers to them as “esses cabrões” [“those bastards”] who practiced “o colun..., o colonis..., o coloniamismo” [“colun..., colonism, coloniamism”], something which she despises so much that she cannot even put it on paper (Figueiredo, *Caderno* 49; Figueiredo, *Notebook* 55). In particular, due to the clash between her affection for her “pai” and his racist actions, Figueiredo describes her feelings for him as conflicted, for she confesses: “Quando amamos e nos violam num mesmo tempo, e não podemos fugir, enfrentamos de igualmente perto a face do amor e a do ódio” [“When you’re in love and you’re violated at the same time, and you can’t get away, you stare just as closely into the face of love as into the face of hatred”] (Figueiredo, *Caderno* 117; Figueiredo, *Notebook* 117). Her being torn between her family’s culture and her attraction for Mozambique can be

observed in the first picture of her appearing in the memoir, in which a tropical scene of coconut trees serves as the background to the image of her child self. This photograph can be interpreted as symbolizing her cultural in-betweenness because, even though she seems at ease in that environment, she is portrayed while holding on to a portable radio, a tool used by settlers to receive broadcasts from Lisbon and, hence, representing their way of keeping in touch with their Portuguese roots (Figueiredo, *Caderno* 20, 24-25).

Just like in *L'amant* and *Au pays*, the transcultural status of *Caderno*'s female narrator can be ascribed to the above-mentioned "subjectivizing" force exerted on her by her family of Portuguese settlers. For instance, she says she internalized her parents' "discursos de ódio" ["words of hatred"] and "palavras brutais" ["brutal words"] addressed to "negros" ["blacks"] (Figueiredo, *Caderno* 117, 131; Figueiredo, *Notebook* 117, 131). This appears to be reflected in her seemingly adopting a colonist stance when illustrating the differences between "nós" ["us"], the Portuguese colonists, and "eles" ["them"], the Mozambican people: "Eles eram pretos, animais. Nós éramos brancos, éramos pessoas, seres racionais" ["They were darkies, animals. We were white, we were people, rational beings"] (Figueiredo, *Caderno* 35; Figueiredo, *Notebook* 43). This notion of white people as superior "seres racionais" echoes Cardinal's mother's conception of French colonizers as the "raisonnable nous," and stresses once more how similarly these two authors describe their being influenced by their familial colonist postures (Cardinal 40). Indeed, in a manner similar to Cardinal's, Figueiredo's protagonist, due to her father's prohibition on playing outside with native children, remembers feeling so lonely and isolated that she often played with ants (although she never pissed on them like *Au pays*'s narrator does) (Figueiredo, *Caderno* 29). Moreover, she too, like Cardinal does with her mother, repels her "pai"'s xenophobic



demeanour. In particular, she is extremely horrified by his violent exploitation of “pretos,” to the point that she struggles to recognize him when witnessing his angry outbursts, as she adamantly declares: “Aquele homem branco não é o meu pai” [“That white man is not my father”] (Figueiredo, *Caderno* 53; Figueiredo, *Notebook* 58). Then, the colonist exploitation of Mozambican people carried out by the family of *Caderno*’s female narrative subject can be considered as yet another “subjectivizing” force that causes her to feel, at the same time, close and detached from her Portuguese roots and, thus, to sympathize with the “preto” culture.

The way in which Figueiredo appreciates indigenous individuals can be interpreted as one of the manners in which she resists the dominating power structures of her family. She reveals that, as a child feeling like a “colonazinha preta,” she loved to disobey her mother – like Cardinal and Duras – and secretly sold mangoes to black passers-by as black women did (Figueiredo, *Caderno* 35-36). She also endeavoured to become more “preta” not only in her actions but also as concerns her physical appearance. Whenever she was sent by her mother to the general store, she would take her shoes off and “ir clandestinamente, sem sapatos” [“go secretly barefoot”] hoping that her feet would become “como os pés dos negros” [“like blacks’ feet”] (Figueiredo, *Caderno* 101; Figueiredo, *Notebook* 103). And she would feel very close to those people, as she admits: “Parecia-me com eles” [“I was like them”] (Figueiredo, *Caderno* 101; Figueiredo, *Notebook* 103). She manifests such closeness to the natives when she compares her hands to those of her neighbour’s son – a person of colour to whom her mother forbade her to talk – and finds that they are “iguais às [suas]” [“the same as [hers]”] (Figueiredo, *Caderno* 43; Figueiredo, *Notebook* 49). Yet, at another point in the text, she sees her very same hands as one with her father’s: “[As suas] mãos [eram] iguais às minhas mãos. [...] As mesmas” [“[His] hands [were] just like my hands. [...] The same hands”] (Figueiredo, *Caderno* 108;

Figueiredo, *Notebook* 109). This observation reinforces even more the interpretation of *Caderno*'s female narrative subject as an individual who, due to the "subjectivizing" forces affecting the shaping of her identity, is located in-between two cultural realities.

