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Writing Verdicts: French And Francophone Narratives Of Race And Racism

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Abstract

Inspired by Didier Eribon's La société comme verdict, this dissertation examines how the novelistic representation of racism and racialization in French-language texts can push back against a collective social verdict in France that stigmatizes non-white peoples as lesser and as other. Though discussing the existence of race is still taboo in France, I show that this stigmatization is in fact a racial verdict, or one that operates through racialization, as opposed to a verdict predicated on sexuality, gender, or class. To do so, I analyze the representation of racial hierarchies and the experience of racism in six novels written in French: Daniel Biyaoula's L'Impasse, Gisèle Pineau's L'Exil selon Julia, Leïla Sebbar's Le Chinois vert d'Afrique, Zahia Rahmani's "Musulman" roman, Cyril Bedel's Sale nègre, and Bessora's 53 cm. As I argue, these authors resist racial verdicts by writing about and examining the place of the ethnic minority individual in French society. In so doing they also issue counter verdicts that condemn society, individuals, and the state for their complicity in maintaining an unjust status quo. I first demonstrate that the racial hierarchies introduced during the colonial era to justify the exploitation and domination of non-white peoples continue to mark French society, operating as a collective societal verdict that marks those perceived as "colored" according to the sign of stigma. This judgment is first and foremost tied to phenotype—the inescapable physical body—but also includes fluid markers like religion, speech, dress and culture. Second, I examine this racial verdict through three lenses—"blackness," "arabness," and "whiteness"—interrogating both how the authors present its impact on society and individuals—, thus proving its very existence—and how they refute it. Once exposed, verdict is countered through the rehabilitation of stigmatized identities such as blackness, the indictment of the impulse to categorize individuals based on race, the condemnation of the French state for its exclusion of its own citizens, and the revelation that whiteness—the source of the racial hierarchy—is both colored and founded on emptiness.

Degree Type
Dissertation

Degree Name
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

Graduate Group
Romance Languages

First Advisor
Gerald Prince

Keywords
beur, blackness, Francophone literature, postcolonial studies, whiteness

WRITING VERDICTS: FRENCH AND FRANCOPHONE NARRATIVES OF RACE AND RACISM

Andrea Lloyd

A DISSERTATION

in

French

For the Graduate Group in Romance Languages

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2019

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ABSTRACT

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Andrea Lloyd

Professor Gerald J. Prince

Inspired by Didier Eribon's *La société comme verdict*, this dissertation examines how the novelistic representation of racism and racialization in French-language texts can push back against a collective social verdict in France that stigmatizes non-white peoples as lesser and as other. Though discussing the existence of race is still taboo in France, I show that this stigmatization is in fact a racial verdict, or one that operates through racialization, as opposed to a verdict predicated on sexuality, gender, or class. To do so, I analyze the representation of racial hierarchies and the experience of racism in six novels written in French: Daniel Biyaoula's *L'Impasse*, Gisèle Pineau's *L'Exil selon Julia*, Leïla Sebbar's *Le Chinois vert d'Afrique*, Zahia Rahmani's *"Musulman" roman*, Cyril Bedel's *Sale nègre*, and Bessora's *53 cm*. As I argue, these authors resist racial verdicts by writing about and examining the place of the ethnic minority individual in French society. In so doing they also issue counter verdicts that condemn society, individuals, and the state for their complicity in maintaining an unjust status quo. I first demonstrate that the racial hierarchies introduced during the colonial era to justify the exploitation and domination of non-white peoples continue to mark French society, operating as a collective societal verdict that marks those perceived as "colored" according to the sign of stigma. This judgment is first and foremost tied to phenotype–the inescapable physical body–but also includes fluid markers like religion, speech, dress and culture. Second, I examine this racial verdict through three lenses–"blackness," "arabness," and "whiteness"–interrogating both how the authors present its impact on society and individuals–, thus proving its very existence–and how they refute it. Once exposed, verdict is countered through the rehabilitation of stigmatized identities such as blackness, the indictment of the impulse to categorize individuals based on race, the condemnation of the French state for its exclusion of its own citizens, and the revelation that whiteness–the source of the racial hierarchy–is both colored and founded on emptiness.

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INTRODUCTION

In the humanities today, the concept that race is scientific and rooted in biology is largely dismissed. Instead, race is understood to be a social construct. This construct nonetheless continues to carry great weight in the fields of genetics and medicine, and arguably forms part of the architecture of power in contemporary society.[i] This is true not only of the United States, but also of Western Europe, where racial stereotypes that stigmatize non-white peoples endure in the popular imagination. Yet, as critics have noted, race denial is common across Europe, in part due to taboos stemming from the Holocaust, but also thanks to claims to colorblindness and a neutral attitude towards racial differences.[ii] As a result, a paradox arises wherein stigmatizing racialization[1] persists unacknowledged and un-critiqued, as to acknowledge its existence would be to admit the continuing existence of race as a social factor.[iii]

France, where it is illegal to collect census data based on ethnicity, religion or gender without the express permission of the individual, is no exception to this rule.[iv] In the aftermath of World War II, race became an "illegitimate" category associated with Anglo-Saxon culture, and it is only recently that discussing race and racism from an anti-racist standpoint has become possible in the public sphere.[v] Moreover, the mythology of the French Republic as an egalitarian, unified nation-state has long been contrasted with a vision of the United States as a "fragmented, ghetto-ized nation, torn apart by identity politics, whether in terms of gender, sexuality or race," where politically correct (PC) culture poses a threat to social cohesion.[vi] Nonetheless, since the emergence of black identity movements in France in the early 2000s, a new conversation has become possible, albeit one still fraught with tension.[vii] Though the older paradigm posits that race does not exist, and that therefore discussing racial categories reinforces racism, the newer paradigm aligns closely with the critical race studies of the anglophone world, and argues that race is not just an illusion, but instead is socially created via the systemic racialization of individuals.[viii] Thus there is a burgeoning discourse of race in France, one that newly includes the

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[1] Racialization refers to the ways in which race is given meaning, particularly through the marking of groups, individuals or cultural practices according to racial categories. See Cretton, "Performing whiteness," 847.

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category of whiteness, as cries of "anti-white racism" grow alongside cultural and economic anxieties exacerbated by the decline of blue-collar work and increased immigration.[ix]

Inspired by Didier Eribon's *La société comme verdict*, this dissertation accordingly examines how the novelistic representation of racism and racialization can push back against a collective social verdict in France that stigmatizes non-white peoples as lesser and as other. This is a racial verdict, or one that stigmatizes through racialization, as opposed to a verdict predicated on sexuality, gender, or class. I analyze this verdict in six novels written in French by authors classed either as French or as Francophone: Daniel Biyaoula's *L'Impasse*, Gisèle Pineau's *L'Exil selon Julia*, Leïla Sebbar's *Le Chinois vert d'Afrique*, Zahia Rahmani's *"Musulman" roman*, Cyril Bedel's *Sale nègre*, and Bessora's *53 cm*. I argue that these authors resist racial verdicts by writing about and examining the place of the ethnic minority individual in French society, and that in so doing they also issue counter verdicts that condemn society, individuals, and the state for their complicity in maintaining an unjust status quo. I first demonstrate that the racial hierarchies introduced during the colonial era to justify the exploitation and domination of non-white peoples continue to mark French society, operating as a collective societal verdict that marks those perceived as "colored" according to the sign of stigma. Second, I examine this racial verdict through three lenses–"blackness," "arabness," and "whiteness"–interrogating both how the authors present its impact on society and individuals, and how they refute it. Though blackness and arabness might be combined under the umbrella of brownness, I have chosen to separate them in this dissertation in order to examine how each category operates individually.

Though at least one series of studies conducted on racism in France characterizes blackness as including sub-Saharan Africans and North Africans under the same umbrella, for the purposes of this project I define blackness along more traditional lines of phenotypical markers such as skin color and sub-Saharan African descent.[x] Phenotype is not indicative of actual heritage, and yet as critical studies on blackness have shown, and as my first chapter will make clear, it remains the first marker of race in the eyes of French society, despite claims to color-blindness or the death of racism. Rather, national belonging, place of origin, language, and

heritage are effaced by the constant reminder that to be black, that is to say, of any noticeable degree of sub-Saharan African descent, is to be lesser than, and that even mixed heritage is not enough to efface that stigma.

I define arabness in turn as a marker of North African descent, or *perceived* North African descent. Like blackness, arabness relies on the visual phenotype, but it also has deep ties to Islam and France's colonial history in North Africa. For this reason, it is differentiated from blackness in the popular imaginary in France. As chapter one discusses, the figure of the Arab man and the Muslim were joined in the colonial imaginary to become the "*arabo-musulman*," a religious fanatic and savage sexual predator.[xi] Today, this idea of the *arabo-musulman* can be argued to encompass anyone marked as "Arab," where the link between Islam and North African descent forms a hybrid religious-ethnic category. Though I focus in this dissertation on North Africans read as Muslim, or the figure of the *arabo-musulman*, this does not meant that black Muslims in France are not also targeted for their faith. However, histories of colonization and immigration mean that the *arabo-musulman* holds a special weight in the popular imaginary.

Whiteness by contrast remains the center from which all other identities are defined; it is the locus of power and the standard of goodness against which racial Others are measured. As George Sefa Dei, Leeno Karumanchery and Nisha Karumanchery-Luik write in their critical book on race and racism, *Playing the Race Card: Exposing White Power and Privilege*, though "the White standard continues to be reified, imagined and repositioned as the one true gauge against which to measure and define difference, dysfunction and dissidence," ultimately whiteness can only exist in opposition to the racial Other.[xii] Whiteness is therefore at once a marker of skin, and a multifaceted marker of power and social or class status. In this way it is largely impenetrable to racialized others, albeit accessible in small ways for those who can "earn" their whiteness, through upward social mobility, marriage, or in rare instances, through the erasure of race, either through passing or social acceptance of previously denigrated groups. Whiteness is also uniquely invisible, at least for those who occupy its privileged seat of power. Where for people of color whiteness has never been invisible, due to their forced position at the negative racial pole, in

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popular discourse whiteness can easily go unremarked.[xiii] It is simply the norm that frames representations of racial Others. Moreover, in the European context whiteness is deeply tied to national identity and ideas of civilization and western superiority.[xiv] Whiteness has also increasingly become synonymous with "European," or in the French context with "French," just as blackness is associated with Africa.[xv] Here, whiteness is not necessarily only antithetical to blackness, but instead can be analyzed in opposition to other categories, such as "arabness," or in relation to class structure.

However, the continued existence of race-based stigma is not unique to mainland France, but is also readily visible in its overseas departments and former colonies in sub-Saharan Africa. Thus, though I will show how France is one of the originators of these racial hierarchies, this dissertation is not just about hexagonal France, but rather about accounts of race in Francophone contexts. Nonetheless, France continues to occupy a privileged seat of power in the Francophone world, as an economic and political power, as the dominant popular image of the French-speaking world, and, in the academic context, as the premier publisher of French-language texts and the main source of the French-language canon. For this reason, my dissertation studies narratives that primarily take place in mainland France.

The authors I study accordingly address the continued existence of racial hierarchies in hexagonal France and in its former colonies of Congo and Guadeloupe, revealing how race-based stigma–or society's racial verdict–harms individuals and society. As I argue, the act of writing about external verdicts and their internalized effects corrects a negative dominant narrative, both by pushing back against internalized shame and by contesting social hierarchies and categories. In writing, these authors thus refuse the social verdict of race. More than this though, they also condemn the societal verdict that gives race-based stigmas such power, in turn issuing what we might understand to be a counter-verdict that reveals the mythologies behind racial hierarchies and the ideals of the French Republic. Each novel reveals how individuals are judged, harmed, and excluded from French society based on phenotypical and cultural markers of race, but the authors use four different tactics to address the racial verdict: they rehabilitate

stigmatized identities by presenting a positive counterpoint; they criticize the impulse to categorize based on racial characteristics; they reveal the failures of the French nation-state to equally protect its citizens; and they reverse the racializing gaze and trouble whiteness itself.

This dissertation employs an interdisciplinary mix of critical race theory, history, sociology, and anthropology in order to interrogate its novelistic corpus. Rather than consider the novels as being divorced from their social milieus, I instead examine them in relation to their specific contexts, following a standard line of inquiry used in postcolonial studies. Each novel was chosen for its interrogation of the themes of race and/or racism, without consideration as to how the authors themselves are classed or identify. Nonetheless, the majority of the authors in my corpus are commonly considered "Francophone,"[2] belong to ethnic minorities, and have immigrant backgrounds with links to former French colonies. As such, their work is commonly studied in the realm of Francophone or postcolonial studies, often with particular attention given to autobiographical aspects or the political and social elements of their texts. By following a similar approach, my work admittedly risks contributing to the marginalization of these authors by marking their work as sociopolitical rather than as purely literary. This then might contribute to the separation of "French" literature, often studied for its literary aspects, from "Francophone" literature. However, I would argue that the texts I have chosen are deliberately engaged through their focus on the social impacts of racialization and racism, even as they play with language and narrative forms. In other words, they tackle society's racial verdict through a literary lens.

Eribon's notion of society as verdict is central to this argument and to this project, and bears careful examination. Though Eribon primarily addresses the internalization of stigmas surrounding class structure and homosexuality, his text also explores how social mechanisms perpetuate domination and the political order more generally, and acknowledges the existence of stigma and verdict for all "inferior" social groups, including racial minorities.[xvi] Whether internal or external, all social verdicts are defined by violence.[xvii] In this way, Eribon's text follows the work of

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[2] I use Francophone in this context as it is typically used in French literary studies: to distinguish authors from outside the metropole or of immigrant origin in France from "canonical" (largely white) writers.

Erving Goffman on stigma, as well as that of thinkers in critical race theory, anthropology, and French philosophy (such as the work of Frantz Fanon and the thinkers of negritude, or Foucault's *Surveiller et punir*), while also highlighting the social structures at play behind verdicts and their internal effects.

The external verdict can be understood as an outward judgment directed towards an individual who does not adhere to the dominant social order. In the Western context, they might be non-white, LGBT, female, non-Christian, poor, or disabled. The external verdict may take the form of legal discrimination, as in the case of slavery or the position of *indigènes* under colonization, or be expressed as an individual judgment such as a slur, but above all it takes the form of a widespread system, or a society acting in concert (knowingly and unknowingly) to uphold the dominant class through the oppression and negative stigmatization of minority groups.[xviii] Eribon gives the example of a father who disowned his 17 year old daughter as punishment for falling pregnant; his actions were not entirely his own but also due to the "*tribunal invisible*" that moderates the actions of both oppressed and oppressor alike.[xix] In other words, the fear of social judgment motivates the father's actions, much as Foucault's internalized Panopticon abets state control.

Turning to an example of race in contemporary France, research has indicated that nonwhite French graduates from elite French universities are 25 percent less likely to find jobs in the private sector compared to whites with the same qualifications.[xx] Following Eribon, this gap in employment can be understood to be the visible verdict, or result, stemming from entrenched discrimination. Moreover, although research conducted by *CRAN* also indicates that 81 percent of blacks surveyed are citizens (with black defined to include both North Africans and sub-Saharan Africans), the social verdict states otherwise, that they are foreigners.[xxi] Thus the external verdicts in France are not limited to racial slurs, but instead act as a multilevel system that tells nonwhite citizens that they cannot be French or as worthy as their white peers.

For society to act as verdict however, external judgments are not sufficient. The father cited above ostracized his daughter partly out of fear of social backlash, out of fear of the

judgment of his peers. Verdict is therefore both external–that judgment enacted upon another–and internal–the judgment directed inward. For those individuals who are stigmatized, shame–stemming from constant reminders of one's "inferiority"–and fear–of judgment, of hatred, of violence, for one's physical safety–both become internalized. Eribon argues that where shame can at times be overcome through the collective contestation of stigmas, through for example embracing slogans such as "Black is beautiful," fear is much more difficult to eradicate.[xxii] Significantly, while becoming conscious of the violence exerted by the social order on one's identity is a necessary step for a stigmatized individual to fight back against said stigma and violence, knowledge of verdicts and their impact does not necessarily lead to escape, as the social machine surpasses the individual level.[xxiii] Writing then, can become a tool of reappropriation, both for the individual and at the larger level of the social.[xxiv] In this way, writing about the racial verdict constitutes an act of resistance and rehabilitation, but does not necessarily lead to emancipation, just as understanding how one is racialized does not stop its violence. As we shall see, this paradox forms a key element of Biyaoula, Pineau and Rahmani's texts.

In addition to Eribon's sociology, this dissertation relies heavily on anthropological studies of race. In spite of anthropology's historical complicity in the construction of racist pseudosciences and systems of belief, the field of cultural anthropology today comprises a wealth of critical theory examining race and racism across history and nations. In particular, the writings of Clarence Gravlee on racism in scientific publications, Dorothy Roberts and Michael Yudell on the intersection of race and biology, Monique Scott on the power of museums to construct or deconstruct racial hierarchies, Paul Mullins on the intersection between archeology, urban planning and racism, and Amade M'Charek on the how race endures even when accepted as a constructed concept, each tackle the issue of race, albeit most typically from the angle of blackness or a black-white binary.[xxv]

The postcolonial and Francophone canon in turn includes the thinkers of negritude and *créolité*–Fanon, Senghor, Damas, Césaire, Glissant, Chamoiseau, Bernabé and Confiant–whose

work still informs Francophone literature today. However, the most recent evolutions in postcolonial Francophone studies, following the turn from Spivak and Bhabha's work on hybrid identities, have focused not explicitly on race and racialization in literature, but instead on trauma and memory, immigrant narratives, and the post-independence African nation-state and the politics of writing.[3] A great number of texts have in turn been published on Sartre, Fanon, Senghor, Césaire and their intersections with race, to say nothing of publications on negritude more generally.[xxvi]

Finally, numerous critics have tackled the legacies of the slave trade and colonialism and their intersections with the African or Black author writing in French: Odile Cazenave in *Afrique sur Seine: A New Generation of African Writers in Paris,* Abiola Irele in *The African Imagination: Literature in Africa and the Black Diaspora*, Benetta Jules-Rosette in *Black Paris: The African Writer's Landscape*, Christopher Miller in *The French Atlantic Triangle: Literature and Culture of the Slave Trade*, and Dominic Thomas in *Black France: Colonialism, Immigration, and Transnationalism*. Though the existence of racial categories is integral to these studies, with their shared focus on black or African identity, they center foremost on questions of diaspora, immigration, post-colonialism, and hybrid identities rather than the question of how racial categories are reinforced by a societal verdict. Rather, the bulk of research into racialization and race-making in France uses a critical sociological or historical lens to study real populations. For this reason my dissertation relies heavily on the work of sociologists, anthropologists, and historians. Nonetheless, Lydie Moudileno has examined the question of race in texts by Daniel Biyaoula and Henri Lopes in *Parades postcoloniales: La fabrication des identités dans le roman congolais* and again in relation to the question of authorship and publication in *Penser et écrire l'Afrique aujourd'hui*.