Her being torn, split, fragmented by the power relations impinging on her process of self-formation extends to her attitude towards non-white people, which, in the same way as Cardinal's and Duras's protagonists, emerges as an ambivalent colonial desire. On the one hand, she appears to be attracted to the natives as she not only wants to be like them, but she also sympathizes with them. For example, she reports befriending her neighbour's son and being fascinated by "esses homens enormes, luzidios de negros" ["those enormous, glossy-black men"] (Figueiredo, *Caderno* 43, 73; Figueiredo, *Notebook* 77). On the other hand, as mentioned above, at times, she seems to be absorbed by her parents' racist discourses to such an extent that she mimics their racist demeanour. Her giving away her colonist roots can also be observed in the episode involving her schoolmate Marília, a mulatto girl, whom she slapped knowing that her white privilege would exempt her from suffering any consequences (Figueiredo, *Caderno* 55).

To sum up, all three narrating subjects of *Au pays de mes racines*, *L'amant* and *Caderno de Memórias Coloniais* appear to be "subjectivized," hence constituted, by power relations pertaining to the post/colonial circumstances in which they find themselves. In all three cases, such forces are presented as being spawned, although in different ways, by their colonist families and by one of their parental figures in particular. Such "subjectivizing" dynamics can be seen as responsible for the fragmentation of the protagonists' autofictional identities and, thus, for their feelings of colonial nostalgia, in-betweenness and essential difference. Indeed, the female narrative subjects are portrayed as occupying a liminal position with regard to both

their colonizer roots and their attraction for the colony's indigenous people and culture. As a result, they are depicted as torn between these opposite poles and as having ambivalent feelings towards both. Yet, by being produced as subjects in discourse by such structures of domination, the female narrators report not being simply subjected to such constrictions, but also defying them. On the one hand, they carry out a performative act of resistance by disclosing the power configurations impinging on them. On the other hand, they actively challenge the colonial norms constraining them and strive to shape their own subjectivities. Additionally, the autofictional mode through which they voice their culturally located experiences allows them not only to confront the individuality imposed on them, but also to assert a new way in which to portray and construct their specific selfhoods, as it will be further discussed in the next section.

#### 4.2.2 Autofictional writing as self-creation

The female protagonists of *Au pays de mes racines*, *L'amant* and *Caderno de Memórias Coloniais* appear as autofictional, nomadic narrative subjects, and therefore split, essentially different not only with regards to other male and female subjects, but also within themselves, as they are equipped with a multilayered identity located in-between distinct cultures. Because of this, they present an alternative way of depicting women's subjectivity by exposing their ethnic-specific realities and the power relations responsible for their "subjectivization" and fragmentation. To be more specific, these three women's nonlinear narratives disclose their transcultural experiences by showing how they position themselves with regard to the colony and the colonial norms regulating their lives. Such autofictional stories manifest their narrators' dichotomous stances not only as concerns their subject matter, but also in respect of the narrative style and techniques adopted. Yet, paradoxically, the genre of autofiction, by displaying a fragmentation of the self, can be interpreted as reconstructing it as well. Indeed, the production of a fictionalized confession, borrowing from Michel Foucault and Judith Butler's theorizations on self-writing, can be seen as a way by which such fragmented subjects strive to performatively shape themselves and to come to terms with their in-betweenness.

As mentioned in sections 4.1.1 and 4.2.1, *Au pays*, *L'amant* and *Caderno* are characterized by a narrative structure in which fragments of memories from the past overlap with each other in a nonlinear way. The fragmentary nature of the texts is also reinforced by the fact that the narration appears to be split between the authors' act of remembering past experiences at the time of writing, i.e. the chronological present, and their young selves who lived such events. Because of this, all three accounts employ narrative shifts

between first and second or third person. For example, both Cardinal and Duras often abandon the narrative “I” to adopt the perspective of “la petite fille,” “l’enfant” (Cardinal 20; Duras 46). Figueiredo, at the very end of her memoir, counterposes her first-person narrator to a metamorphic “you,” a putative new version of herself freed from her “passado [quem] apodrece” [“past [which] is rotting”] (Figueiredo, *Caderno* 136; Figueiredo, *Notebook* 135).

The in-betweenness of their identities and stories is also mirrored by the use of images symbolizing a certain liminality. For instance, in *Au pays*, a parallel could be drawn between the protagonist’s transcultural condition and the image of the “cigognes” which she describes as “de passage,” “[qui] vont et viennent[,] [...] traversent la Méditerranée” (Cardinal 104, 108; Chuang 22). In the case of *L’amant*, it is significant that Duras refers to the image of her fifteen-year-old self crossing the Mekong on a ferry as a photograph that was never taken. By remarking this, she hints at the importance of that “traversée du fleuve” which indeed represented a turning point in her life (Duras, *L’amant* 16). Furthermore, this narrative image is located on “un bac” taking the protagonist from Sadec to Saigon and can therefore be seen as an “image of transition,” as another symbol of her being in-between two cultures and two places (Duras, *L’amant* 11; Sankey, “Time and Autobiography” 185). The liminality of this “photographie [qui] aurait pu être prise” is also stressed by the contrast between the reiteration of the phrase “j’ai quinze ans et demi,” which hints at her past, and her use of the present tense throughout the passage (Duras, *L’amant* 16; Sankey, “Time and Autobiography” 185). The mark of in-betweenness characterizing the use Figueiredo makes of images in her memoir has already been mentioned in section 4.2.1; yet, the dichotomous nature of *Caderno* is also symbolized by the juxtaposition of such paratextual components, as it is made not only of chunks of text organized in a nonlinear way, but also of photographs portraying Figueiredo as a happy child. If, on the

one hand, such pictures help the reader get closer to the author and give more credibility to the autobiographical aspects of the narrative, on the other hand, in their accompanying excerpts, marked by racial discrimination and sexual harassment, they further emphasize the split essence of the text.

The nomadic, fragmented nature of the three female narrators considered here is also reflected in their conception of memory as faulty and split. All of them confess at some point in their texts to forgetting past events or compensating for such forgetfulness by fictionalizing their recollections. For instance, Cardinal affirms that, since “la mémoire, elle, [la] dépasse,” she has no “souvenir” of her departure from Algeria for France, nor of the last time she saw her father (Cardinal 90, 169-170). Similarly, Duras does not remember exactly the words of the “télégramme de Saïgon” announcing the death of her little brother, nor the outfit she was wearing when meeting the Chinese man for the first time – she just presumes she had on the felt hat and the golden heels, thus fictionalizing that memory (Duras, *L’amant* 18-19, 126). Likewise, Figueiredo does not recall where she was when she first heard about the April 25 Revolution, whether in a small square in Lourenço Marques or downtown (Figueiredo, *Caderno* 75-76). Moreover, she admits to lying about the way in which she was dressed when she left Mozambique: she first describes herself as wearing “um vestido branco em tecido crepe” [“a white crepe dress”], then she reveals that the dress was actually navy blue (Figueiredo, *Caderno* 103; Figueiredo, *Notebook* 105).

Nonlinear narration and fragmented memories are elements which Judith Butler identifies as intrinsic to the act of self-narration (*Giving an Account of Oneself* 68). She also purports that, due to the sociocultural structures impinging on and therefore “subjectivizing” one’s subjectivity, “the ‘I’ [cannot] tell [...] the story of its own emergence,” at least not “in

coherent narrative form” (Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* 37, 79). Additionally, she argues that the process of self-writing can be assimilated to that of self-staging, thus stressing the fictional component of this practice (Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* 69). In this way, her theorizations on relating one’s story can be extended to the autofictional texts analyzed here. Indeed, in rereading Foucault’s “How Much Does It Cost for Reason to Tell the Truth?” Butler hypothesizes that to give an account of oneself equals to give an account of the power relations affecting it (*Giving an Account of Oneself* 124). In this way, a link can be established between Foucault’s notion of “subjectivation” addressed in section 4.1.2 and Butler’s conception of self-narration: as the structures of domination affecting a subject are deemed to constitute it but do not determine it, one of the ways in which one can resist them is by exposing them through the act of telling. Such considerations reinforce the idea that the autofictional narratives considered here not only represent an alternative way of portraying female experiences, but they also symbolize the manner through which their narrators react to their “subjectivization.” More specifically, by applying, like in section 4.1.2, the notion of the performative as “that discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names,” it could be argued that, by giving a fictionalized account of themselves, the female narrating subjects not only resist power configurations – since “speaking [...] constitutes an act of power” – but they also strive to shape their subjectivities (Butler, *Bodies That Matter* 13; Butler, *Giving an Account of Oneself* 125).