Thus, my project's examination of fictional narratives of racialization addresses a significant gap in the critical literature, particularly through its focus on the pole of whiteness. As

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[3] Consider for example the work of historians Gérard Noiriel and Benjamin Stora, or the project "Ecrire par devoir de mémoire" on the Rwandan genocide.

my chapter on whiteness will show, even work on albinism and passing tends to focus on blackness and the black-white divide. Though this project does not presume to make new claims about race, in applying Eribon's particular notion of society as verdict to an interdisciplinary comparative literature study, it furthers existing conversations about race, empire and writing while bridging the gap between French and Francophone literature and critical work in sociology and history.

In only considering three racial axes and the geographical regions of North Africa, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Caribbean, and in focusing whiteness on the lived experience of those of white "French" heritage, this dissertation admittedly ignores French Indochina, Madagascar, Mauritius, Réunion and French Polynesia, as well as the ways in which Eastern European and Southern European–e.g. Portuguese immigrants–have been racialized as non-Gallic and therefore less white. The choice to abstain from considering literatures coming from Asia and island territories is due to my own lack of expertise in Asian Studies and the relative dearth of literature coming from former French Indochina or non-Caribbean islands when compared to the triangle.[xxvii] Moreover, as chapter one will show, the racialization of black and brown ("Arab") bodies in the French media and sociopolitical spheres also occupies the largest space, without discounting racism directed towards other minority groups. This dissertation also fails to consider Judaism as a marker of non-whiteness, choosing instead to focus largely on the intersection between Islam and arabness.[4] In this case, the choice was made due to the racialization of North Africans as Arab Muslims, irrespective of actual religion or ethnic group, and the contemporary dominance of narratives on Islamic terrorism in France.

I have also chosen to focus on narratives of racist encounters set primarily within the Hexagon rather than also consider narratives set outside of France due to the need to narrow the scope of the project, and also to better understand how French society in particular operates as a society founded upon racial verdicts. However, exploring the specific cases of the Antilles, Sub-

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[4] Marlène Amar's *La femme sans tête* (1993) is nonetheless a strong account of how Algerian Jews are racialized yet also expected to assimilate into the fabric of French society.

Saharan Africa, and North Africa and how they might compare to one another or the case of France itself remains a potential avenue for a future continuation of this project. Additionally, I have chosen to study written narratives in the form of novels, thereby leaving out film and theatre, both important sources of social critiques. Like my narrow geographical focus, this in part serves the need to limit the scale of the project. Film and theatre also are unique disciplines that require different methodologies of critique than the novel, to say nothing of how their publics will differ. Film in particular has the capacity to reach large audiences, and can operate with the visual in a way that literature cannot. Indeed, given the role of phenotype in racialization, film has the potential to provide a powerful representation of the racial verdict.

However, my project works closely with the power of naming and words–*Noir*, *Arabe*, *Blanc*, *terroriste*–and I would argue that the novel is particularly effective at interrogating the power of language in a way that might be lost in the multi-sensory experience of film and theatre. Novels also allow the reader to see into the mind of a narrator, an effect that several of the authors in my corpus wield to better expose the psychological damage of racism. In this way, I would argue that the novel has a particular power–the power to touch imaginations but also to re-imagine popular discourses. As Éric Fassin writes regarding his invention of the word whiteness (*blanchitude*) as part of his work on race and sexuality in France, "part of our job is to provide concepts, i.e. a language with which to work both for social scientists and for activists."[xxviii] Similarly, the novel has the potential to put the racial verdict into words, thereby making it graspable.

Finally, I argue that my dissertation's focus on the issue of race and racialization in France–in spite of the inability to gather data based on race–is justified both due to France's colonial history and role in supporting racial hierarchies, and due to the universality of whiteness as a pole of power in the West. As my first chapter will show, despite the preponderance of American studies in critical race theory, and despite the difficulty of talking about race in France, particularly given the lack of official documentation (in contrast to the US census categories),

France does indeed have an enduring social system of racial classification.[5] Discussing the existence and impact of racial categories in France does not therefore constitute a misapplication of the US conception of race and racism to a different context. Rather, my dissertation contextualizes racialization in the specific context of France and its former colonies. I would furthermore argue that the hesitancy to discuss race and above all the difficulty of naming whiteness in France can and does contribute to an erasure of the discrimination suffered by minorities.

For this reason, the texts that I have chosen constitute a powerful counter-discourse that brings to race to light, much as work on memory can re-examine hidden pasts. Indeed, Éric Fassin's work on race and sexuality has revealed the resistance to talking about race in France, while simultaneously forcing a discussion that has brought new words into the discourse. Though conversations about whiteness and race are popular in English, this is not the case in France, and references to "whites" and the word "whiteness" in public discourse are a new development, in stark contrast to longstanding references to "blacks" and "Arabs".[xxix] Nonetheless, there is a growing discussion of race and racialization in France, though the population tends to divide along ethnic, political and generational lines.[xxx] Blacks are the most likely to adopt racial discourses, while whites are the most hostile. As Fassin argues, "whereas non-whites have always known that they were exposed to racism and racial discrimination, and thus have always known that they were racialized subjects, the privilege of whiteness is that you can ignore the fact that racialization is not just about 'them' (racialized others), but also about 'us'."[xxxi] Accordingly, in addressing the issue of race and racialization in a French context, the texts in my corpus push back against this erasure, and contribute to a burgeoning dialogue.

Chapter one traces the historical racialization of black and brown bodies in French thought, beginning with first usage of the word "race" and its subsequent development into a system of social classification that endures in the present day, where the terms *Noir* and *Arabe*

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[5] "In Switzerland, as in bordering nations, especially Germany and France, the idea of race and the word "race" are still associated with the Holocaust and considered to be "taboo"." See Cretton, "Performing whiteness, 844.

are frequently used in French discourse to mark individuals according to their perceived phenotypes. Though racial hierarchies were proposed and supported by thinkers across Europe, this chapter primarily focuses on the use of racial categories in France and its former colonies, as my corpus centers on those regions. I first trace the creation of "blackness" as a category, before next examining the creation of the "*arabo-musulman*," a category that ties together race and religion into the frightening specter of the potential Islamist terrorist. As this chapter shows, whiteness and a "white" French culture function as the norm against which racialized Others are measured. In both cases then, race is not just phenotype but is also inextricably linked to religion, culture and notions of citizenship and nationhood. Here I rely on the work of Amade M'Charek, who argues that race is multiple, and that an individual may be marked as non-white based on a number of categories outside of skin color. In this way, markers associated with non-whiteness such as Islamic faith, modes of dress, or the adoption of slang can effectively "darken" the skin of an individual, regardless of actual phenotype. Indeed, the multiplicity of race as stigma means that it is far more difficult to ascend to the ranks of whiteness than it is to fall from grace, given the many ways in which culture and religion can be used to racialize individuals. Racialization therefore primarily functions as a means of excluding groups from the privileged pole of whiteness. However, the physical body remains the first and primary marker of race. For those read as "black" in particular, this can constitute an insurmountable barrier that cannot be overcome by changing speech, dress, hair, or culture.

The final section of the chapter looks at the contemporary state of race relations and racialization in France, both from the side of the continued stigmatization of non-white Others, and from the side of resistance. I first draw on Didier Fassin's work with policing in the *banlieues* to argue that non-white others are still viewed through a neo-colonial lens that relies on tropes of savagery and violence to legitimize discrimination and marginalization. I then examine how the deliberate celebration of black identity by groups such as CRAN or websites devoted to black pride, and the valorization of stigmatized groups in hip-hop music and rap function as a cultural resistance against the continued presence of racism in France. As I argue, each moves race

beyond a simplistic vision of the body that relies on phenotype, instead tying together class, culture, and geography with race. In this way they highlight the complexity of racialized groups and trouble the simplistic categories commonly used by police and the media. Yet this chapter ultimately shows that race is nonetheless intimately tied to the physical body, to the visual and to cultural markers. As the following chapters reveal, literature–with its ability to name–in turn becomes a prime vehicle for undoing the work of racialization.

Chapter two examines the internalization of blackness as stigma in *L'Impasse* and *L'Exil selon Julia*. While chapter one largely focuses on how racialization operates at a society-wide level, this chapter instead focuses on the individual impact of verdict. In each text, the narrator is identified as *Noir* by outside observers and suffers repeated instances of anti-black racism in France and in its former colonies of Guadeloupe and Congo. Racism and its effects are no longer abstract and distant, but instead deeply affect–and hurt–the protagonists and those close to them. Indeed, each author makes clear the profound power of racist words and anti-black stigma to wound the psyche: Biyaoula's narrator suffers a psychological breakdown, while Pineau's narrator turns to writing–detailing her emotional trauma–as an escape. As this chapter shows, anti-black stigma rests on the socially constructed binary opposition between whiteness and blackness, where whiteness and its associated traits of beauty, intelligence, class, power, civilization, humanity cast blackness as the undesirable opposite. Yet, if blackness is equated with savagery, and a lack of intelligence and humanity, these authors' decision to portray the pain suffered by intelligent black individuals exposes the lie of the construct.

This chapter accordingly argues that in naming racism and its effects, Biyaoula and Pineau resist the dominant narrative that stigmatizes non-white others while also exposing the continued existence of racial hierarchies born of the colonial era. More than this, they decolonize blackness through their writing by humanizing the black subject. Biyaoula takes the negative experience of lived blackness to its extreme: his narrator, Joseph, ridiculed for his dark skin by his family in Congo and unable to find belonging in France, suffers a mental breakdown after failing to resist the imposition of blackness as stigma. In the end, he succumbs to society's view that

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whiteness is superior and that Africans are exotic. As I argue, he undergoes a colonization of his mind. In this way, Biyaoula highlights the insidious power of the social verdict and its very real damage. Though Pineau also makes the violence of racism and racialization clear, she offers a counterpoint to the negative view of blackness: through her memoire to Man Ya, or Julia, she effectively rehabilitates black and Creole culture and history. Moreover, she emphasizes the possibility of being French *and* Creole or Guadeloupean, effectively pushing back against the implicit link between Frenchness and whiteness.

Like chapter two, chapter three examines how the individual is impacted by the negative racialization of an entire group, but through the lens of the "arabness." This chapter accordingly examines Sebbar's *Le Chinois vert d'Afrique* and Rahmani's *"Musulman" roman*, focusing on the figure of the "*arabo-musulman*" and the ways in which it is tied to fears of Islamist terrorism and a belief that Muslims cannot be fully French citizens. The main intrigue of *Le Chinois vert d'Afrique* takes place during the wave of anti-Arab police and vigilante violence of the 1980s and centers on a police and vigilante-led hunt for a child of mixed North African and Vietnamese descent. In turn, *"Musulman" roman*, whose plot is in direct conversation with the events of 9/11 and subsequent invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, recounts the childhood and subsequent exile and flight of its narrator, who now finds herself imprisoned abroad in an American military camp alongside suspected terrorists. Different from blackness, the stigma of arabness is deeply tied to the rise of a modern "terrorism discourse," wherein the specter of violence enacted by revolutionary groups–and above all radical Islamist terrorists–marks all those perceived as North African (Muslim) as potential threats to French society and the state. More than just a social verdict, the reaction to arabness is marked by legal verdicts: the stripping of judicial protections and the unequal application of the rule of law on the basis of Muslim belief or suspected ties to Islamic terrorism.

Though both of these novels have been studied as part of the *beur* literary movement, and have strong themes of memory and immigration, I argue that these texts are distinctive due to their protagonists' refusal to accept the rights afforded by French citizenship. Rather, they

question the nature of terrorism, of citizenship and of belonging to the state in France, revealing "Frenchness" as both deeply multicultural–in stark contradiction to the mythology of a Gallic and unified France–and also as undesirable in the face of constant discrimination. Indeed, rather than fight for acceptance, the protagonists of each novel instead choose their own forms of exile–one within the boundaries of the state and one without–in an ironic rejection of the nation-state that denies them belonging as full citizens. In this way, Sebbar and Rahmani issue their own counter-verdict, condemning the race and religion-based refusal to allow "Arab-Muslims" full belonging in French society, much as Pineau and Biyaoula indict anti-Black racism. They also problematize the categories of "French" and of the *arabo-musulman*, highlighting the multifaceted and complex nature of each.

With their focus on the complex and three-dimensional nature of individuals marked according to the monolithic signs of "black" and "Arab," the texts studied in chapters two and three each highlight how the categorization of peoples according to their perceived ethnicity is problematic. However, my reading of these novels only obliquely addresses whiteness, focusing instead on how they deconstruct stigmatized categories to undo the racial verdict. Chapter four turns to whiteness itself, the pole of power from which the racial verdict is first issued, and examines how it can be challenged in turn. Though Bedel's *Sale nègre* and Bessora's *53 cm* each have afro-descendent protagonists and could accordingly be read as commentaries on the stigmatization of blackness or minority ethnicities, I argue that they also interrogate whiteness itself and expose it as a hollow construct.

Sale nègre is a first-person narrative by a white-passing black albino protagonist, who ascends into wealth and privilege thanks to his white skin, only to fall from grace as his blackness catches up to him in the form of his drug-addicted dark-skinned brother. *53 cm* in turn follows the many attempts by its mixed-race protagonist, Zara, to acquire a French *carte de séjour*, as she navigates the French bureaucracy and a societal and legal obsession with categorization and classification. In each case, the protagonist disturbs the presumed purity of whiteness through their very existence. The ease with which Bedel's white-skinned black narrator moves into the

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world of wealthy whites reveals the supreme fragility of whiteness: if a "black" man can pass as white–or even become white–due to the color of his skin and ability to culturally adapt, then the entire system of racial classification, based as it is on phenotype and "culture"–is revealed as empty and arbitrary. Indeed, whiteness is itself revealed as pure fiction, and thus its position at the top of the racial hierarchy is rendered illegitimate.

Bessora in turn ironically reverses the racializing gaze and openly critiques whiteness, thereby highlighting the degree to which the French obsession with categorization is tied to the racialization of non-white Others. I argue moreover that Bessora's careful deconstruction of these racial categories and their ties to Frenchness undoes whiteness itself. Here whiteness becomes a semi-universal construct that is not limited to the French nation, but rather informs identities and race-making across the West. Not only do these texts break down the black/white or white/Other binary that still informs notions of social value, Frenchness, and belonging, revealing it as a false construction, they also reveal how whiteness is also colored, thereby racializing it. This is perhaps the most radical means of interrogating the racial verdict, as it both categorizes whiteness and forces the reader to confront its existence as the invisible yet arbitrary norm.

[i] Gravlee, "Race, biology, and culture," 21-41; Roberts, *Fatal Invention*; Yudell, *Race Unmasked*.

[ii] Cretton, "Performing whiteness," 852.

[iii] Ibid.

[iv] France, *Loi n° 78-17,* https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/

[v] Fassin, "(Sexual) whiteness and national identity," 234; Fassin, "'Race', sexualities and the French public intellectual," 1471, 1474-75.

[vi] Fassin, "'Race', sexualities and the French public intellectual," 1472.

[vii] Ibid., 1474-75.

[viii] Ibid., 1475.

[ix] Fassin, "(Sexual) whiteness and national identity," 238-40.

[x] Reiter, *The Dialectics of Citizenship*, 117-18.

[xi] Hajjat and Mohammed, *Islamophobie*, 171.

[xii] Sefa et al., *Playing the Race Card*, 69.

[xiii] Cretton, "Performing whiteness," 848.

[xiv] Loftsdóttir, "Within a 'white' affective space," 453.

[xv] Baker, "Chromatic Ambivalence," 149; Fassin, "(Sexual) whiteness and national identity," 239-40.

[xvi] Eribon, *La société comme verdict*, 10, 47.

[xvii] Ibid., 37.

[xviii] Ibid., 37, 47, 50, 110, 140.

[xix] Ibid., 140.

[xx] Reiter, *The Dialectics of Citizenship*, 117-18.

[xxi] Ibid., 118.

[xxii] Eribon, *La société comme verdict*, 48-49.

[xxiii] Ibid., 37.

[xxiv] Ibid., 86, 89, 100.

[xxv] Gravlee, "Race, biology, and culture"; M'Charek, "Beyond Fact or Fiction"; Mullins and Jones, "Archaeologies of Race"; Roberts, *Fatal Invention*; Scott, "Writing the History of Humanity"; Yudell, *Race Unmasked*.

[xxvi] Ellena, "Remembering Fanon"; Forsdick and Murphy, *Postcolonial Thought*; Hiddleston, *Decolonising the Intellectual*; Judaken, *Race after Sartre*; Kesteloot, *Ecrivains noirs;* King, *Race, Culture*.

[xxvii] Moudileno, *Littératures africaines*, 6; Yeager, *The Vietnamese Novel in French*, 2.

[xxviii] Fassin, "'Race', sexualities and the French public intellectual," 1476.

[xxix] Fassin, "(Sexual) whiteness and national identity," 237.

[xxx] Fassin, "'Race', sexualities and the French public intellectual," 1476.

[xxxi] Ibid.

CHAPTER 1

BECOMING BLACK AND ARAB: A HISTORY OF RACE-MAKING IN THE FRANCOPHONE CONTEXT

Lack of census data notwithstanding, as this chapter will show, race does exist in France as a social category and has for hundreds of years, shaping economics and marketing, legal discourse and policing, and general ideas of culture. In France, race exists first in the most obvious sense of non-white bodies that are read as sub-Saharan African or North African or Asian–and marked accordingly as invasive, different, and above all non-French. Race in these instances exists in opposition to whiteness and Frenchness; it is non-whiteness and a complex set of phenotypical markers, geographical origins and cultural cues. As we shall see, in this way lack of intelligence becomes associated with sub-Saharan Africa and blackness, while residency in the *banlieues* is associated with violence and, in the case of North Africans, Islamic terrorism. In short, race can and does exist without official recognition or state sanction.

It instead comes into being in the marking of bodies according to color and religion, in the practice of policing, in the valuation of Frenchness as a rigidly (white) European heritage with strict linguistic and cultural rules. Studying race in the French context might raise suspicions of applying an American lens to a French context, therefore risking eliding the differing histories of the two states in favor of a facile comparison. However I would argue, in line with other scholars working on the concept of blackness in France,[6] that though it is hidden and characterized otherwise, race is integral to French history following the discovery of the New World, and that today this long history continues to inform and code debates on immigration, class, and religion.

This chapter thus proposes to examine how race can exist in a race-less state first by tracing the historical racialization of black and brown bodies in French thought, beginning with the

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[6] In their introduction to *Black France/France Noire: The History and Politics of Blackness*, editors Trica Keaton, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, and Tyler Stovall argue that "questions of race and blackness abound in French life and are not simply imported from the United States. Rather, they are very much rooted in European and French histories," and that moreover racially coded language is part and parcel of the French and Francophone canon: "Césaire's re-signifying of the epithet "nègre" (the "French N Word") both emerges from and reflects a history of race-making in France, inseparable from slavery and colonialism," 5.

invention of racial classifications and their expansion during the Enlightenment, to the continued

existence in the present day of the classifications of *Noir* and *Arabe*, referring primarily to afro-

descendant populations with roots in sub-Saharan and North Africa.[7] I will show that phenotype

endures as a marker for both groups, and is subsequently used to infer negative cultural

attributes. In the case of "Arabs," religion–Islam–also functions as a marker, despite the heavy

presence of Islam across sub-Saharan Africa. In all of these cases, whiteness and a "white"

French culture are the positive norms dictating what is seen as other and negative, nearly

invisible in their ubiquity and unquestioned position as the societal ideal. Moreover, in spite of the

continued importance of phenotype, race in France is not just skin color or hair or facial features,

but also class, culture and religion. In the final part of the chapter I will examine the contemporary

state of race and racialization in France, both from the side of negative stigma and from the side

of resistance, either through positive claiming of a subaltern identity (e.g. CRAN) or through

claiming Frenchness and calling out racism, as commonly seen in rap music.

Given the multiple ways in which race (examined here as blackness or Arabness) is

coded in France, Amade M'Charek's groundbreaking work on race is central to this chapter.[8]

Contrary to the popular binary that positions race as either biological fact or as social construct

and fiction, in her article, "Beyond Fact of Fiction: On the Materiality of Race in Practice,"

M'Charek instead argues that race is both multiple and relational. M'Charek first gives the

example of a Dutch mother whose white-skinned newborn was treated first as an emergency

case due to whitening around her lips during breastfeeding, and then as at risk for Down's

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[7] Though "Arab" traditionally refers to an ethnic category whose population spreads from the Middle East to North Africa, we will see that in the French context it has historically been used to refer to people of presumed North African descent, irrespective of geographical heritage or actual ethnicity. This emphasis on North Africa is primarily due to immigration patterns, with the vast majority of immigrants read in France as Arab and Muslim historically coming from former French colonies in the current countries of Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria. With the contemporary refugee crisis this immigration pattern is undergoing a shift that nonetheless has not changed the conflation of North African or Middle Eastern, Arabophone, Muslim, and Arab as interchangeable categories. See *France 24* and *eurostat*.

[8] M'Charek's work focuses in particular on the relationship between forensics, genetics, anthropology, and race or race-making, and how scientific tools can contribute to racialization and myths of nationhood.

syndrome due to the presence of a palmar crease. Whereas both are common in newborns, these markers–along with the paleness of the child's skin–were interpreted as pathological due to the darker skin of the mother, that is until the white German father arrived at the hospital. Even after this revelation and after giving the infant a clean bill of health, doctors prescribed her a dose of vitamin D meant for "very dark skin," in spite of the child's very white skin. In other words, race was conferred across generational lines, based not on the color of the actual individual–the child– or on that of her white father, but based instead on her mother's darker color.[xxxii] Thus non-whiteness–or the fact of being racially coded–can be tied to heredity beyond skin tone, leaving whiteness inaccessible even to those with white skin.

In her second example, M'Charek gives the case of a CT camera in Belgium that was used to identify two male youths who stabbed a man in a train station. Belgian media marked the boys as being clearly Moroccan based on their dark hair and choice of athletic wear. Both youths instead turned out to be Polish, but dominant discourses of crime and criminality in Belgium, along with stereotypes of dress, marked the young men as North African in the eyes of the public. Here, race existed along lines of perceived nationality, in spite of no clear phenotypical markers being visible in the fuzzy camera image.[xxxiii] As M'Charek remarks, "Race does not inhere in skin color, physical characteristics, a palmar crease, DNA, clothing, national identity, or the like. It is a configuration, an effect of relations between differences."[xxxiv] Otherwise stated, race is coded into being through interactions that ascribe a racial character based on a myriad of signals, from frizzy hair to dark skin to the use of *verlan* to Nike track pants.

Though these examples take place outside of France–albeit in a Francophone country in the case of Belgium–M'Charek's notion of the multiplicity of race is highly applicable to the French context. Indeed, it is due to this slippery and multiple nature of race that France can–and does– have racially coded peoples and racial discrimination without ever needing to legally affirm the existence of such categories as "white," "black" or "Arab." Thus North African or *maghrebin* (or rather being perceived as such) becomes a stand-in for Arab or *arabo-musulman*, while African or

Noir becomes a stand-in for afro-descendent peoples from sub-Saharan Africa and the Antilles. In both cases, these markers signify non-Frenchness, regardless of actual origin or nationality.

Noir, nègre, esclave: Inventing Race, Creating Blackness

Perhaps the most enduring and certainly the most consistently and widely stigmatized racial category, blackness has existed as a marker in French thought since before the Enlightenment, reaching its peak as a classification during the era of slavery. Though the contemporary French government officially eschews race as a legal category, French thinkers were at the forefront of the move to classify mankind along racial lines. The word race originally referred to the noble class, with the first known use of the term in French dating to around 1500.[xxxv] Race at this time was not tied to skin color or physical characteristics. Rather it referred to inherited character traits that would be passed on through good breeding, but could also be bettered through training. Consequently, race was both class and culture, an idea that endures in contemporary classifications, as we shall see in the final section. However, race in the 16th century was nonetheless tied to a strict family lineage, a fact that also seems to have influenced the later evolutions of race as a concept.[xxxvi] We might think back to M'Charek's discussion of the infant, for example. Significantly, it was with the emergence of the slave trade that the modern connotation of race came into being, with the development of classification systems that were used to justify the domination of colonized peoples up through and beyond the colonial era. Pap Ndiaye places the emergence of the standard racial hierarchy in the seventeenth century, coinciding with the development of sugar plantations, whose mass exploitation of humans as capital encouraged explanation and justification. The answer was to argue that Europeans were inherently superior, though the reasons given for this superiority–biology, culture, religion, climate–differed.

To this end, François Bernier first defined four races in the *Journal des Savants* in 1684: Africans, Asians, and Samoeds were marked according to a combination of physical features and skin color. However, Egyptians and Indians were exempt from the African category, as Bernier argued that they were tanned, not naturally dark. Although his ideas were of little influence at the

time, Bernier is significant because he shifted the discourse on race to physical features and fixed attributes. Moreover, and more importantly, the fourth race, Europeans, was defined not by physical features, but by opposition to the other three.[xxxvii] In essence, whiteness was–and still is–the norm against which all else was marked as Other or deviant. In its first incarnation, the European race was consequently inherently nebulous and undefined, except as the position of normalcy, as well as uncritical of itself as a category.

The eighteenth century also saw the French thinker Buffon and the Swedish intellectual Linneaus classify races according to skin color–red, white, black, and yellow–while German scholar Johann Friedrich Blumenbach divided humans according to five races, once again tied to color–American/red, Caucasian/white, Ethiopian/black, Malay/brown, Mongol/yellow.[xxxviii] Buffon also posited that racial differences were due to climate, a significant development due to the later appearance of varied arguments regarding the inferiority of non-white races, arguments that would point to culture, climate or biology.[xxxix] Two points stand out here. One, race as a concept has deep roots in European and specifically French thinking; it is therefore not an American invention but one native to the history of European geopolitical dominance. Two, the rise of racial categories tied together geographical origin, skin color and, to a degree, nationality. As we shall see, the latter point endures today in the common assumption that non-white peoples in France are foreign.

By the eighteenth century, the words *Noir*, *nègre* and *esclave* were near synonyms in French.[xl] This blurring of words is significant not just because it marks dark-skinned afro-descendent peoples as the slave class, but also due to the way in which it marks perceived skin color according to the negative sign of slavery. Yet, I would also argue that the slippage between these terms can operate in the reverse direction; to be marked as a slave, or in the contemporary moment as a member of the lower class or as an immigrant, might "darken" one's skin in the eye of the beholder. As the following section on arabness will demonstrate, this theory does indeed hold. Recalling M'Charek's, in spite of ideologies that mark race as fixed and biological, race must constantly be invented.

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Furthermore, blackness and slavery were (and are) also linguistically tied to the Antilles, due to the preponderance of sugar plantations, where *esclave*, *Noir*, and *Antillais* became interchangeable terms. Yet, as Françoise Vergès succinctly states in "Les troubles de la mémoire. Traité négrière, esclavage et écriture de l'histoire,": "L'esclavage ne concernerait alors que *ces Noirs*, alors que dans l'océan Indien, la population servile ne fut jamais exclusivement africaine."[xli] It is thus clear that those racialized as black are held to a different standard: the condition of slavery effaces other markers of race such as geographical origin while tying together all those whose bodies (phenotypes) are read as black. In this way, a fair-skinned afro-descendant Martinican can be tied to dark-skinned Africans, and racialized as a potential slave. As chapter two will make clear, this condition of blackness–its ties to a slavery based on dehumanization–is its first and most powerful stigma, a racial verdict that erases even birthright and genetic claims to Frenchness.

As previously noted, slavery necessitated the hierarchy of races in order to justify its existence. Perhaps less remarked upon in the French context however is the existence–even prevalence–of racist discourse during the Enlightenment. Race does not–and cannot–officially exist in France today due to its commitment to the Enlightenment ideals of *liberté*, *egalité*, and *fraternité*. Nevertheless, even great thinkers such as Voltaire and Montesquieu, otherwise noted for their critiques of intolerance, were not free from classing Africans as the lowest of the low, although in the case of the former I would argue that it was likely satire. In fact, anti-black and anti-African sentiment is perhaps the most constant feature of the inventions and re-inventions of race. It was during this time that the explanation of dark skin as being Cain's punishment was first posited, thus positioning black Africans as sinners (and murderers).[xlii] Their servitude could then be justified as due penance for their ancestral crime. Biology and fixed traits also became key to the idea of race at this time, in a departure from the sixteenth century belief that defined race as nobility and good upbringing.[9]

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[9] I would nonetheless argue that cultural racism–based in a belief in cultural superiority–contains vestiges of the 16th century link between "race" and upbringing, This is particularly evident in

Let us first consider one excerpt from Voltaire's *Essai sur les moeurs*, referring to Africans: "Leurs yeux ronds, leur nez épaté, leurs lèvres toujours grosses, leurs oreilles différemment figurées, la laine de leur tête, la mesure même de leur intelligence, mettent entre eux et les autres espèces d'hommes des différences prodigieuses." Voltaire goes on to argue that Africans cannot even be men, because if they were Europe would not in fact be Christian as it claims to be. Though Odile Tobner reads this passage as explicitly racist in her book, *Du racisme français: quatre siècles de négrophobie*, I would argue that the link of the inhumanity of Africans with a clearly satirical commentary on religion might instead place this passage in the same vein as Voltaire's virulent satire in texts like *Candide* and his critiques of religious intolerance in *Traité sur la tolérance*. However, Tobner also remarks that Voltaire's text was not read as parody at the time, and that it was instead taken to be wisdom and truth.[xliii] This then raises the question of how even satire or comedy meant to subvert racist assumptions may have unintended consequences, particularly when it is misread as fact or having a basis in some fundamental truth.[10]

Additionally, there are explicitly racist passages in *L'Esprit des lois* and *Traité de métaphysique*.[xliv] The proliferation of polygenesis–the theory that humans did not have a common ancestor but rather consist of unique species–a theory that is at the base of the most virulent strains of racism comparing Africans to apes–is also heavily linked to Voltaire, thus foreshadowing the scientific racism of the 19th and early 20th centuries.[xlv] It is no coincidence that this theory's growth coincided with the spread of the sugar plantation system, responsible for the rapid increase in the wealth of France and other European nations. Regardless of authorial intention, I would argue that Voltaire therefore became a highly influential voice in the history of racial classification and dehumanization of Africans. More significantly, Montesquieu in turn argued in his *Défense de l'esprit des lois* that climate played a role in the evolution of races,

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discourses surrounding parenting, such as the trope of the African-American "absentee" father, and the critique of youth behavior in poverty-stricken areas like the *banlieues*.
[10] Chapter Two further examines the power of racist comedy in relation to marketing of the Bamboula cookies by St. Michel in the 1980s.

whilst also justifying the slave trade in his *Pensées* with nine arguments, two economic, two religious and political, and five based on skin color.[xlvi] Here, we have an Enlightenment thinker who explicitly justified racial classifications and economic exploitation.

For all its illumination, the Enlightenment, at the heart of the idea of the modern French Republic and the base of many modern conceptions of liberty and human rights, is also inextricably tied to the proliferation of racist hierarchies meant to justify the economic exploitation that led to the rise of Europe as a global power. This means that the racial hierarchy has been legitimized since its early conception by influential philosophy, but is also tied to the myth of the French nation. Considering this history, perhaps it should not be surprising then that studying the history and contemporary status of race is taboo in France (and in the West more generally), tied as they are to the creation of the modern global political and economic order, and to the vision of France as an enlightened progressive country. To address the roots of the racial hierarchy would mean reckoning with the less savory aspects of the Enlightenment, and therefore with Frenchness itself.

The era of high colonialism during the nineteenth century saw the rise of greatly influential French thinkers on race, whose works promoted scientific and biological racism, including Ernest Renan, Gustave Le Bon–his works were translated into ten languages and sold hundreds of thousands of copies–and Arthur de Gobineau–who achieved his greatest success outside of France and is considered to be one of the earliest proponents of scientific racism.[xlvii] From arguing that humans shared a common ancestor, the common discourse now held that humans were different species (echoing Voltaire), thus justifying even stricter racial hierarchies in the colonies. If race were biological and insurmountable, the code of the *indigénat,* would be justified in refusing economic advancement to colonized peoples, as was the case.[xlviii] This argument was given greater weight by its preponderance in the French scientific community.[xlix]

Furthermore, Cuvier's work on Sarah Baartman, the Venus Hottentot, reinforced images of African women as being physically and sexually different from their white European counterparts. Of the sixteen pages in Cuvier's autopsy report of Baartman, nine were devoted to

her genitals, and only one to her brain.[i] Through extrapolation, the genitalia and buttocks of black women in general were classed as excessive and ape-like.[11] Importantly, hyper-developed genitalia and buttocks were seen as evidence of an inverse brain development.[li] Accordingly the scientific community's work on women–including that of the French scientific community–was paramount to the ideologies that linked Africans to apes. As Robyn Wiegman notes moreover in *American Anatomies: Theorizing Race and Gender*, the discourse on the black female and her sexuality was placed in opposition to whiteness: "the focus on the black female body as the site for investigating the sexuality of the "race" reinforced discourses of feminine beauty as paradigmatically white, so thoroughly negative was the black female's sexual characterization."[lii]

This standard of beauty as "white" has had an enduring impact on beauty campaigns marketed towards black women around the world, and is heavily present in the literary works to be studied in chapter two, where the desire for whiter skin and "white" hair informs social conduct. The racial verdict therefore not only relies on judging minority individuals for their visible phenotype, but also relies on an elevation of the white ideal, and an internalization of stigma by the racialized individual. The social influence of a figure like Cuvier–and therefore the impact of his work on Baartman–must also be highlighted. Enormously popular and widely read literary works of the 19th century, Jules Verne's *Voyage au centre de la terre*, Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, Emile Zola's *Germinal*, Honoré de Balzac's *La Peau de chagrin*, Elie Berthet's *Les Catacombes de Paris*, and Gaston Leroux's *La Double vie de Théophraste Longuet*, all openly referenced Cuvier's research on geological layers and race, as well as Darwin's theories on evolution, in order to portray social classes as layers, where the lower classes were typically savage, or worse monstrous and even sub-human, associated explicitly with darkness and the underground, and implicitly or explicitly with non-valued races.

Meanwhile the aggressive sexual behavior of tailless apes and their large penis size was held to also be true of black men, seen as the "closest cousins" to apes.[liii] As I will show in the

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[11] This question of sizing is key to Bessora's *53 centimètres* studied in chapter four: the protagonist is repeatedly misclassified, as her small buttocks size means she deviates from the standard expected of an afro-descendant woman.

section on contemporary culture, these stereotypes endure today and inform treatment of non-white residents–particularly young men–of the Paris *banlieues*. Therefore race–in this instance taking the form of blackness–was inextricably tied to a voyeuristic consumption of corporeality and sexuality, the latter of which would also hold true for the characterization of North Africans. That is to say, physicality or physical form–an innate quality–works in conjunction with perceived–not necessarily real–modes of behavior to create the idea of race.

Race as a popular discourse perhaps had its greatest reach during the Third Republic, between human zoos, the *jardin d'Acclimatation*, colonial expositions and the use of trademarks and postmarks.[12] This is supported by Dana Hale's careful examination of domestically produced trademarks during the Third Republic in "French Images of Race on Product Trademarks during the Third Republic." As we shall see, images that promote the racial verdict and dominant racial hierarchy were extremely popular during the height of French colonialism, but their influence continues today, thereby ensuring their impregnation into the French imagination. Indeed, business owners adopted the common hierarchy of races popularized by Le Bon that separated humans into four categories based primarily on physical characteristics: white, yellow, red, black, "in descending order of intelligence, beauty, culture, and moral qualities."[liv] Within LeBon's system Arabs were "inferior Caucasians", or more typically a separate, fifth race.[lv] These trademarks accordingly portrayed colonial subjects both as they were perceived and in the roles they were expected to fill: agricultural laborers, servants, entertainers and craftsmen. For the most part these images were exoticized and familiar reproductions of stereotypes already heavily reproduced in the press, colonial fairs, and other ethnographic spectacles. North Africans were the most widely represented, but black Africans were the second most heavily represented group. Yet their existence on everyday household items is unique.[lvi]

Importantly, a sociological distinction between Antilleans and Africans already existed at the time, with the former largely educated middle class and the latter mainly laborers.[lvii] Yet, the

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[12] See *Zoos humains et exhibitions coloniales*, eds. Pascal Blanchard et al., for an in-depth history of the traveling colonial expositions, human zoos and the great world's fairs that brought the "colonies" to France during the height of the colonial era.

representation of black peoples in the trademarks reveals how geographical and national origin is effaced in favor of negative stereotypes applied to blackness as a class.[13] Hundreds of registered trademarks between 1886 and 1940 represented *noirs* or *nègres*, with black individuals portrayed as children (therefore childlike), soldiers (tirailleurs sénégalais), entertainers, and laborers for whites. Plantation scenes–thus highlighting the laborers of the Antilles–were common before 1900, but later the imagery switched to domestic servitude.[lviii] Significantly, dark-colored products like chocolate and coffee portrayed blackness as a positive trait, usually in conjunction with images of workers ("Africans" and "mulattoes") harvesting crops and serving the final products in wealthy European households.[lix] In contrast to the existence of an educated, albeit small, black populace in France, I would argue that these trademarks therefore reinforced the idea that to be black is to be servile, uneducated, and in service of whites. Blackness in these instances is also clearly tied to stereotyped beliefs about music, as well as a lack of decorum and civility. It is consequently more than skin, but also culture and intellect.

Furthermore, products used for cleaning–soaps, bleaches, and other household cleaners–defined blackness as a negative trait that needed to be effaced.[14] As Hale remarks, these companies promulgated the idea that black skin was evidence of the curse of Cham–not unlike the Cain descent theory–and that a powerful enough cleaner might "bleach a black person white." Given the contemporary trade in skin-whitening products, the legacy of these trademarks is significant.[15] Finally, the *tirailleur sénégalais*–most famously in the Banania breakfast cereal, which ironically originated in Nicaragua–was represented in ten trademarks from 1915-1925. In each of these trademarks the soldier was childlike, in keeping with the idea of the *bon noir*. Later

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[13] Frantz Fanon's remarks on his discovery of his own blackness upon arriving in France for the first time echo the rupture between this class division and the reality of being "noir" in France. See *Peau noire, masques blancs*, 127.