This understanding of self-writing as functional to the creation of the subject is shared by Foucault, who, in his essay “Self Writing,” presents us with the “hupomnēmata,” a notebook for the Ancient Greeks, which, by collecting the self’s experiences, aimed at creating the writer, the self (210-211). Indeed, the purpose of these “hupomnēmata” was “to make one’s recollection of the fragmentary ‘logos’ transmitted through teaching, listening, or reading, a

means of establishing a relationship of oneself with oneself,” and to “contribute to the formation of the self through these scattered ‘logoi’” (Foucault, “Self Writing” 211). Through the process of self-writing, the self is believed to assimilate what it has heard and to shape and take care of itself. Foucault therefore classifies the “hupomnēmata” as a “technique of the self,” as it is part of the Greeks’ set of practices of self-care which granted access to self-knowledge (Foucault, “Subjectivity and Truth” 87). This is because, for the Greeks, the Delphic principle “gnōthi seauton” [“know yourself”] was closely related to the concept of “epimeleisthai sautou” [“to take care of oneself”] (Foucault, “Technologies of the Self” 226). In a similar way, autofiction can function as a “technology of the self” as it helps the author articulate, process and make sense of his/her memories. Moreover, since the “scattered ‘logoi’” can be interpreted as the fragmented memories – such as those about the education the protagonists received during childhood, the conversations they listened to and the events they witnessed – related by the female narrators of *Au pays*, *L’amant* and *Caderno*, their written recollection of these “souvenirs” can be assimilated to the creation of the “hupomnēmata” and to its self-productive power. Furthermore, such parallel is reinforced, on the one hand, by Foucault’s assertion that this Greek notebook was hinged on a “contemplation of the past,” just like the autofictional accounts analyzed here focus on a reflection on past events (Foucault, “Self Writing” 212). On the other hand, both the “hupomnēmata” and Cardinal, Duras and Figueiredo’s works combine “the traditional authority of the already-said,” which can be seen as being embodied by the structures of domination “subjectivizing” the narrative subjects, “with the singularity of the truth that is affirmed therein,” or the protagonists’ voices in relating and reacting to those forces (Foucault, “Self Writing” 212). The shaping or “unification” of the writer’s identity



therefore results from the merging of such “heterogeneous fragments through their subjectivation in the exercise of personal writing” (Foucault, “Self Writing” 213). Drawing a connection between Foucault’s theory of “subjectivization” and his work on self-writing, it could be argued that, by giving an account of oneself, the female narrative subjects “subject” themselves, they make themselves as such by “historicizing [...] [their selves],” thus defying the “subjectivizing” influences infringing on the formation of their identity (Allen 368, 374).

In *Au pays*, *L’amant* and *Caderno*, the productive power of the practice of self-writing can be said to have a twofold function. On the one hand, it can be interpreted as the act through which the female narrators respond to their “subjectivation” and the silence they have been confined to. Indeed, silence and its related feeling of mystery are recurring elements present, to various extents, in these three works. In Duras’s novel, they are intimately linked to her family and to her mother in particular, since, as already remarked in section 4.2.1, “Elle est le lieu au seuil de quoi le silence commence[,] [...] [le] mystère” (Duras, *L’amant* 34-35). Thus, this silence can be seen as symptomatic of the “subjectivizing” and restraining effect her parent has on her. Likewise, in Cardinal’s narrative, the silence, the “indicible” is directly related to her familial realm which she perceives as full of “mystères” (Cardinal 38). Figueiredo’s memoir displays silence as associated not only with family scenes, but also with her condition of “retornada.” More specifically, she correlates this muteness with the fact of being woman, as she describes the moment she left Mozambique as marked by “[um] silêncio ainda mais fundo, porque afinal já era uma mulher” [“an even deeper silence because after all I was now a woman”] (Figueiredo, *Caderno* 111; Figueiredo, *Notebook* 112). Indeed, she recalls her mother keeping quiet about her father’s affairs, and her learning to read as the moment in which she started turning into “a pior inimiga do [seu] pai. [...] calada” [“[her] father’s worst enemy. [...]