[14] This idea in particular is essential to the study of texts on blackness and whiteness in chapters two and four.

[15] See Hassane, "L'Internet des diasporas noires aux Etats-Unis, en Grande-Bretagne et en France," for a discussion of internet marketplaces directed at black communities. Skin whitening products for women and models with whitened skin are particularly abundant. Skin whitening is also a trope in francophone literature set in Africa or in the African diaspora community. See for example *Bleu, blanc, rouge* by Alain Mabanckou or *L'Impasse* and *Agonies* by Daniel Biyaoula.

images of both soldiers and entertainers tempered their strengths with comedy, highlighting the "infantile" nature of their subjects.[lx] Consequently, we can see that "good" blackness–in opposition to the ugly black skin that needed to be bleached white–is positioned as servitude, an inferior and thus unthreatening intellect, comedy, and childishness. By opposition whiteness is linked to beauty, power, strength, intelligence and superiority.

Though this dissertation does not focus on French Indochina and the racial category of "yellow" or "Asian", it should nonetheless be noted that trademarks of French Indochina–albeit the least popular category–did exist, generally portraying all peoples from East Asia as a generic, mild mannered, hardworking race with stereotypical Chinese or Japanese traits. Significantly, these trademarks were only used for regional products such as rice, teas, or cloth, whereas black and Arab trademarks were ubiquitous and often unrelated to the product.[lxi] This preoccupation with "Arab" and "Black" or "*Noir*" is likely in part related to the stronger history of immigration from North and sub-Saharan Africa. I would argue that the very ubiquity of the North African and black trademarks has influenced their continued use today as racialized categories in the French public sphere. Indeed, the proliferation of racist imagery on ordinary objects points to heavy saturation of the public mind with racial categories, to the point that they evolved from pure spectacle–like the human zoo–to something mundane and unremarkable. The unremarkable however, with its capacity to pass unnoticed, is arguably harder to change or eradicate than that which is striking. This is key to the racial verdict's power: so long as race remains ubiquitous but invisible, stigmas can be and are reproduced. Finally, it must be noted that in spreading these images, businesses and the popular sphere created the racial categories they presumed to exist, cementing together stereotypes of phenotype, social class, and behavior.

Overt biological racism directed towards blacks continued through the first half of the twentieth century, with the 1907 creation of the "Commission permanente pour l'étude des métis," whose goal was to study the physical, intellectual and moral capacities of mixed race individuals in order to determine once and for all whether the *métis* was in fact sterile like a mule, lesser than the white man, greater than the black man, doomed to degenerescence, or a fully functioning

human.[lxii] One might also consider the works of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, "*Les Fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures* (1910), *La Mentalité primitive* (1922), and *L'Âme primitive* (1927), the latter of which was extremely popular.[lxiii] World War II, and the shame of the Vichy regime largely put an end to the attractiveness of biological racism, but it would be a mistake to think that racialized discourse has since disappeared. Rather, there has merely been a shift in favor of discourses of cultural superiority.

The role of the image and visual culture in the twentieth century up to the contemporary era should also not be understated. The fetishization of African-American stars like Josephine Baker allowed on the one hand for a positive portrayal of blackness, yet the French fascination with jazz and black culture might also be viewed with a degree of suspicion. As Pap Ndiaye remarks in *La condition noire: essai sur une minorité française*, the presence of "negrophilia" in French culture was likely motivated in part by the search for the "primitive," in what Gilroy refers to as cultural insiderism, or the uncritical infatuation with and fetishization of cultural difference.[lxiv] Indeed, a study conducted in the early nineties by Leora Auslander and Thomas Holt, "Sambo in Paris: Race and Racism in the Iconography of the Everyday," found that racist objects depicting Africans and African-Americans were ubiquitous across the Paris landscape, in front of cafés, in shop windows and above all in well-to-do *arrondissements*; the findings surprised both the researchers and their French colleagues, suggesting that racialized imagery and stereotyping discourses can escape conscious scrutiny.[lxv] Curio shops, *marché aux puces*, antiques dealers and fairs all sold antiques with either racialized depictions of blacks–meaning exaggerated stereotyped features that are not necessarily negative and racist, but merely fetishistic–or overtly racist depictions.[lxvi]

For the most part the objects in question derived from the American minstrel tradition, depicting servile individuals in "unambiguously racist representations of blacks as dumb, servile, and comic."[lxvii] Genuine French and European objects were more varied in their representations. They include stereotyped images of *tirailleurs* and servants, with bug-eyes, thick lips and bodily contortions, as well as reproductions of Josephine Baker and jazz musicians.[lxviii] The co-existence

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of these varied objects on the same market–from wholly racist caricatures to figurines of musicians–thus suggests that Ndiaye is not wrong in his assessment of the popularity of African-American musicians.[lxix] Rather, the starkly differing treatment of black Americans in France and their French counterparts suggests that there is an exotic otherness about Americans that engenders positive portrayals.[16] This adoration of American jazz and other music forms associated with blackness seems to spill over to black culture more generally in France: it is often assumed that blacks in France are experts in jazz and "black" music.[lxx] Meanwhile, depictions of North African and "moors" also exist, but are rarer. These are often ethnographic and depict "traditional" activities such as carrying water. Like the sub-Saharan African and African-American depictions, the North African figures range from merely racialized to overtly racist and grotesque representations of turbaned grimacing figures with large gold rings through noses and ears, holding lamps, supporting tables on their backs, and carrying rum sets.[lxxi]

That these statuettes and figurines exist is no surprise. Yet, the researchers found that demand for the *most* racist American and European depictions was so high as to exceed supply, creating a lively market of reproductions.[lxxii] What is more, the American objects–with their unambiguously racist representations, were the most popular item type and the most ubiquitous. Whereas the same objects are often collected in the United States by African-Americans seeking to re-appropriate their history, this was not found to be the case in France; rather buyers were white French collectors, raising the question of why these objects are popular.[lxxiii] Nostalgia and an enduring fascination for American jazz culture could well be a motivating factor, but the consumption of racist art, and its presence on the streets should nonetheless raise questions due to the impact of the visual on ideas of race.

Indeed, as we have seen, the history of race classifications in France has a strong basis in the visual, from skin color to hair to facial features, to genitals, to infantilizing reproductions of soldiers and workers on trademarks. Robyn Wiegman notes, referring to the US race context, that

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[16] See *Black Europe and the African Diaspora,* edited by Darlene Clark Hine, Trica Danielle Keaton, and Stephen Small, for a discussion of Josephine Baker and the differing treatment of black Americans and those French citizens racialized as Other.

"the visible has a long, contested, and highly contradictory role as the primary vehicle for making race "real" in the United States. Its function, to cite the body as the inevitable locus of "being," depends on a series of bodily fictions assumed to unproblematically reflect the natural meaning of flesh."[lxxiv] I would argue that this holds true for the creation of race in the French context as well, and that the heavy trade in racist depictions of blacks and North Africans allows for continued conflation of old stereotypes and the living inhabitants of France. Blackness is thus steeped in a long tradition of anti-black racism, a tradition that is deeply French and intertwined with the Enlightenment, the Third Republic, colonialism and the creation of the contemporary French state. To be black is to be associated with inferior intellect, a savage nature, aggressive sexuality, and being less human than all other races. To be black is also to be the antithesis of white, the antithesis of value, power, beauty and creation.

From North African to *Arabo-musulman*

Whereas blackness has its roots in the slave trade and the first creation of racial hierarchies in Europe, the category of arabness–or what I am naming the racialization of North Africans in France as Arab and Muslim–is directly tied to the colonial conquest of Algeria and the ensuing "occupation" of North Africa. Here again, negative "racial" markers were invented as justification for oppression, and tied once more to social status, certain phenotypical markers, and–differently from blackness–to Islamic faith. Indeed, following the imposition of colonial rule in North Africa, race was explicitly tied to religion and indigeneity. Muslims were distinguished from Jews and Europeans, [lxxv] with Muslims further divided according to Arab or Kabyle ethnicity. Berbers more generally in Morocco, and Kabyles specifically in Algeria, were more valorized than their Arab counterparts, as they were seen as less religious, sedentary (and therefore could adapt to European-style cities), more intelligent, hardworking and potentially assimilable.[lxxvi]

Arabs were said by contrast to be fanatical, violent, promiscuous, irrational, tyrannical and barbaric, in contrast to the progressivism, rationality, and freedom of French civilization.[lxxvii] Therefore colonialism was considered both necessary and noble, as it would bring progress, enlightenment and modernity.[lxxviii] These tropes bear a good deal of similarity to those said to

represent black Africans, but it is important to note the presence of religious fanaticism as a characteristic, as this trait exists independently from biology. I would argue therefore that the racialization of North Africans relied more heavily on cultural rather than biological racism, an idea that is supported by the difficulty of categorizing North Africans under the four-type racial system.

Accordingly, Islamic faith was viewed as the greatest negative characteristics of Arabs. As Peter Dunwoodies notes in his article, "Assimilation, Cultural Identity, and Permissible Deviance in Francophone Algerian Writing of the Interwar Years", "Islam was, for the Europeans, not only the founding factor of Arab (and, to a lesser extent, Berber) identity, but the primary cause of Arab "backwardness" and the key obstacle to successful assimilation."[lxxix] As historian and colonial administrator of Algeria André Servier stated in 1923:

> The only thing the Arabs ever invented is their religion. And this religion is, precisely, the main obstacle between them and us…Islam…is a homeland; and if the religious nationalism in which every Muslim brain is steeped has not yet been able to pose a threat to humanity…it's because the peoples linked by it have fallen, as a result of its rigid dogma…into such a state of decrepitude and misery that they are incapable of fighting against the material forces placed at the disposal of Western civilization by science and progress[lxxx]

In this estimate, Muslims are not merely fanatics irrationally opposed to progress and enlightenment, but also constitute a monolithic *Arab* unity that is intrinsically tied to the idea of a nation, outside of actual national boundaries. Moreover, they are also potential threats to humanity as a whole, a nefarious presence that must be carefully controlled. Legally classed apart along racial-religious lines, under colonialism the Arab man therefore became a mythic *arabo-musulman*, an Arab-Muslim man, in popular culture ranging from the press, to the colonial Expositions, to postcards, to songs and Orientalist literature. This man was–not unlike the black man in American and French thought–a sexual predator, savage or barbaric and also deceitful.[lxxxi] We might add to this list Delacroix and contemporaries' paintings of harems and North Africa and colonial postcards. The Arab woman by contrast was simultaneously viewed as a sensual treat for the eyes of the male western gaze and yet oppressed by the Arab man.[lxxxii]

We can also return here to Dana Hale's examination of trademarks. As previously stated, North Africans were the most commonly represented group from 1886 to 1940. The images used

evoked classical oriental scenes from *The 1001 Arabian Nights*: turbaned men smoking in Moorish courtyards, women lounging in salons, and Arabs on camelback trekking across deserts. Hale notes moreover that, "Images of the Orient and Africa meshed, making it impossible to pinpoint the specific location of each scene from the collection of trademarks in this category."[lxxxiii] Thus the North Africa stamped on products as ordinary as Camembert was also the Middle East, in a conflation of exotic images taken from Arab, Berber, Turkish and other cultures. Significantly, the gender binary reappears in these images: women were once again sensual and submissive, whereas men were belligerent and violent, cast as Muslim zealots, warriors, colonial Spahis and Zouaves, and sheiks, Kroumirs, and caliphs.[lxxxiv] As we shall see, these tropes of fanaticism, violence and oppression are particularly relevant to the status of "Arabs" in France today.

Though the French also colonized Morocco and Tunisia, and though much of Francophone West Africa is Muslim, the special case of Algeria has had perhaps the greatest influence on historical and contemporary visions of the *arabo-musulman*. Algeria attained special status as a region of France in 1834 (as opposed to being classed as a protectorate like Morocco), meaning that its four million Muslim majority could no longer be classed as foreigners but instead earned the title "subject." However they still were not French citizens and were further distanced by the continued use of the terms *indigène* and *musulman*, in an effort to imply non-nationality.[lxxxv] Even when citizenship was granted to Algerian subjects in 1865, it was only on the condition that Muslims renounce their faith and completely assimilate to the French model of life.[lxxxvi] Accordingly, one could not be wholly French and also be Muslim, an idea that persists in the contemporary era.

Furthermore, for those few Algerians who did renounce faith and culture, the term *musulman* remained applicable on the basis of ethnicity. The court of Algiers in 1903 indeed argued that the term "Muslim" did not have a strictly religious sense; instead it stated, "*il est manifeste que le terme « musulman » n'a pas un sens purement confessionnel, mais qu'il désigne au contraire l'ensemble des individus d'origine musulmane, qui, n'ayant point été admis au droit de cité, ont nécessairement conserve leur statut personnel musulman, sans qu'il y ait lieu*

de distinguer s'ils appartiennent ou non au culte mahométan."[lxxxvii] Thus, just as one might be Jewish by birth but non-practicing and secular, French colonialism created a distinction between Muslim by religion and the "Islamic race", or those who were Muslim by birth, by virtue of their ethnicity and culture.

This distinction becomes particularly important in the modern context due to France's immigration history. Large-scale immigration to France from its former colonies–with North Africa providing the largest numbers–began approximately a century ago, during World War I, as the *metropole* called for laborers in its factories.[lxxxviii] Moreover, hundreds of thousands of troops were conscripted from the colonies, leading to an influx of over 250,000 North Africans to France as workers and soldiers.[lxxxix] These immigrants were for the most part Algerians, because their special status of French national made travel papers unnecessary.[xc] Yet, when *tirailleurs musulmans* returning from the fronts of Europe fought for naturalization, colonists opposing this move argued along racial lines. In 1919, *L'écho d'Alger* warned that French culture would be "drowned in the mass" and that the French race (understood as Gallic and white) would not only be "submerged in a new race", but also "absorbed by the primitive race."[xci] North Africans were thus explicitly named as a separate race, and also as a threat, in contrast to the infantilized black African solider or Antillean servant. Immigration continued to take place nonetheless, largely due to France's continued demands for factory workers to replace lost bodies. Though some would return home, many stayed, and by 1954 France counted some 227,000 North African immigrants, of which 93% were Algerian.[xcii] This last point is particularly relevant, because though Algerians had a special status of citizen from 1947 onwards (in contrast to indigenous peoples in other French colonies),[xciii] 1954 also marks the outbreak of the Algerian War, whose violence would lead to a resurgence of marking the Arab under the dual signs of Islam and threat.

As a result of the exceptional violence of this war and the whitewashing of the French army's own brutality, the figure of the Muslim in France became at once a stand-in for Algerian specifically, and for Arab.[xciv] According to the French police–headed by Maurice Papon–the FLN (*Front de Libération Nationale*) was responsible for a series of terrorist attacks on police

officers.[xcv] Moreover, Muslims were as a group held responsible for the choice of the FLN to undergo an armed conflict, leading to a link between "Muslim" and "enemy" and" threat."[xcvi] Consequently, recalling our negative associations of the male Arab-Muslim, we can now add terrorist and enemy of the French state to the list.[17] This ignores the reality that many Algerians were forced to participate in the FLN under threat of death, the fact that the majority of Algerian immigrants were not militants, and the systemic brutalization of persons read as Algerian at the hands of the police.[xcvii] Negative stereotypes predominated nonetheless. In fact, a 1966 study found that Algerians (the majority of the immigrant population) were considered deceitful, lazy, aggressive, dirty, vicious, cruel, easily manipulated and of bad character, a list that is nearly identical to that applied to Arabs more generally nearly a century before.[xcviii]

The 1979 revolution in Iran, and later the Gulf War, led to an outpouring of fear about the supposed rise of Islam in France that continues today, leading to the increased targeting of "Muslim" communities in the public and judicial spheres. To take one example, in response to the 1979 revolution, newspapers published images of North African and sub-Saharan workers praying in mosques, as well as caricatures depicting cars covered with Islamic veils.[xcix] In the first case, sub-Saharan immigrants were also included in fears over Islam (we might also recall the shared stereotypes of aggression between "blacks" and "Arabs"). In this way the Iranian revolution enveloped all Muslims, irrespective of culture, nationality, language or ethnicity. And yet the predominant discourse continues to conflate Arab, Muslim and North African.[c] At the same time, previously vilified Portuguese immigrants earned their "whiteness" and therefore their assimilability and right to become French, as media and political discourse shifted its main focus to immigrants coming from former colonies, and above all "Muslims" and "Arabs."[ci] This at once teaches us that whiteness can expand its borders, but that it does so in response to a perceived threat posed by a greater difference. It also reveals that European and white have become synonymous, a point to which I will return in chapter four, to the greater exclusion of those with ancestry outside the continent.

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[17] This link is key to the works studied in chapter three.

Yet, where originally it was assumed that immigrant workers would simply leave France, their children proved otherwise, and even organized a March for Equality and Against Racism in 1983.[cii] The "Beur generation" thus claimed a French identity in opposition to its longstanding classification as non-French Others, thereby putting into question the enduring colonial racial hierarchy and valorization of France as a white Gallic country whose indigenous subjects could not be French due to skin color and/or religion. As Islam has been seen as a menace since the founding of the colonies, Algerians–representatives of the Arab-Muslim terrorist–once again found themselves at the epicenter of the "problem of immigration." Thomas Deltombe argues that this was a resurgence of the specter of the Algerian War in his study of the relationship between the media and the construction of the Islamic Other–*L'Islam imaginaire. La construction médiatique de l'islamophobie en France, 1975-2005–.*[ciii] Let us recall however that Algerians earned French citizenship in 1947. Therefore the mass Algerian "immigration" to France that took place in the years before independence was in legal terms the mere movement of French citizens from one region of the state to another. The question was nonetheless reframed along religious lines, in a shift away from overt racism against Arabs as a (perceived) ethnicity, though as we have seen Muslim, Arab, and North African are synonymous terms in France.

In 1987, the Chirac's government in fact ordered a "Commission des Sages"–Commission of Experts–to study the "immigrant problem" (primarily from North Africa) and the "Muslim problem," thereby once again conflating ethnicity and religion. The commission's findings ruled that Muslims–and by extension North Africans–cannot be integrated, because Islam is irreconcilable with French society.[civ] As one expert, Bruno Etienne, stated: "Les musulmans ne sont pas intégrables…Ma réponse est effectivement que c'est très difficile pour l'islam de domestiquer la sphère du privé qui, dans notre société, est séparée de la sphère du public." As Abdellali Hajjat and Marwan Mohammed note in their critical book on the ties between the French state and Islamophobia, *Islamophobie. Comment les élites françaises fabriquent le « problème musulman »*, this argument implies that Islam always seeks to regulate the lives of *all* people, including non-Muslims, and that therefore "Muslims" in France would necessarily act as a

monolithic block and attempt to overthrow the secular Republic.[cv] This commission thus conflated

one version of political Islam with all expressions of the religion, and attributed political Islam to all

peoples assumed to be of Muslim origin. Lest it be assumed that the Commission was an outlier

and unrepresentative of general views, my third chapter will show that this attitude continues to

inform the reception of those perceived as Muslim. Indeed, both Rahmani and Sebbar focus

heavily on the Muslim as "threat."