a silent one”] (Figueiredo, *Caderno* 19, 61; Figueiredo, *Notebook* 67). This pervasive silence is therefore symptomatic of the protagonist and her mother’s being, as women, subjected to the “pai”’s patriarchal power. Moreover, the female narrator associates silence with the guilt elicited by her going to Portugal as “um desterrado” [“an exile”] (Figueiredo, *Caderno* 134; Figueiredo, *Notebook* 134). Thus, by telling her own “verdade” [“truth”] about the colonial events she witnessed, Figueiredo finally uses her “voz” [“voice”] to counteract the silence she was confined to by both her father’s imposing figure and the discrimination she experienced when resettling in Lisbon (Figueiredo, *Caderno* 115). Such considerations can be extended to Cardinal and Duras’s novels, as, in giving an account of their lives in the colony, they step out of the silence, the mystery, surrounding them and make their voices heard.

On the other hand, the art of self-writing can be perceived as helping the narrators come to terms with their condition of cultural in-betweenness, therefore better comprehending and shaping their own subjectivities. This is because, by performatively naming the power structures impinging on them, they resist them and create their own influence dynamics. The productive potential of the act of writing the self is clearly displayed in *Au pays*, where the female narrative subject decides to embark on her trip back to Algeria to find her roots again and, thus, to overcome the writer’s block preventing her from writing her next book (Barclay 79; Cardinal 83). It is her colonial nostalgia, her uprootedness which pushes her to go back to her motherland to feel whole again, to reconnect with her “archaïque” self – her self which she perceives as distant in time, related to her “enfance,” but also pertaining to the “état tribal” in which her and her family lived while in the colony (Cardinal 5, 40, 42-43). This necessity is paired with the urge to write about her story, for she states that “sinon, je suis perdue” (Cardinal 84). Her coming to terms with her “bicéphale” nature can be observed when she confesses that,

in looking for her lost childhood harmony in Algeria, she found not only her “archaïque” self, but she also better understood “ce qu’il y a en [lui] de plus récent,” i.e. her French side (Cardinal 17, 145). Indeed, at the end of her travel diary, Cardinal affirms she has found an “équilibre” inside of herself (Cardinal 196). It could therefore be said that, by putting together and writing about the “illustrations juxtaposées” of her “esprit,” her fragmented memories or “logoi,” the narrator achieves a better understanding of her subjectivity and turns herself into a more balanced individual (Barclay 80; Cardinal 166). Quite differently, in *L’amant*, even if Duras does not allude explicitly to the productive power of the practice of self-writing, she presents it as deeply connected to her subjectivity. This can be seen when she defines her will to become a writer as her “certitude essentielle” (Duras, *L’amant* 93). Moreover, she presents this desire of hers as both in contrast with her family’s expectations and as being fomented by its “terrible dureté” (Duras, *L’amant* 93). For this reason, her writing can be seen as her attempt to come to terms with the “subjectivizing” power her mother and elder brother exerted on her. Indeed, she admits that, it is because they are dead at the time when she is writing that she can talk about the “périodes cachées de [sa] jeunesse” in *L’amant* – which was indeed composed in 1963, seven years after the death of her mother, and published in 1984 – and which she did not tackle in her works while they were still alive (Duras, *L’amant* 14, 38; Lane 227). So, it could be said that the female narrator’s act of writing about the memories of her youth and family in Indochina and France symbolizes the way in which she resists the “subjectivizing” influences affecting her self and, consequently, as a means through which she can assert and shape her own subjectivity. Likewise, in *Caderno*, Figueiredo exposes her own “verdade” as opposed to her parents’ “mensagem” [“message”] about what happened in the colony after independence and which she never delivered (Figueiredo, *Caderno* 100). She confesses that, in presenting her own