       Significantly, the Commission–while arguing that Muslim/North African immigrants posed

a threat to French *laïcité*–also gave the following statements: "des historiens insistent sur la

résistance que l'islam a opposée à la civilisation chrétienne au cours des siècles" and "il ne s'agit

pas de nier les conflits que peuvent provoquer la vie commune et la participation à la même unité

nationale de populations dont l'histoire et les traditions ne sont pas les mêmes."[cvi] The irony of

arguing that the secular French Republic must be protected on the basis of its Christian heritage

is self-evident, but it importantly undermines the very argument that Islam poses a threat because

of its inability to respect *laïcité* and separate the public (national) and private (personal) spheres.

If there can be no state religion in France, this argument's claim that there is in fact a French

religion–Christianity–that continues to permeate the public sphere in the guise of history and

tradition, if true, would mean that French culture is already in violation of *laïcité*, the exact

accusation leveled at Islam. Considering that of the eleven public holidays in France, six are

associated with the Christian religion–Christmas, *La Toussaint*, *L'Ascension*, Easter, *Lundi de

Pentecôte*, *l'Assomption*–the Commission's arguments against Islam's threat to *laïcité* are

particularly specious.

       The recourse to history and tradition instead reveals the neo-colonialist mentality

underpinning these arguments. If Islam, starkly represented in the bodies of France's former

North African subjects, now French citizens, poses a threat to French soil, it is in part because the

presence of citizens who defy the assimilationist ideal highlights the failure of colonialism's

civilizing mission as well as the loss of the colonies. Recall that the price of citizenship for

Algerians was a renunciation of Islamic faith; French Muslims push back against this history by

their very existence. Yet sociologists in 1987 estimated that only five percent of the "Muslim" population was practicing.[cvii] The Commission even admitted as much, making their insistence on the religious threat even more baffling: "il faut toutefois constater que la majorité des enfants d'immigrés *d'origine musulmane* (ou Français musulmans), peu pratiquants, ne connaissent guère l'Islam."[cviii] What we have here then is a couching of the racial ideology of the threatening Muslim and Arab in republican terms, or what Haijat and Mohammed have termed a "respectable racism."[cix] This serves to legitimize racialization and the racial verdict while providing a patriotic bulwark against criticism.

Following these lines, news media in the 1980s also highlighted the "Islamic menace," not least as a way of boosting ratings, throughout the subsequent years, thereby enshrining the Arab-Algerian-Muslim as threat in the minds of the public.[cx] The Gulf War in particular gave a focal point to these presentations, wherein the conflict was presented as a Holy War between the (Christian) West and the Muslim world. The "Arab-Muslim" community thus was presented yet again as a potential locus of sympathy for the enemy, and became a regular target of sidewalk interviews, surveys and reports testing its "attachment" and integration into France, in a clear instance of profiling along racial lines.[cxi] In one such street interview, Jean-Marie Calvada informed a woman of French-Moroccan origins that she was wrong to feel French. Rather, she must have an identity conflict along lines of nationality and above all because, as he explained to her: "votre confession, et votre culture, est musulmane. Si je puis dire, entre guillemets, elle est du mauvais côté : elle est du côté de celui auquel appartient l'Irak, qui est l'adversaire de la coalition."[cxii] Morocco was in fact an ally of France along with Saudi Arabia.[cxiii] Furthermore, the presenter made a racially coded assumption that the woman must be Muslim by virtue of her origins, and implied that to be culturally and historically Muslim makes one an enemy of France and by extension the West. Implicit in that idea is the racialized notion of the dangerous Arab. This is a clear example of verdict in action: the woman was publically stigmatized, linked to enemy combatants, and denied belonging to France.

The final development in the melding of Arab, North African, and Muslim, was the

codification of the "Muslim" and "immigrant" problem as a war between the West, or France, and the Arab, best represented by the young North African male of the *banlieue*, placed in adamant opposition to the "Republic" and its ideals of freedom and secularism. The chain TF1 in particular, headed by Etienne Mougeotte from 1987 to 2007, has given great credence to this inflammatory rhetoric over the years. Openly supportive of the "immigrant" community's belonging to France, Mougeotte is on record privately referring to those of North African origins as "ratons" and "bougnoules."[cxiv] They are also tied to disease, harking to colonial notions of cultural superiority and the role of the *mission civilisatrice* as a beacon of progress. Consider for example the title of the 1994 program, "Musulmans, la contamination."[cxv]

Today this translates into gendered and paternalistic discussions of the *banlieues*, where four North African characters, two male and two female, are seen as opposing sides of the fight for the soul of the Republic. The negative characters are defined by their Islamic faith, while the positive male and female are those who deny their Muslim origins or proclaim their love of *laïcité*, assimilating completely to the white French ideal.[cxvi] Just as under the colonial system citizenship for Algerians was contingent on becoming "white" culturally, today to be accepted as French while North African requires openly and constantly denying one's origins. As we will see in chapter three, this issue forms the crux of Rahmani's text.

By contrast, the negative male is the *garçon arabe*, the male Arab youth, the inheritor of the savage Arab-Muslim of old, who not only corrupts his black compatriots, or acolytes (recalling once again the infantilization of blacks in the racial sytem), but is also an anti-Semitic, homophobic, oppressor of women, and Muslim fanatic who will rape women who refuse to wear the veil.[cxvii] To be a practicing Muslim male, or rather, to be read as such, is to be a potential Islamist terrorist. It should be noted that these *garçons arabes* are the youths who choose to embrace their immigrant origins as a means of asserting their identity in the face of racism and systemic discrimination in the job market, housing, and policing.[18] In so doing, they threaten the

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[18] North and Sub-Saharan Africans are 2.5 times more likely to be unemployed than whites, with a 20% unemployment rate, and with all other factors being equal are 25% less likely to receive a

French Republic by positing a different means of being French that is not modeled on whiteness

or Christianity. Opposed to this we have the (submissive) veiled female, who is forced to wear

Islamic dress by the males of the *banlieue* under threat of rape or death,[cxviii] and who therefore

must be protected by the French state, an argument that has been used to justify headscarf,

niqab and burkini bans.[cxix] Thus the state limits the religious freedom of women in the name of

protecting those same women from a nameless figure. As my third chapter will show, this is a

legal verdict that allows the state to assert its power over vulnerable subjects, who are vulnerable

precisely because they are stigmatized by society.

However, those most likely to suffer discrimination on the basis of Islamic faith are

women who wear a headscarf; in 2012, 80% of reported harassment and hate crimes directed

towards Muslims targeted veiled women.[cxx] Significantly, native white French women who have

converted to Islam have reported being viewed under a different racial light and told to return to

their countries, the same harassment leveled at their black and brown peers.[cxxi] Thus markers of

Islamic faith can act to efface the whiteness of one's skin, effectively turning it "brown." Different

from blackness then, which is deeply tied to biological racism, arabness is above all defined by

cultural racism, though the importance of skin color and facial features in marking people as Arab

should not be overlooked. Moreover, I would argue that the way in which skin can be "darkened"

through cultural and religious markers points both to the slippery nature of race itself, and the

ways in which whiteness works to protect itself as pure in order to maintain its status. As we shall

see in chapter four however, the purity of whiteness, and by extension whiteness' power, is easily

threatened by those who resist categories, like the white French women who wear headscarves,

or the young men in the *banlieues* who actively defy adhering to the image of the ideal citizen.

To be racialized as Arab in contemporary France is therefore to be read along cultural

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job offer in the private sector; job applicants are required to provide photos with their CV's making
discrimination on the base of race particularly easy. Furthermore, discrimination against non-
whites is notoriously widespread in housing, further enshrining segregation based on skin color.
Due to the illegality of using race, ethnic or religious data to address inequalities, there is little to
no recourse to the law for victims of discrimination. See Reiter, *The Dialectics of Citizenship*, 93-
95.

and religious lines as well as according to perceived phenotype, not unlike how one might be read as black based on origin, culture, hair type or facial features in spite of having pale skin. In both instances, these are devalorized statuses placed in opposition to the white French Republic and Frenchness itself. To return once more to M'Charek, race is relational and inherently fluid. One might even say that race–or the act of racializing–constitutes a socially constructed verdict whose attributes intertwine phenotype, cultural and social cues, as media, political, legal and business narratives wind together to determine what French society *is* and can be, to the exclusion of non-"white" peoples.

Contemporary State: Race In France

The result of these long histories is in some ways unsurprising. As Achille Mbembe argues in "Necropolitics," the colony functions as a place where a "war without end" is enacted on the bodies of the colonized in the service of "peace" and "civilization."[cxxii] In what could be understood as a boomerang of Mbembe's unending colonial war to the metropole, this war has continued interminably on French soil from the start of immigration. The presence of devalued brown and black bodies, and above all "Muslims," from the former colonies is met with hostility and rejection at best and brutality at worst. I would argue that this continued violence has in fact created a state like that of an autoimmune disorder, wherein the French state reads its own citizens as foreign bodies. Verdict in this case takes the form of state-sponsored aggression towards its own citizens, a topic to which I will return in chapter three.

Indeed, Didier Fassin's ethnographic work in the Paris *banlieues*–detailed in *La Force de l'ordre: Une anthropologie de la police des quartiers*–paints a chilling portrait of the enduring strength of race-making and the societal verdicts levied against those read as non-white and non-French. Fassin spent time with the BAC (brigade anti-criminalité) from May 2005 to June 2007, and also had first-hand experience with the CRS (riot police). Fassin's work reveals a break between the perception of the *banlieues* as violence and crime-ridden zones and the reality of the daily work of the BAC officers, as well as a troubling pattern of brutality and instigation on the part of the officers that is tinged by an admiration for the Front National and a generalized and

racialized disgust for the inhabitants of the quarters they patrol.

Three significant patterns emerge from the text. One, during their patrols BAC and CRS officers regularly stop youths–primarily young men–who are walking, waiting for the bus, or going about their daily business, in order to ask for identity papers. Alternatively, inhabitants are accosted for suspected crimes, regardless of whether they match the descriptions of the suspects.[cxxiii] Two, the officers frequently use these routine stops to threaten the youths with arrest. In fact, such confrontations often culminate with the officers taking the youths to the police station, where they will be interrogated for hours and entered into a database, even if innocent. These confrontations frequently turn violent, sometimes shockingly so; significantly, the greater injuries are typically suffered by the citizens, not the officers, and this violence is often used as an excuse to raid residences of non-suspects.[19] Three, racial slurs and war terminology characterize the speech of BAC members both when discussing the citizens they are meant to protect and during their confrontations. Residents are referred to as "ennemis," "bandes de racaille," "sauvages," "singes," "bêtes," polygamists, and more.[cxxiv] Meanwhile, the *banlieue* itself is a dangerous "jungle" and a hostile war-zone that must be cleaned "au Kärcher", where there is an ongoing "guerre sans merci contre la criminalité" "guerre contre les trafiquants" and "guerre aux bandes violentes."[cxxv]

Given this terminology and the representation of the *banlieues* in the media, one might think that they are indeed dangerous. Even residents, when polled, agreed that crime is much worse in the *banlieue* than in Paris or elsewhere in France. Yet, crime data taken from the Ministry of the Interior and generalized investigations show otherwise. Crimes in the *zones urbaines* (ZU) are either not higher or only marginally higher than those in other urban areas, while violent crime such as homicide is steadily declining. In fact both attacks against persons

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[19] Pages 68-69 give a detailed description of one such confrontation, during which a crowd of youths and later adults formed around officers confronting a blind youth. Reinforcements were called in and violence broke out; one officer placed a Flash-Ball gun to the temple of a nine year-old child, while another group of officers broke into an apartment, leaving a girl doing homework hospitalized with a broken arm and concussion. By contrast, the only injury suffered by an officer was an ankle sprain, and yet police reports claimed that officers suffered *graves blessures* and violence on the part of residents.

and crimes targeting belongings have seen major declines.[cxxvi] When compared to Paris specifically, crime rates in the *banlieues* are equivalent or lower.[cxxvii]

And yet, political and media coverage of the *banlieues* insists that these are major centers of crime, juvenile delinquency and security issues, leading to a policy of "prevention" via heavy police presence, in what we might consider a corollary to broken-windows policing in the United States. As Fassin remarks, this combination of policy and discourse has created a circular reasoning–and indeed a vicious circle of events–, where "le déploiement spectaculaire de la force publique signifiait le danger présumé et justifiait les pratiques d'exception."[cxxviii] Moreover, this leads to a sort of contamination, where the populations of the *banlieue* are tainted by the perception of crime, and therefore become (racialized) criminals in the eyes of the police and the nation, thus creating a reality where perceptions based in fictions become fact. The role of representation in verdict then cannot be overstated.

Fassin indeed notes that the majority of officers surveyed consider the *banlieue* to be dangerous, their inhabitants to be enemies, and the situation to be one of war. On the one hand, this is partly due to their training, during which "les enseignants leur dépeignaient presque systématiquement la banlieue comme un monde hostile."[cxxix] The role of media and generalized perceptions is also key. However, racial demographics play a vital role in this training and the pre-conceived notions held by trainees. Significantly, around eighty percent of BAC officers come from rural areas or small cities and towns in the provinces, and have little, if any, first-hand knowledge of or experience in Paris and its suburbs.[cxxx] Additionally, they are predominantly white, due in part to "multiple forms" of dissuasion that occur during the recruitment process for minorities. While certain police forces have agents coming from the DOM-TOM, officers of Maghrebi or sub-Saharan African origin are rare.[cxxxi] This in turn allows for an easily charged atmosphere of tribalism based on skin color and beliefs about Frenchness. During training sessions teachers in fact explicitly use images historically tied to skin color, highlighting an us versus them mentality, with statements such as "Mon pauvre, tu vas voir, là-bas, c'est la jungle !" and "Tu vas te retrouver chez les sauvages."[cxxxii] Youths read as black and Arab are also

commonly referred to as "bâtards."

Given that the *banlieues* are heavily populated by peoples of North African and sub-Saharan African descent, such phrases cannot be read separate from the history of race-making in France and its colonies. As Fassin succinctly states, "la racialisation est en effet un élément essentiel de la relation entre les policiers et les habitants. Elle repose à la fois sur la différence objective des origines des uns et des autres et plus encore sur la différence subjective instituée à travers les représentations mutuelles." In fact, those BAC officers who possess the most extreme beliefs and display the greatest aggression towards minorities are the most likely to use terminology such as "bâtard" and "sauvage," thus justifying the use of excessive force through a systematic dehumanization of the populations of the suburbs. Moreover, though French police forces in general are left-leaning politically, those officers who support the Front National (FN) and the extreme right, as well as open admirers of the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), are predominantly found in the BAC.[cxxxiii] This is significant due to the xenophobic and anti-immigrant platform of the FN and the racist nature of the KKK. Read in this context, the use of dehumanizing terms to refer to non-white youths who are presumed to be immigrants takes on a new tone, and reveals the way in which racialization and citizenship status, or notions of national belonging, are intertwined.

Thinking back to M'Charek, the contemporary state of the *banlieue* is one in which the objective reality of crime and contemporary French notions of race as non-existent differ from the concrete reality, which, though ironically born of subjective perceptions, traps the people living in the *banlieue* under the racialized signs of violence, savagery, crime and non-belonging, signs that are intimately tied to the body and cultural expressions such as dress and language. Indeed, in what we might consider a racial verdict in legal form, the laws of January 1980 and February 1981 legalizing identity checks have institutionalized the face and skin color as markers of presumed alterity.[cxxxiv] The BAC is responsible in turn for investigating drug infractions (ILS) and infractions of immigration law (ILE). When quotas need to be filled, patrols perform identity checks. Significantly, the most xenophobic officers prefer to work on ILE detail.[cxxxv] The end result is an environment where the BAC is feared by inhabitants, due to their known reputation of

aggravating incidents and record of abuses,[cxxxvi] an environment where race is mapped onto the bodies of French citizens and immigrants alike, based above all on skin color, or *faciès.* In the *banlieues*, the societal verdict as passed down by the BAC states that to be French is to be white.

It must be noted that an ethnographer's account and eyewitness accounts more generally must always be treated with a degree of reservation. However, the ethnographer's typical difficulty is getting populations to act as though they are not under observation. In this case, Fassin reports officers censoring vulgar–and racist–speech upon his entering the room, as well as taking down a sign paying tribute to the Ku Klux Klan.[cxxxvii] Though he admittedly primarily spent time with one BAC unit, in light of tensions in the *banlieues*, data on prison populations, and the nature of policing tactics and identity checks across the suburbs, it is not unreasonable to assume they represent part of a larger whole. Moreover, as Fassin himself notes, war imagery characterizes BAC badges as a whole, indicating that an aggressive attitude towards the *banlieues* is emblematic of this particular police force.[cxxxviii] Finally, police brutality directed towards afro-descendent populations is a well-known issue, treated in literature across geographic regions.[20]

Furthermore, to return to the notion of contagion, Mamadou Diouf's article, "The Lost Territories of the Republic," explores how xenophobia and targeting of immigrants and their descendents permeates other facets of French society. Recalling the BAC's call to cleanse the *banlieues*–evoking dirtiness and disease–Diouf remarks that, "Migrants, new generations of French citizens of color, and in particular those of Islamic confession are perceived, indeed *constituted* simultaneously, as a demographic, health, cultural, and religious threat that multiplies like vermin, at a vertiginous speed." These populations are also seen as literal carriers of diseases, as a public health threat, due to their origin in less developed countries.[cxxxix] Therefore, though biological racism faded in the last century, I would argue that France grapples today with a form of cultural racism that is also intertwined with questions of class. As Ndiaye notes, cultural

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[20] See for example Camp and Heatherton, *Policing the planet: why the policing crisis led to black lives matter*, and Roberts, *Killing the black body: race, reproduction, and the meaning of liberty*.

racism, like biological racism "tend à fétichiser les différences en les considérant comme irréductibles et comme justifiant une politique de séparation spatiale, de mise à bonne distance, par peur d'une contamination des corps individuels et du corps de la Nation."[cxl] Indeed, the term *corps*, body, is key to these varied forms of racialization: the physical body of the non-white Other inspires fear due to the imagined threat to the physical white body–the bodies of white women are at risk of rape by black men and Arabs, while whiteness itself is threatened by mixing of lineages– and also the metaphorical body of a nation-state founded on a racial hierarchy and a vision of French culture as "white."

The creation of the *Ministère de l'Immigration, de l'Intégration, de l'Identité Nationale et du Développement Solidaire* (Ministry of Immigration and National Identity), with its titular implications tying French nationality and identity to a policy of assimilation, gives credence to this idea. Diouf considers moreover that this ministry recalls the civilizing mission, which is directly tied to a racialized view of the world.[cxli] The fear of religious fundamentalism–specifically, the fear of Islamic fundamentalism–further highlights the way in which race has become cultural in France. French nationality is predicated on western culture, and so for immigrants and their descendants the physical body as well as everything that constitutes cultural identity and heritage–dress, religion, food, history, language–mark them apart. As Diouf argues, the result is that "they are fundamentally nothing more than "black," Arab, or Asian" in the eyes of France, because to be French is to be culturally "white."[cxlii] We will return to this notion at length in chapter four. Yet skin color that denotes difference in heritage belies the Enlightenment universalist tradition, creating a universe where belonging is impossible for those who are racialized as non-white. This is indeed the colonial war without end, yet the victims are France's own citizens.

We can conclude then that blackness and Arabness and other racial categories do exist in contemporary France, in defiance of colorblind ideals. That these categories are fundamentally imagined–to quote Ndiaye, "Les Noirs sont noirs parce qu'on les range dans une catégorie raciale spécifique, bref, ils sont noirs parce qu'on les tient pour tels"[cxliii]–does not preclude their existence. Just as importantly, how an individual self-identifies–as black, or Arab, or Antillean or

Jewish or French–does not change society's reception or the fact of being racialized. Likewise, due to race's many meanings, outward appearance–e.g. skin color or phenotype–does not save those who might otherwise pass as white from being racialized as non-white. We can think of the white woman racialized as Muslim (and North African) when she wears a headscarf or, to borrow Ndiaye's example, an afro-descendent albino whose name or hair will mark them according to the sign of blackness.[cxliv] Indeed, the latter example forms the basis of Bedel's novel studied in chapter four: his protagonist shaves his hair to efface his blackness and pass as white, due to his understanding that in spite of his white skin, other features will inevitable mark him as black.

Significantly, Ndiaye's work reveals that many who are racialized as "Noir" do not identify as such; in turn many who consider themselves black do so because society proclaims them to be, placing into question simultaneously their French citizenship.[cxlv] However, the vast majority of interviewees insisted on their Frenchness, or at minimum, that being French was a part of their identity.[cxlvi] This racialization of individuals regardless of their identification is a prime example of Eribon's external verdict: race comes into being for non-white others because it is imposed upon them. The interviewees' insistence on their Frenchness is moreover notable as it both undermines the assumption that Frenchness is whiteness, while also highlighting the ever-present need for non-whites to proclaim their belonging to the nation-state. In this way, both those who refuse to identify as black and those who do so while acknowledging that this identity is imposed resist the racial verdict that marks them as different: they reveal its existence by naming racialization and question its foundation by proclaiming their Frenchness. And yet, those who consider themselves black because they are marked as such remind us that the racial verdict is also internal.

Identities and Revendication: Writing Back

As we shall see, given the at times tenuous link between verifiable truth and belief, cultural productions in music, film and literature that use fiction or creative renditions of lived realities to push back against racialization in France have a particular power, a power that I would

argue is based in part in their ability to co-opt the power of imagery and stereotype to create a new lens through which to see the world.

Indeed, a number of scholars have investigated the question of whether a "Black France" exists.[21] Elisabeth Mudimbe-Boyi examines this question, or the existence of a "France noire," in "Black France: Myth or Reality?," concluding that the term in French is ambiguous. In the first sense, it is an underground France; in the second it designates French territories overseas populated by afro-descendent peoples.[cxlvii] This second view fits well with the colonial history and the continued contemporary pattern of racializing non-white peoples as outsiders. Indeed, Mudimbe-Boyi remarks that book titles such as *AOF AEF La France noire: ses peuples, son histoire, ses richesses*, "compartmentalizes the Black as a colonized subject and a subaltern."[cxlviii] The final meaning she identifies concerns France itself and its current black population. Due to the colonial history and racial coding, this meaning of France noire requires a qualification: "French *but* Black, or Black *but* part of France." In short, one cannot simply be "French" if one is read as non-white.[cxlix] Though these examples concern blackness only, I would argue that the same holds true for all racial categories other than white.

Accepting that a black population does exist–or at least a population classed as such–Ndiaye estimates that a "thick blackness," Tommie Shelby's term for a black identity that comprises both community and culture, does not exist in France; rather blackness is "thin blackness," a prescribed identity.[cl] Those individuals who proclaim their Frenchness before their blackness or other identities–without necessarily disavowing blackness–thus exhibit an attitude that we might understand as having similarities with post-blackness.[22] This is to say that the

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[21] The existence of an "Arab France" or Arab identity is less of a question thanks to the prominence of the *génération beur* and anti-racist political movements. See Aïtel, *We Are Imazighen*; Silverstein, *Algeria in France: transpolitics, race, and nation*; and Aissaoui, *Immigration and National Identity: North African Political Movements in Colonial and Postcolonial France*.

[22] Originally conceived by Thelma Golden as an art movement building on or progressing from the Black Art Movement (BAM), cultural critic Touré expanded the notion of post-blackness to include a post-racial identity that encompasses individualist representations of blackness. Otherwise stated, though race exists, Black Americans should not "perform" blackness, but should instead be themselves, existing free from imposed cultural norms. Identity in this view then

choice to define oneself first by nationality rather than by an idea of blackness or a belonging to a specific black culture denotes a move away from a racialized vision of society. This would refute society's verdict and its emphasis on the body; indeed it is a subversive stance because it refuses the characterization of France as a white nation. However, the fact of blackness–or being judged as such–is unavoidable. Hence there is also a movement towards black identity as evidenced by CRAN (*Conseil représentatif des associations noires*), the marketing of "black" products, and the production of hip-hop culture.

CRAN works towards greater representation of minorities in the government and media, for equality, and critiques the over-representation of black and Arab youths in police raids, while also raising the question of reparations for slavery and colonialism. Its website also regularly posts articles denouncing instances of blackface in France as well as other actions that are deemed racist or racially insensitive. In 2006 CRAN also performed the first statistical analysis of racial diversity in France, considering employment, education and perceptions of racial inequity.[cli] Their position is therefore directly counter to that of the French government, holding that race is a facet of daily life in France and that *Noir* is an acceptable identity. This is significant, because previous public claims to blackness that demanded an end to discrimination were treated as a threat to the Republic by a number of intellectuals across the political spectrum.[clii] CRAN's very existence accordingly denotes a resistance not just to the obvious societal verdicts such as excessive policing of minority youths, but also to that dominant discourse that both creates race in France and argues against its existence, thereby locking marginalized groups into a position of invisible suffering.

Furthermore, following a similar vein of inquiry to Mudimbe-Boye and Ndiaye, in his article, "The Invention of Blacks in France," Patrick Lozès highlights CRAN's use of the term

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is individual, but still tied to race. His work has been lauded by some and criticized by others for conflating a racial category (black) with a socio-cultural category (blackness), thus tying skin color to authenticity of action, and for accepting black as a race without interrogating whiteness as the power structure that creates the norms against which all others are judged. See Touré, *Who's Afraid of Post-Blackness? What It Means to Be Black*; *The Trouble with Post-Blackness*, edited by Houston A. Baker and K. Merinda Simmons; and Osbey, Brenda Marie. "UNTITLED, or, the Post-Blackness of Post-Blackness".

"diversity" in place of "difference." "Difference" implies a norm, and thus "diversity" constitutes a paradigm shift away from the dominant white standard.[cliii] This is particularly important if we consider the terms "black" or "blackness" and the fact that their very existence is rooted in opposition to whiteness. Consequently, to proclaim blackness, or being *noir*, but to do so while refusing to place this identity within the traditional hierarchy is doubly audacious. Audacious because it openly announces the existence of a community of color–even if this community is tied together more by the experience of discrimination than by a shared culture–and because it breaks the racial hierarchy it exposes.

One might ask if this shift can be tied to the US post-blackness movement, with its move away from traditional conceptions of black culture, but a look into other websites dedicated to black culture in France seems to indicate that the opposite is true overall. Souley Hassane's study of websites created by and for African diaspora communities in the US, France, and Great Britain finds a common linkage of collective memory, idealization of the ancestral land, and a revendication of African identity and pride in being black. Significantly however, though 40% of European sites are non-commercial, encompassing blogs, news journals, research sites and radios, 60% of sites are commercial.[cliv] Furthermore, the vast majority of these sites market beauty products for black women that emphasize white standards of beauty: hair straightening products, nose surgery, and skin whitening products.[clv] The ideal of blackness being represented here is then not one that shifts the paradigm like CRAN is seeking to do, but rather one that commits a slow symbolic violence in conjunction with the violence already inflicted by the dominant white culture. This is an internalization of the verdict that renders blackness and brownness a negative trait.

Let us consider the site, NOFI, which states itself to be "la première plateforme d'échange, d'information, de réseautage et de réflexion sur le quotidien de la communauté noire." In turn, NOFI leads to nofipédia, an encyclopedia of "culture noire" and noiretfier.com, a website dedicated to merchandise directed at the black community in France.[clvi] Yet, this merchandise is largely composed of black US references. T-shirts for sale include Noir et Fier, but also Shaka

Zulu, Black is the new Black, African Queen, Mohamed Ali, Super Ali (with Mohamed Ali represented as a superhero), and Super Malcolm (with Malcolm X represented as superhero). On the one hand, this points to the popularity of black American culture in France. On the other, it also recalls efforts to avoid stigma through the usage of the English term "black" in place of "*noir*," a point to which I will return in chapter two. The DVDs for sale by contrast do target a French-African audience: *Africa Paradis*, depicting a future reversal of the situations of France and Africa with white immigration southward, and *Un pas en avant*, a fictional thriller dealing with corruption of international humanitarian aid in Africa. Meanwhile the magazines for sale celebrate black identity and culture.[clvii]

Thus, Ndiaye's assessment of "thin blackness" seems to hold, as the commercial products do not overall pull from a specifically French tradition–but an American one. Nonetheless, the blackness presented here is also one of resistance and power–Malcolm X and Mohamed Ali. Moreover, the work of CRAN seeks to resist the dominant norms of the Republic, while the DVDs criticize and subvert the status quo and tropes of the white savior. French blackness is therefore first and foremost a "response to and rejection of anti-black racism."[clviii] Otherwise stated, it functions as resistance to verdict.

Beyond coalitions and marketing, music–specifically rap and hip-hop–takes on this role of resistance, moving beyond blackness to encompass arabness and more generally class structure. Early French rap–dating to the end of the 1980s and the early 1990s–was largely the product of the children of Algerian and Arab immigrants, and thus primarily denounced anti-Arab racism and class issues, dovetailing at times with SOS Racisme.[clix] Significantly, before the 1980s representation of Arabs in music was limited, with just 3 song titles mentioning the word "Arab*e*" from 1973 to 1995, while references to Arabs within songs relied on stereotypes.[clx] Even in the 1980s, the "Arab" in songs was characterized by skin color, almost without exception described as "bronzé" or "basané," with additional references to frizzy hair and accent.[clxi] Rap music therefore became a vehicle through which artists could resist and rehabilitate the racial verdict that condemned the *arabo-musulman.* Nonetheless, there was a noted lack of music concerning

and celebrating the black experience. As one of the few scholars to work on French rap music, André Prévos estimates this to be because most early rappers were of North African origin, and thus could not speak to the black experience. Prévos also argues that rappers could not praise Africa due to its economic hardships and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in North Africa.[clxii]

Yet, French rap today has expanded to encompass black issues–from anti-black racism to celebrating black identity–and general class issues. The majority of hip-hop artists in France are the French-born children of immigrants, largely of North African and sub-Saharan African origin.[clxiii] For these artists, the racial verdict is therefore personal, as are experiences of discrimination based on class. Group membership also often cuts across cultural and ethnic lines,[clxiv] a fact we might consider to be particularly significant considering the conflict between the French Republic's claim to colorblindness and the real existence of racial hierarchies that negatively impact its citizens. For example, the group 113 is composed of one member from Mali (Mokobé), another from Algérie (Rim'K), and a third from Guadeloupe (AP), while the members of IAM are both black and white but all of foreign origin.[clxv] These artists are seemingly united by a shared outsider status, each belonging to a category that precludes them from "Frenchness", where Frenchness is both whiteness and the lack of foreign origin. This unity in conjunction with a common focus on social critique helps to highlight the ways in which societal verdicts (in their many forms) ostracize members of the French community.

Indeed, many rap and hip-groups make political and social injustice a target of their lyrics. André Prévos notes that the hardcore rap groups Assassin, NTM, and Ministère AMER "consider their mission to be the denunciation of what they see as the social and economic exploitation of marginal groups and individuals in French society." This exploitation largely targets the *banlieues* and other marginal sites, but it is not just racial; rather it is racial, geographic and class-oriented. IAM in turn consider themselves "urban witnesses" who "denounce the violence of the city, drugs, the rising threat of racism and of the National Front, [and] the politicians' lack of concern for the fate of the poorest."[clxvi] Significantly, IAM's members take their names from Egyptian pharaohs, thus referencing the African world without recalling negative images of North Africa and Islamic

fundamentalism; instead they conjure a positive image of Arab or African culture as one that is highly advanced and civilized.[clxvii] Taking a different approach, rappers Kery James, Médine, and Youssoupha–all practicing Muslims and all non-white–frequently address Islam and the ways in which it is racialized and tied to the *banlieue*.[clxviii] Additionally, they also refute the idea of otherness, claiming their own stake in French culture and their belonging as French citizens.[23] The way in which these groups tie together culture, religion and class with racialization effectively pushes against the dominant idea that race is evident and knowable through phenotype, reminding the public that less visible cultural markers also define racialization in France. They also refute stereotypes by championing the cause of the downtrodden.

These groups accordingly resist various social verdicts by claiming pride in their origins outside of the metropole, but also in claiming their right to Frenchness itself. In so-doing they also level their own judgments against the dominant culture and its positioning of whiteness as the normative ideal. Ironically, the diverse composition of groups and their oft-chosen role as voices for the oppressed fulfills the ideals of the colorblind Republic. In denouncing racial and social injustice, these groups embody the ideals of *fraternité*, *egalité* and *liberté*, thus shifting the framework of race in a direction similar to that of CRAN. Moreover, by naming police violence, the threats of drugs and racism, and other issues in a popular format that holds great social currency, these musicians and artists also provide a counterbalance to the preponderance of stigmatizing imagery in popular culture. Though one might argue that the imagery associated with rap and hip-hop could reinforce negative stereotypes, the content of the songs in fact works to subvert expectations. More than this, through their visibility and popularity, they also provide an example of successful men from disadvantaged backgrounds, in direct contrast to continuing tropes that paint those in the *banlieues* and non-whites more generally as lazy, infantile, or unable to succeed.

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[23] Kery James' "Lettre à la république" (*92.2012*, 2012) is of particular note, with its implication of the entire French Republic, its strong denunciations of racism, xenophobia and its defense of "*Arabes*" and "*Noirs*" as equally French despite their being set apart.

As we have seen, the creation of racial hierarchies as we understand them today has its roots in French thinking, and particularly that of the Enlightenment. Needed to justify slavery, and then colonialism–both for reasons of economic exploitation and in defense of presumed cultural superiority–the racialization of non-white peoples is a long-standing French (and Western) tradition, and one that continues in the contemporary moment with the marginalization of immigrants and the *banlieues* along racially coded lines. Despite the Republican ideal that race does not exist, the experience of ethnic minorities in France says otherwise. Their existence is coded according to a social (racial) verdict that positions whiteness–white skin, European facial features, traditional French culture–as the norm and the position of value, while Otherness is judged and condemned.

Some cultural markers like accents and use of slang are not visible, and thus someone may outwardly pass as "white" or as "French." Similarly, visible markers such as racially coded clothing–athletic wear in the case of the youths in Belgium or headscarves in the case of women in France–can effectively darken a person's skin in the eye of the beholder. Yet, these markers are not inherent to a person; this is to say, they can pass unnoticed, be hidden or even changed or masked. As chapter four will discuss, this can facilitate a movement across racial and class hierarchies through the action of passing, the very act of which threatens to destabilize the racial hierarchy. Indeed, this fluidity underlines the unstable nature of racialization, and the ultimately arbitrary nature of race itself. As we have seen, in spite of a certain reliance on cultural markers, the racial hierarchy is above all tied to the physical body and to phenotype. Those whose phenotype denotes them as non-white therefore cannot escape the stigma of the racial verdict, regardless of whether they are categorized in a way that reflects their heritage or identity. Because the racial hierarchy also relies on notions of cultural superiority that are divorced from the physical body, it ultimately undermines itself. Race therefore is a hollow construct. Indeed, this is the very argument that underlies the counter verdicts in the texts to be studied in the following chapters.

Yet, in spite of race's fabricated nature, the racial verdict is very real. It makes itself felt through marginalization and everyday racism, but also through harsh and discriminatory policing tactics and social and media narratives that tie aggression, predation and terrorism to black and brown skin and Islamic faith. Groups and societies that push an alternate narrative that values diversity and celebrates brown and black skin and non-European roots and cultures while also maintaining that such things can be and indeed *are* French, refute these verdicts by revealing how they are based on a false system of binaries. Nowhere is this more clear than in the work of CRAN and in research into black identity in France–with its revelation that such an identity is largely imposed from the outside–in the lyrics of rap artists, and in literature. Rap music in particular, with its roots in poverty and resistance, and its lower barriers to entry and access, might be understood as an equalizer that allows for dialogue in a way that more traditional forms of "high" art such as literature and theatre do not.

Yet, literature–like rap and song–functions as a vehicle for storytelling, and as such has also proven to be a key vehicle for the denunciation of verdict through the exposure of its ill effects. We might think of the class struggles of Annie Ernaux and Didier Eribon, but also the work of *beur* authors writing on the experience of being North African in France. So too has the literature addressed how the racial verdict marks blackness under the sign of stigma. As the following analyses of blackness, arabness, and whiteness in literature will show, much like the rap artists denouncing police brutality and openly naming stigma, these narratives work to uncover verdict's existence and its impact. In so doing, they perform a radical act that exposes otherwise invisible power structures, so widespread as to appear banal–a black caricature on breakfast cereal or casual discourse about thugs in the *banlieues*. More than this, they also deliver their own counter-verdicts, condemning the norm. They instead create a different social vision, shifting the paradigm so that internalized verdicts of racism and non-belonging can be revealed and cast out.

[xxxii] M'Charek, "Beyond Fact or Fiction," 427-434.

[xxxiii] Ibid., 434.

[xxxiv] Ibid.

[xxxv] Tobner, *Du racisme français*, 51 ; Ndiaye, *La condition noire*, 230.

[xxxvi] Pierre H. Boulle, "Origins of the Modern Concept of Race," 12.

[xxxvii] Ndiaye, *La condition noire*, 231, Boulle, "Origins of the Modern Concept of Race," 14.

[xxxviii] Ndiaye, *La condition noire*, 231.

[xxxix] Boulle, "Origins of the Modern Concept of Race," 14.

[xl] Ndiaye, *La condition noire*, 230.

[xli] Vergès, "Les troubles de la mémoire", 1164.

[xlii] Tobner, *Du racisme français,* 97.

[xliii] Ibid., 110-112.

[xliv] Ibid., 114.

[xlv] Boulle, "Origins of the Modern Concept of Race," 19.

[xlvi] Tobner, *Du racisme français*, 102-108.

[xlvii] Todorov, *On Human Diversity,* 106-07; Ndiaye, *La condition noire*, 235; Tobner, *Du racisme français*, 157.