nostalgic version of Portuguese colonialism in Mozambique and of her father's racist misdeeds in particular, she feels like she betrayed him (Figueiredo, *Caderno* 118). At the same time, she declares that she had to do it in order to be able to “levantar a cabeça” [“lift our heads up”], to free herself from the colonial guilt that confined her to silence (Figueiredo, *Caderno* 118; Figueiredo, *Notebook* 118). Additionally, her process of self-writing does not only function as an instrument of self-redemption, but also as a way through which the female narrative subject can eventually reconcile herself to her Mozambican past. Indeed, the quite enigmatic last chapter of the memoir, in which Figueiredo shifts to a second-person narrator thus seemingly addressing her split self, can be interpreted as the female protagonist's decision to overcome her “passado [quem] apodrece” [“past [which] is rotting”] and the guilt associated with it, and to go on and live one of her “muitas vidas” [“many lives”] (Figueiredo, *Caderno* 136; Figueiredo, *Notebook* 135). Hence, by giving an account of her colonial past and exposing the power relations associated with it and which were responsible for the “subjectivation” of her individuality, the narrator seems to free herself from them and to give her subjectivity the possibility to acquire a new configuration, as shown by the fact that she asks herself at the very end of the text: “Para onde vais, agora?” [“Where are you going, now?”] (Figueiredo, *Caderno* 136; Figueiredo, *Notebook* 135).

To sum up, in the three works analyzed here, the practice of autofictional writing can be interpreted as an act through which the female nomadic narrative subjects both convey an alternative way to represent women's experiences as well as a new version of themselves. From this point of view, their writing process can be compared to Foucault's definition of the Greek notebook called “hupomnēmata” which was germane to the shaping of the self writing it. Such an analogy is also supported by the fact that both forms of self-writing focus on the recollection

of fragments of discourses or “logoi” concerning the past. In particular, the autofictional texts considered here display such fragmentation not only on the level of content, but also in their stylistic aspects, thus articulating even further the theme of the transcultural nature of their writing subjects. Moreover, in giving an account of the forces impinging on their subjectivities, the narrators performatively react to them and succeed in exerting their own power. By overcoming the structures of domination contributing to their cultural in-betweenness, Cardinal, Duras and Figueiredo’s female narrators appear to move closer to a truer version of themselves.

## 5. CONCLUSION

In exposing and articulating the individual and composite nature of women's subjectivity, female autofiction can be regarded as a feminist form of self-writing. The autofictional narrative subject, in its appearing fragmented, multilayered and reconstructed through the recollection of personal memories, brings women's issues to the fore while focusing on specific and complex lived experiences. Bearing that in mind, this dissertation has proven that the female narrators of Cardinal's *Au pays de mes racines*, Duras's *L'amant* and Figueiredo's *Caderno de Memórias Coloniais* can be assimilated to Braidotti's model of feminist nomadic subjectivity. In particular, attention has been drawn to the mark of in-betweenness shared, to various extents, by all three narratives, as concerns both their style and content.

The female narrative subjects' transcultural status has then been interpreted as engendered by the power dynamics contributing to their "subjectivization" within their respective post/colonial contexts. Particular consideration has been given to the role played in this "subjectivization" process by the protagonists' parental figures: in the texts, they function as poles of attraction and repulsion with and from which the female narrators alternatively identify and detach themselves. Moreover, due to such troubled relationships with their parents, all three female subjects are shown having ambivalent feelings of desire towards the colony and its people. Because of this, the colonial nostalgia pervading Cardinal's and Figueiredo's texts in particular, can be seen as carrying a different connotation from the one adopted in French and Portuguese postcolonial literature, as it does not appear to be associated solely with colonist economic well-being and privileges, but also with their genuine love for the colony as well as

their dichotomous sense of self attached to it. In addition, the narrators' cultural in-betweenness has been presented as the catalyst prompting them to turn to the practice of autofictional writing so as to overcome their liminal status. In recollecting and relating their sparse memories, the female narrative subjects strive to shape their own individualities by using their voices not only to defy the structures of domination influencing them, but also to assert their own representational and power configurations.

To conclude, this research has demonstrated that female autofiction, in being in-between genres and thus enabling the authors to adopt composite and multilayered narrators and stylistic techniques, holds great relevance in terms of the creation of empowering ways of representing women's nomadic subjectivity. Such an effective intertwining of form and content has been observed in the comparative analysis of *Au pays de mes racines*, *L'amant* and *Caderno de Memórias Coloniais*, in which the concept of in-betweenness characterizing the style of the texts is also reflected in their subject matter, as they revolve around the protagonists' culturally hybrid experiences. As the scholarship on female autofiction's feminist potential is still embryonic, future research might further explore how such a writing category contributes to the construction of new approaches to the portrayal of gender difference in literature, and the extent to which this genre offers opportunities for the articulation of trauma in terms of self-reconfiguration.

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