[xlviii] Hajjat and Mohammed, *Islamophobie*, 170.

[xlix] Ndiaye, *La condition noire*, 234.

[l] Wiegman, *American Anatomies*, 58.

[li] Ibid.

[lii] Ibid., 56.

[liii] Ibid., 59.

[liv] Hale. "French Images of Race," 132.

[lv] Ibid.

[lvi] Ibid.

[lvii] Ndiaye, *La condition noire*, 147.

[lviii] Hale, "French Images of Race," 137.

[lix] Ibid., 138.

[lx] Ibid., 137-140.

[lxi] Ibid., 141-44.

[lxii] Ndiaye, *La condition noire*, 235.

[lxiii] Tobner, *Du racisme français*, 170.

[lxiv] Ndiaye, *La condition noire*, 169.

[lxv] Auslander and Holt, "Sambo in Paris," 147-184.

[lxvi] Ibid., 153-54.

[lxvii] Ibid., 153.

[lxviii] Ibid., 154.

[lxix] Ibid., 153-54.

[lxx] Ndiaye, *La condition noire*, 253.

[lxxi] Ausander and Holt, "Sambo in Paris," 155.

[lxxii] Ibid.

[lxxiii] Ibid., 157-58.

[lxxiv] Wiegman, *American Anatomies*, 21.

[lxxv] Stein, *Saharan Jews*, xi.

[lxxvi] Goldsworthy, "Images, ideologies, and commodities," 160.

[lxxvii] Ibid.,153-54; 160.

[lxxviii] Ibid.,154.

[lxxix] Dunwoodie, "Assimilation, Cultural Identity, and Permissible Deviance", 71.

[lxxx] Ibid.

[lxxxi] Hajjat and Mohammed, *Islamophobie*, 171.

[lxxxii] Ibid.

[lxxxiii] Hale, "French Images of Race," 134.

[lxxxiv] Hale, "French Images of Race," 134-35.

[lxxxv] Dunwoodie, "Assimilation, Cultural Identity, and Permissible Deviance", 68.

[lxxxvi] Hajjat and Mohammed, *Islamophobie*, 170.

[lxxxvii] Ibid., 170-71.

[lxxxviii] Nouschi, "Esquisse d'une histoire," 40.

[lxxxix] Ibid.

[xc] Ibid., 42.

[xci] Dunwoodie, "Assimilation, Cultural Identity, and Permissible Deviance," 69.

[xcii] Nouschi, "Esquisse d'une histoire," 45.

[xciii] Ibid.

[xciv] Stora, "Entre la France et l'Algérie"; Amiri, *La bataille de France*.

[xcv] Manceron, *La triple occultation d'un massacre*, 155.

[xcvi] Roman, "Pourquoi la laïcité ?", 73.

[xcvii] Péju, *Le 17 octobre des Algériens*, 26-39; Manceron *La triple occultation d'un massacre*, 125.

[xcviii] Nouschi, "Esquisse d'une histoire," 47.

[xcix] Hajjat and Mohammed, *Islamophobie*, 107.

[c] Ndiaye, *La condition noire*, 278.

[ci] Deltombe, *L'Islam imaginaire*, 44-45.

[cii] Hajjat and Mohammed 109.

[ciii] Deltombe, *L'Islam imaginaire*, 54.

[civ] Hajjat and Mohammed, *Islamophobie*, 110.

[cv] Ibid.

[cvi] Ibid., 111.

[cvii] Ibid.,112.

[cviii] Ibid.

[cix] Ibid., 114.

[cx] Deltombe, *L'Islam imaginaire*, 69.

[cxi] Ibid.,153-54.

[cxii] Ibid., 158.

[cxiii] Ibid.,153-54.

[cxiv] Ibid., 154

[cxv] Ibid., 303.

[cxvi] Guénif-Souilamas, "La Française voilée," 121-28.

[cxvii] Ibid., 124-25.

[cxviii] Ibid., 110-11.

[cxix] "Le maire de Cannes;" Breeden and Blaise, "Cannes, Citing Security Risks".

[cxx] Hajjat and Mohammed, *Islamophobie*, 27.

[cxxi] Ibid., 30-31.

[cxxii] Mbembe, "Necropolitics," 23-24.

[cxxiii] Fassin, *La Force de l'ordre*, 13-20.

[cxxiv] Ibid.,70, 74, 87-88.

[cxxv] Ibid., 70.

[cxxvi] Ibid., 86.

[cxxvii] Ibid., 82-83.

[cxxviii] Ibid., 72.

[cxxix] Ibid.

[cxxx] Ibid.

[cxxxi] Ibid., 87.

[cxxxii] Ibid.

[cxxxiii] Ibid., 262-63.

[cxxxiv] Ndiaye, *La condition noire*, 210.

[cxxxv] Fassin, *La Force de l'ordre*, 122-24.

[cxxxvi] Ibid., 92.

[cxxxvii] Ibid., 262.

[cxxxviii] Fassin, 92.

[cxxxix] Diouf, "Lost Territories," 35.

[cxl] Ndiaye, *La condition noire*, 243.

[cxli] Diouf, "Lost Territories," 34.

[cxlii] Ibid.

[cxliii] Ndiaye, *La condition noire*, 44.

[cxliv] Ibid., 45.

[cxlv] Ibid., 49, 52.

[cxlvi] Ibid., 47.

[cxlvii] Mudimbe-Boyi. "Black France: Myth or Reality?," 21.

[cxlviii] Ibid.
[cxlix] Ibid.

[cl] Ndiaye, *La condition noire*, 56.

[cli] Conseil Représentatif des Associations Noires, https://le-cran.fr/

[clii] Lozès. "The Invention of Blacks," 103.

[cliii] Ibid., 105.

[cliv] Hassane, "L'Internet des diasporas noires," 120-121.

[clv] Ibid., 132.

[clvi] nofi, https://nofi.fr/

[clvii] Noir&fier, http://noiretfier.com/

[clviii] Trica Keaton, T. Sharpley-Whiting, and Tyler Stovall, Introduction to *Black France/France Noire*, 3.

[clix] Prévos, "Evolution of French Rap Music," 716.

[clx] Mathis-Moser, "L'image de « l'Arabe », 132-33.

[clxi] Ibid., 134, 136.

[clxii] Ibid., 717.

[clxiii] Calogirou, "Le motif des racines," 97.

[clxiv] Prévos, "Two Decades of Rap," 5.

[clxv] Calogirou, "Le motif des racines," 100; Jacono, "Musical Dimensions," 24.

[clxvi] Jacono, "Musical Dimensions," 25;

[clxvii] Prévos,"Two Decades of Rap," 11; Prévos, "The Evolution of French Rap Music," 721.

[clxviii] Dotson-Renta, "'On n'est pas condamné,'" 355-56.

CHAPTER TWO

DECOLONIZING BLACKNESS

This chapter will examine the text *L'Exil selon Julia*, by Gisèle Pineau, and the novel

L'Impasse, by Daniel Biyaoula, whose narrators are identified as *noir* by outward observers and

who detail their experiences of anti-black racism in France and in former French colonies. *L'Exil*

selon Julia is a semi-autobiographical text–somewhere between a novel and a *récit d'enfance*[24]–

that recounts Pineau's childhood in France (or a memory of said childhood), four years of which

were spent living with her creolophone illiterate grandmother, Man Ya, or Julia, and her family's

move back to Guadeloupe during her early teenage years. As the title indicates, this text is in

large part a memoir that pays homage to the grandmother Man Ya and the lessons she imparts

on Creole culture, language, and the ancestral history of slavery. In turn, *L'Impasse* might be read

as a traditional narrative of immigration and the identity struggles that accompany the return

home or life in France. Its narrator, Joseph, struggles to assimilate to French society, in large part

due to the exceptional darkness of his skin, but cannot return to his home country of Congo, as

he finds many aspects of its society revolting. He thus is split between two spaces, occupying the

classic third space of the immigrant with a hybrid identity.

And yet, these texts are also fundamentally about the negative experience of blackness–

or in the broadest terms, the experience of stigma–in the French context and in its former

colonies of Guadeloupe and Congo. As the previous chapter indicated, the meaning of

"blackness"–when understood as a racial category in the French context–is fluid when chosen by

people who self-identify as "black" or "noir." In the same turn it is rigidly tied to negative

connotations of savagery and non-belonging when outwardly imposed upon individuals by a

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[24] Louise Hardwick notes that *L'Exil selon Julia* takes a child as its protagonist–whose name, Marie, is Pineau's middle name, but does not overtly link author and narrator. Kathleen Gyssels in turn classifies the text as auto-fiction. However, Pineau herself has stated that *L'Exil* is a vision of her own childhood, albeit one that she had to create: "Even if my memory is not reliable, you know, I had to build my own childhood. When my brothers and sisters read *L'Exil,* they did not recognize themselves because it was my own way of seeing the world." In *Childhood, Autobiography and the Francophone Caribbean*, 142-43; ""Devoured by Writing": An Interview with Gisèle Pineau," 329.

social verdict. Blackness as discussed in this chapter is therefore understood first and foremost to be an outwardly imposed image based on racial stereotypes, that marks those perceived as afro-descendent based on skin color as *noir*, or black, with accompanying negative connotations.

The narrator of *L'Impasse*, Joseph, is called *Kala* (charcoal), a "noir vendu," and an embarrassment to Africans by his own compatriots, and subjected to frequent racism in France. Indeed, his own mother named him *kala* as an enduring reminder of the horrible blackness of his skin. For Joseph, the pain of this name opens a "précipice infini," an unending suffering in the knowledge of his inescapable blackness and the stigma it invokes, a suffering that eventually leads him to adopt the modes of his compatriots–including bleaching his skin and embracing a stereotyped French vision of African culture–in order to drown the monster within. Pineau's novel hinges in turn on the repetition of racial slurs ("Négro. Négresse à plateau. Blanche-Neige. Bamboula. Charbon. Y a bon banania") and explicit evocations of the pain these names and other forms of race-based rejection induce in the young narrator. These texts consequently expose the way in which external racial verdicts–racist taunts, police profiling, and discrimination at school and the workplace–become internalized, creating traumatic psychological wounds.

This chapter therefore argues that in naming and proclaiming racism and its effects, and in linking them to the continued existence of a (neo)colonial state, Biyaoula and Pineau practice a resistance through the act of writing that decolonizes the dominant French narrative. This is particularly evident in *L'Exil selon Julia*, in which the act of writing forms a key part of the narrative itself. If externally imposed blackness evokes savagery, sub-human status, and intellectual inferiority, in portraying the internal pain of black protagonists in the face of lived racism Biyaoula and Pineau offer a counter-narrative that instead humanizes the black subject. Moreover, these texts offer a vision where blackness is real and colonial narratives of racial inferiority endure, in protest of the nation-state's verbal commitment to color-blindness. Thus they refute the racial verdict in two ways. First, they reveal its continuing existence, therefore taking away the power of whitewashing or claims to a colorblind society. Second, they contest verdict's imposition of stigma by rehabilitating the humanity of the black subject. Indeed, Pineau has stated that the pain of

racism is an omnipresent theme in her work, and that moreover all her writings "evoke the fight

against racism, against the prejudice and ignorance of racism."[clxix]

Though both books resist verdict on a meta-literary level, the ways in which their

protagonists cope–and how successfully they resist the imposition of blackness as stigma–differs

greatly. The success or failure of this resistance offers a clue to the power of the racial verdict but

also indicates what tools, if any, might be available to push back against it. This chapter first

considers *L'Impasse*, which takes the negative experience of living blackness as stigma to its

extreme. As I shall argue its narrator and protagonist Joseph, whom I argue serves as a symbol

of the fight against racial stigma, undergoes a colonization of his mind. Though at first Joseph

resists mightily, he ultimately succumbs to the shame of being dark-skinned and embraces both

an exoticized view of his own culture and the narrative that dark skin and natural hair are markers

of inferiority that must be effaced or modified. Biyaoula's novel is thus a strong commentary on

the full damage caused by an internalized verdict, blackness taken to its extreme as fully

negative. By contrast, the pain of stigma notwithstanding, Pineau rehabilitates blackness in *L'Exil*

selon Julia, offering an alternative–and positive–narrative of what blackness can be. Through the

character of Man Ya and her valorization of Creole culture and history, through the emphasis on

the capacity to be both French *and* Creole or Guadeloupean, and through the strength and

continued resistance of the child protagonist, who turns to writing to resist the haunting refrains of

bamboula and more that echo in her mind, Pineau valorizes the embrace of "black" (or non-white)

culture and identity.

L'Impasse: Colonizing the Mind

Hailing from Congo, Daniel Biyaoula is best known for his three novels: *L'Impasse*

(1996), which earned the Grand prix littéraire d'Afrique noire in 1997, *Agonies* (1998), and *La*

Source de joies (2003). Each of the three novels follows a pattern common in Francophone

literature, wherein the intrigue either centers directly on immigration to France and its impact on

the protagonists (*L'Impasse*, *Agonies*) or obliquely, where the relationships between France and

its former colonies, and between those who depart and those who remain, are explored (*La*

Source des joies, *L'Impasse*). However, the 1980s and 1990s saw a shift in the representation of these narratives. Whereas until the 1970s the primary protagonists of francophone African novels were "exemplary" colonial subjects–gifted and hardworking students who excelled in Africa and emigrated to the metropole to further their studies–the literature evolved to include narratives of clandestine immigration.[clxx] Here, the typical hero gave way to new antihero protagonists, or what Moudileno names the "noceur"–the frivolous partygoer who seeks to enjoy life in Paris without concern for morality or instruction–as well as clandestine immigrants and marginal figures.[clxxi]

L'Impasse* follows this pattern, with its focus on immigration into France, the tension between the changed emigrant and those who have remained at home, and its studied contrast between the (at first) serious protagonist Joseph and his compatriots who are typical *noceurs*. In this way Biyaoula's text echoes the writings of his contemporary and compatriot Alain Mabanckou, as well as the work of Williams Sassine, J.R. Essomba, Blaise Ndjehoya, Calixte Beyala and Sami Tchak.[clxxii] However, Biyaoula's focus on the racialized body in *L'Impasse* also marks a departure from francophone African literature of the 1990s–and above all that of Congo– wherein discussions of race were seen as outdated vestiges of Négritude.[clxxiii] I would argue that the very fact that Biyaoula's focus on race is unusual for its time bolsters the notion of society as verdict. Just as the characters in his novel try to escape the effects of race, going so far as to pretend it no longer impacts them, they remain bound by it. In turn, in taking an unpopular stance to address the continuing existence of racialization and its stigmatizing effects, Biyaoula resists an international whitewashing of the racial verdict, while still managing to critique the failings of the Congolese state.

Though little has been written on Biyaoula or on *L'Impasse* in particular, Moudileno has addressed the issue of race and racialization, Cazenave and Célérier have briefly examined the question of migration, comparing it to *Agonies* and *La Source des joies*, and Little has studied the *Blanche/Noir* relationships in *L'Impasse*.[clxxiv] My chapter accordingly draws on the work of Moudileno, with a shared focus on race and racialization in the text, but argues in turn that Biyaoula's insistence on the existence of race functions as a counter-verdict. As we shall see,

L'Impasse is ultimately a despairing and deeply biting text. Its protagonist, Joseph Gakatuka, is also the narrator, offering the reader an intimate portrait of the psychological and at times physical impact of experiencing stigma. More than this, Joseph functions as an outsider to both Congolese and French society, a status that allows him to observe each with an anthropological gaze.[clxxv] As such, I would argue that Joseph's observations and critiques can be read as a stand-in for Biyaoula's voice, while Joseph himself serves as a symbol of the fight against racial verdict. Indeed, he is the only black figure in the text who sees racial stigma in all its forms and rails against it. Even his friends who support *noiritude* (read: Négritude) embrace white beauty standards–to the detriment of blackness–without acknowledging as much.

Yet, Joseph is not a wholly reliable or objective narrator. Also prone to severe headaches, perhaps migraines, he identifies their root cause as his own revolt against negative images of Africa and Africans: "C'est à partir du moment où j'eus une conscience accrue de mes origines, où je leur assujettis ma personne, que ça m'arriva, ces crises de céphalée. Quand j'étais contrarié, qu'il y avait quelque chose qui me paraissait nuire à l'africanité, à l'image de l'Africain, à son être, c'était parti."[clxxvi] Joseph is particularly sensitive to the effects of stigma, more so than any of his friends or compatriots, and this sensitivity will ultimately lead to his full mental breakdown. As I will argue, Joseph's mental break and subsequent transformation forms Biyaoula's strongest commentary on the power of the racial verdict: revolt against stigma is doomed to failure in a society that accepts its existence.

Biyaoula makes it clear in the following pages that the negative images that haunt his narrator are dual-natured. On the one hand, Joseph agonizes over the continuation of racial hierarchies and their devaluation of dark skin and other outward markers of blackness. These are stigmas that are ultimately beyond the control of the stigmatized, stigmas that cannot be hidden. However, he also is deeply pained by the conception of Africa as corrupt, non-modern, and economically destitute, an image that is reinforced by the corruption in his own home country of Congo. In Joseph's mind, this stigma in turn is the fault of his own people's embrace of corruption and adherence to tradition for tradition's sake, as these give fodder to the racist ideas used to

support the *mission civilisatrice* and reinforce negative images of Africans in France and elsewhere.

Nonetheless, Biyaoula also shows that the civilians in Congo are also bound by the system in which they live–a government with weak rule of law and accountability whose failings are both its own and also partly an extension of the colonial legacy–and thus must conform to survive. Though Joseph condemns them as complicit, Biyaoula instead reveals that they are also victims, like Joseph, of an internalized racism. I would argue that this paradox–and his inability to accept it–is ultimately what troubles the narrator the most. Unable to find a way to escape the effects of internalized racism, the economic legacies of colonialism, or the human fallibility that leads his people to hurt themselves, he despairs. He is at an impasse.

Just as the stigmas that trouble Joseph are two-pronged, his mental breakdown takes place in two distinct stages, one in Congo–the "Première constriction"–and one in France–the "Deuxième constriction." This section will follow his breakdown chronologically, in keeping with the movement of the novel. I first consider the nature of internalized racism in the "Première constriction," or what I call the first "break," which takes place in Brazzaville. Biyaoula reveals that Joseph's compatriots and family are already lost to a colonization of the mind, having accepted blackness as negative, and they readily re-enact the violence of racism on one another. In the second part, the "Deuxième constriction," or "break," I examine the toll of fighting racism in France. Here, verdict is imposed by the dominant group, whereas in Brazzaville judgments come from those who are also stigmatized. In the final section, I discuss Joseph's mental breakdown and his surrender to society's verdict. As we shall see, this novel is at once a condemnation of the failings of both societies, and indicative of the wide reach of the notion that blackness is defect.

<u>First Break: Internalized Racism at Home</u>

The novel begins with Joseph's return to the Republic of Congo, his first visit since immigrating to France fifteen years prior. From the very first scene in Charles de Gaulle airport, his discomfort with his home culture and its ties to racial hierarchies is evident. Moreover, he is

rejected upon sight by his compatriots for his refusal to conform to their standards of what an

African should be. His clothes are an "embarrassment," a particularly grave offense because they

might give credence to racist views held by whites: "Les Blancs, quand ils voient des Noirs

fringués comme ça, ils pensent tout de suite qu'on est tous pareils! Heureusement que nous

somme là pour sauver l'honneur du continent!."[clxxvii] At first glance, it would seem that Joseph's

compatriots share his awareness of racial prejudice and his fear of how certain presentations of

"Africanness" might reinforce negative stereotypes. His casual clothes, by comparison with their

expensive suits, might evoke images of poverty in the mind of an outside observer. In this

worldview, appearance would be paramount to combating stigma.

Yet, in the very next breath, they proclaim: "Et puis, vous avez vu comment il est noir !?

D'où il peut venir pour être si noir ?," whilst simultaneously condemning Joseph for dating a white

woman, as this makes him a "complexé" and a "Noir vendu" who wants to make his skin whiter by

association.[clxxviii] In this rapid-fire series of judgments we see several levels of social verdict at

play. First, Biyaoula reveals that Joseph's compatriots have internalized negative images of

blackness–Joseph's dark skin, compared to *goudron*, or tar, provokes ridicule and disgust.

Recalling the centuries-long use of race hierarchies to support economic and social domination, it

is unsurprising that residents of a former colony might take this view.

Paradoxically however, they also mock Joseph for what they see as an attempt to whiten

his skin by dating Sabine; he is a sellout, a traitor to Africa. Nonetheless, this group whitens their

skin and prefers women with pale skin and European-style hair; in other words, they actively try to

escape their own blackness in pursuit of the white ideal. The group thus crows that their skin is

lighter in color than Joseph's: "il n'arrivera jamais à avoir un teint comme le nôtre ! Noir comme il

est, il lui faudrait des wagons de produits pour qu'il s'éclaircisse un peu !."[clxxix] In so doing they

reveal that their judgment of Joseph's dating a white woman is ultimately a projection of their own

insecurities.

Indeed, Goffman notes that the stigmatized individual who has accepted the majority

judgment–or society's verdict–feels a shame that arises from "the individual's perception of one of

his own attributes as being a defiling thing to possess, and one he can readily see himself as not possessing."[clxxx] Accordingly, Joseph is unsettling because he has found acceptance in the arms of a white woman despite the remarkable blackness of his skin, thereby defying racial hierarchies at home and in France that place him at the bottom of the social order. From the outset then, Biyaoula reveals the extent to which the racial verdict has impregnated society–not just in France, but in Africa. More than this, he also doubly marks Joseph as an outsider: he is an immigrant to France, and simultaneously rejected by his own countrymen and women. As such, stigmatized on two fronts, he is uniquely privileged to observe how racialization impacts society. However, Joseph is also an unwilling participant in this very same system, unable to escape. This conflict will allow the reader to witness firsthand the power of blackness as stigma.

Indeed, the judgment of Joseph's peers provokes a stark–albeit internal–reaction. He calls their comments "absurdités," in an attempt to discredit them, and yet he wants to explode with anger and disgust. What is more, the power of the eyes staring at him makes him feel like he is part of a "spectacle."[clxxxi] This term evokes performance, and I would argue that in this context it has links to the stigmatization of Africans in human zoos: this is an involuntary performance in which Joseph is the subject of a ridicule based above all on his outward appearance–skin and clothing–both of which connote in the eyes of his aggressors negative stigmas of Africa. This is not to say that Joseph feels he is part of a colonial attraction, but rather that the rejection he experiences has its roots in the same system of dehumanizing hierarchies that made a spectacle of Africans on French soil. Biyaoula's choice of words is therefore significant: he reveals some Africans as being willing participants in subjugating their kin, in so doing blurring the lines between the white oppressor and the black subject. I would argue however that this is not just a condemnation but also a revelation of the extent to which verdict can be internalized; Joseph's compatriots lash out because he represents the very thing they despise in themselves: their blackness.

Sabine is unmoved by their remarks, but Joseph is so upset that he does not want to embrace her, for fear of inciting further judgment.[clxxxii] If Joseph's reaction seems extreme, it is

because he has been stigmatized for the blackness of his skin for the entirety of his life. Called *Kala*, or charcoal, by his own family, rather than Joseph, he now bears "des tas et des tas de meurtrissures." He explains,

> Quand on a vécu ce que j'ai connu, quand on n'a jamais cessé de vous appeler Kala, « Le Charbon », pour vous dire combien elle est sombre, votre peau, ça ouvre en vous un précipice infini. Vous voyez tout à travers votre noirceur. Lugubre que vous devenez. Vous n'avez plus goût à rien. Vous tissez dans votre tête des toiles de toute sorte. Vous y construisez des labyrinthes d'où vous ne parvenez plus à sortir. Où que vous allez, vous avez le sentiment de ne pas être à votre place. Vous vous sentez nul, quoi ![clxxxiii]

Blackness, for Joseph, is an externally imposed stigma that devalues his personhood, defining him according to one inalienable characteristic: his skin color. That this skin color marks him as lesser than makes this stigma doubly traumatic. First, because he has not chosen this identity, second, because he cannot hide it, let alone escape it. For Joseph, there is no question of "passing." Moreover, Biyaoula reveals here the degree to which the verdict that blackness is negative can be damaging to a psyche. It has taken Joseph years to begin to heal these wounds, eleven or twelve years in France, to be exact, but the prospect of returning home to the birthplace of his trauma, combined with his treatment at the airport, tears his wounds open all over again.[clxxxiv]

The idea that black skin is something to be corrected is only further reinforced by the society that awaits him at home. His seatmate, Karl de Muelle, a son of a high-ranking (and thus extremely wealthy) government official, is also one of those who mocked him in the airport. Karl uses de-pigmentation products to whiten his skin, and adheres strictly to the vestimentary code of the *sapeurs*.[clxxxv] Even Joseph's own mother has embraced skin bleaching–euphemistically called "maquillag*e*"–in the time of his absence; her lack of wealth however means that her skin is greatly damaged by the products she uses. He remarks: "Ah ! elle ne doit plus faire ostentation de sont teint de Blanc comme elle aimait dire ! C'est un visage d'Arlequin tout recouvert de gros boutons et de squames qu'elle trimbale. Peut-être il est à peine moins noir que le mien. Elle doit avoir une maladie de peau, un cancer peut-être, que je me dis."[clxxxvi] The originator of his painful sobriquet, his mother is in fact nearly as dark-skinned as her son. Like the group at the airport then, her stigmatizing of her own son is a projection of her own internalized trauma. A trauma that becomes

visibly expressed through the damage she inflicts on her skin in an effort to adhere to a white-centered system of value. Moudileno remarks moreover that this is a symbolic breakdown of the familial link, which has now also succumbed to the pressure to alter identity markers.[clxxxvii] As such, not only does Joseph suffer rejection through naming, he now also no longer shares his skin color with his mother. Biyaoula thus names the racial verdict as a factor in the multileveled breakdown of Congolese society: it is not only the wealthy elite who aspire to a "white" phenotype, ordinary citizens too engage in actual self-harm in the pursuit of an unattainable racial ideal. Moreover, society is suffering not just at the governmental level, but at the fundamental level of the family.

Indeed, the health risks associated with commonly sold skin whitening products in Africa are well known. These products typically contain two or more elements including corticosteroids, hydroquinines, vegetable extracts, and caustic substances including bleach, mercury, hydrogen peroxide, and varied other acids, with side effects ranging from aesthetic complications such as increase in pigmentation or uneven pigmentation to life-threatening conditions; the scales on Joseph's mother's face are commonplace.[clxxxviii] She is also far from unique in her approach; dermatologists estimate that anywhere from 25 to 96 percent of women in sub-Saharan Africa use skin bleaching products, depending on age range and sample population, with younger women being the highest represented.[clxxxix] This is a wide estimate, but even the lower number points to a pervasive use of these products. Though the motivations for beauty modifications are complex, and archives show that cosmetology and skin care have a centuries-long history in Africa, the widespread use of skin bleaching products in Africa can be traced to just four decades ago.[cxc] That this coincides with the era of decolonization is no accident. Rather, it hints at the enduring legacy of the colonial vision of blackness as inferiority.

As we saw in the previous chapter, black skin has been systematically de-valorized and tied to lower class positions, in contrast with whiteness, which stands as the position of power and goodness. In her study of skin-bleaching, Dr. Melanie de Souza adds to this list the long-term valorization of white skin in media and marketing as the standard of beauty–including on the

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African continent–and the lack of cosmetics created for darker skin tones until recent years. Skin

bleaching in turn became–and remains–a path to better social standing.[25] Read in this context,

Joseph's short and biting commentary on his mother's skin has wide-ranging implications, as his

mother's case is representative of a well-documented social phenomenon. This reveals how

Biyaoula's text can be read as more than fiction: it is in conversation with–and openly condemns–

veritable continued stigmas tied to phenotypic signifiers of blackness.

Though Karl de Muelle also whitens his skin, this particular phenomenon is gendered,

burdening women first and foremost. In fact, in conversation with an old friend, Marie, Joseph

learns that women in his country are held to the white beauty standard by men: "Tu ne vas pas

me faire croire que tu ne plairas pas aux hommes si tu n'avais pas cette peau délavée ni cette

espèce de perruque que tu as sur la tête —Et bien, c'est tout à fait ça."[cxci] She goes on to say

that men only want women with light skin and straight hair, as this is what they consider beautiful;

the media and films are partly to blame, as any black models and actresses are either pale, or

have straight hair, and usually both.[cxcii] The men, in turn, are allowed to stay as dark as the day of

their birth, with natural hair, although paler skin is still valued.

Blackness as stigma is also a doubly enforced social verdict. First, outward signifiers of

blackness like skin and hair were devalued and replaced with a white European model by the

colonial powers. We shall see in the following section on Joseph's second break and the section

on *L'Exil selon Julia* how the stigma associated with blackness endures in France. In turn, Marie's

comments–and the dermatological studies–reveal a second layer: in the post-independence era,

blackness is devalued even in black-majority areas. I would argue once again that Biyaoula

intends this as an expression of a deeply internalized racism. Indeed, literature on racism and the

internalization of stigmas has shown that members of stigmatized groups who have internalized

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[25] See also Margaret Hunter, "Buying Racial Capital: Skin-Bleaching and Cosmetic Surgery in a Globalized World," for a discussion of how the skin-lightening market is both aiming for a veneer of inclusivity in its advertising while simultaneously enjoying continued growth and acceptance as a cosmetic practice worldwide, thereby further endorsing whiteness or lightness as *the* beauty standard.

negative self-images can perpetuate their own domination, defining themselves according to the colonizing and unattainable majority ideal.[cxciii]

This is underlined by Marie's commentary on the impossibility of embracing natural hair and skin color. She asks, "Mais yàya, tu crois que c'est agréable d'être regardée de haut quand on est toute noire et qu'on a des cheveux tout crépus ? Tu crois qu'on se sent bien quand autour de soi toutes les autres femmes ne sont pas comme ça ? Tu sais, on a vraiment le sentiment d'être anormale."[cxciv] The word *anormale* is particularly significant. Marie stood out before she took to straightening her hair and bleaching her skin because of the sheer number of women engaging in the practice, and thus in that sense was outside the norm. Yet this wording also reveals that she was judged, as though her natural skin and hair were defects, and that this judgment provoked a sense of shame, identified as one of the hallmarks of internalized stigma by both psychologists and sociologists.[cxcv] Joseph fails to understand this however, instead continuing to judge women for their choices, seeing them as deliberately contributing to the breakdown of the black race.[cxcvi] In this way, Biyaoula reveals Joseph as an unreliable judge of his own society. Not only does he condemn women while failing to understand how society pressures them, thereby leading to a double condemnation wherein they are first stigmatized for their blackness and second stigmatized as women, he also adheres to a concept of racial purity.

Still, Joseph ironically praises white people for their binary categorization of skin color: "ils considèrent qu'il y a eux qui sont blancs, et tous les autres qui sont plus ou moins sombres. Que l'on ait des parents blanc et noir, pour eux, il n'y a pas de différence. Ils ignorent ce que c'est des métis. Il n'y a que des Noirs pour eux." Whiteness is the default position of value, and to be seen as black is to be stigmatized. In Brazzaville, by contrast, people categorize blackness by shades, with the lightest skin the most valued, and those with dark skin, like Joseph, placed at the bottom of the social hierarchy.[cxcvii] These commentaries accordingly reveal that the social verdict in Joseph's home country aligns with that perpetrated by the dominant white society in the global north: blackness is pathological, and in need of erasure. However, Joseph suffers most at home, because he knows that those who denigrate him and proclaim their superiority will also suffer

racism in a white-dominated society. In other words, he is excluded even by those who are stigmatized, in a double effacement of his value. As Moudileno notes, this betrayal is also particularly painful because blackness should be able to exist unadulterated in Africa.[cxcviii]

Unlike his peers, Joseph first resists this internalized verdict, just as he finds his mother's appearance and the attitude of Karl de Muelle revolting. He is aware that there is something "pas net" behind Marie's arguments. Nonetheless, he also remarks, "une interrogation supplémentaire qu'elle à introduit dans ma tête, Marie. C'est que je les trouve d'une logique implacable, ses propos !".[cxcix] It is this moment that marks the beginning of what I will term the colonization of Joseph's mind, or the ending of his fight against internalized racism, through which Biyaoula will highlight the power of verdict. Joseph's treatment at the hands of his family merely compounds the effects of this implanted seed. They all call him *Kala*, charcoal–thereby reopening old wounds–and criticize his clothing and apparent poverty.[cc] Moreover, his elder brother Samuel kisses him on the mouth. Joseph is revolted, but imagines that this is a means of feeling closer to whites by proclaiming an evolved social status.[cci]

Yet, despite their propensity to whitening their skin and admiration of "Parisians"–or those who have moved to France and adopted a Western way of life, thus gaining access to its perceived wealth–, his family repeatedly lashes out at "les Blancs." Joseph is unsurprised, as whites in turn categorize Africans and "Noirs" according to sweeping negative generalizations. His family also ironically rails against mixed marriages. However, his girlfriend is white, and thus he is in direct conflict with his family's values, unable to speak up to defend himself.[ccii] Furthermore, he is coerced into dressing in suits and pretending to be successful in France for the sake of the family honor. In this vision of success, as we saw in the airport scene, poverty reflects negatively on Africa and Africans. Thus Joseph's lack of wealth marks him as both a failure and as someone who can reinforce negative images of Africa. Through this scene Biyaoula critiques the binary system that has created the categories of white and black, while also revealing the hypocrisy of his home country. Where Europeans can easily criticize "Noirs" without suffering, due to the privileged position of whiteness, black Africans who have internalized stigma must admire

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whiteness in coded terms–hair, skin, wealth–lest their blackness be wholly devalorized. This is

the paradox of the racial verdict of blackness, intimately tied as it is to histories of colonization: it

is an imposed identity whose acceptance requires adherence to the very system that marks it as

stigma.

Unsurprisingly, given Joseph's abhorrence of stereotypes, this is something that further

damages his psyche: "Pour moi, il me demande de me prostituer, de m'asseoir sur mes idées,

mes convictions, de marcher sur ce que je pense le plus important dans ma vie."[cciii] For Joseph,

who is already suffering the repetition of the nickname *Kala*–an enduring reminder of how his skin

is an inescapable stigma–to put on appearances that emulate an ideal of whiteness or simulate

the appearance of wealth is to embrace his peers' internalized racism and to deny his own worth

as an African who can exist outside a binary system. I would argue that Joseph's struggle can be

extrapolated to all those who are stigmatized, as it reveals both the depth and breadth of how

society functions as verdict. As Eribon reminds us, knowing one is minoritized does not ensure

escape. Rather, verdict is socially enacted by both the dominant and minority groups.

Accordingly, the sheer hypocrisy by which Joseph finds himself surrounded weighs

heavily on him. His family forces him to eat while they go hungry, so they can pretend they have

wealth in a country afflicted by poverty.[cciv] Manners–or outward appearance–matter above all

else, because "C'est ça qui donne l'impression à la populace qu'on fait comme les Blancs, qu'on

l'est presque devenu, blanc, que sa misère, qu'on s'échine à habiller de costumes brillants, qu'on

essaie de parer avec des voitures, des maisons tout importées, eh bien, que sa misère, elle ne

traverse plus le corps pour s'épandre à l'extérieur, qu'elle ne pue plus."[ccv] Here, Biyaoula

nontheless makes it clear that Joseph conflates the separate issues of class and race-based

stigma, assigning the root cause of both to an admiration of whiteness. Given the way in which

whiteness is tied to power and social status, I would argue that Joseph is not wholly incorrect, but

that he instead gives no place to nuance or other factors. Ironically, he sees the world as black

and white, and this tendency will only further harm his psyche, which fact underlines Biyaoula's

critique of the racial verdict.

Whether Joseph is correct in his assumption that all aspirations towards wealth in Brazzaville are tied to an admiration of whiteness is ultimately irrelevant, however, because it is his belief in this assumption that will tear him apart. The (different but intertwined) stigmas of blackness and poverty–and all the negative images of Africa these evoke–are inescapable. In this way Biyaoula highlights how for those who have internalized the verdict that blackness is negative–and that poverty or lower social status is tied to darker skin–, examination of their practices is not possible, as this would lead to the downfall of the system and a forced confrontation with the stigma that they have adopted. Ultimately then, as someone who is cognizant of the effects of stigma and who rails against racism, Joseph is troubled by his family and compatriots' refusal to examine either their own internalized racism or the flaws such as corruption that are tearing the country apart. He laments moreover, "Dieu ! ils ne le vivent pas comme nous, les Blancs, l'exotisme qu'ils décèlent sur nos corps gonflés, desséchés ou rongés de misères !."[ccvi] Social verdicts may not hurt the dominant class, but those who are judged or stigmatized suffer. The price this verdict enacts on the minority person will be still clearer in the following section on *L'Exil selon Julia*.

His family forces him to accept their burdens however, and it is at this point that Joseph suffers his first mental breakdown. Surrounded by hypocrisy and contradictory positions, Joseph is also attacked for his skin color, his beliefs, and his refusal to adhere to traditions such as calling his elder brother "Ya" Samuel, or to go to church. In the final confrontation, his brother cries out, "Tu crois que c'est parce que tu as passé quelques années à l'étranger que tu peux te permettre de marcher sur les traditions ? Tu es blanc, toi ? Tu es devenu blanc, toi ?."[ccvii] Here, Joseph is mockingly compared to that which he can never be: white. After having been reminded repeatedly of how his dark skin makes him lesser than in the eyes of his peers–and in the eyes of the West–he is also accused of embracing that which he abhors–a white ideal. In other words, his very reality–that of an African man who wishes to escape stigmas surrounding blackness–is denied both because he dares to question what he views as problematic traditions and practices and because he dares to push back against stigma and racism. He is forced to kneel and kiss the

ground at his brother's feet, thereby denying the beliefs and sense of independence that structure his own sense of self-worth and pride. After, he states, "J'ai besoin d'aller faire un tour tant je suis au désespoir, tant je me sens sale, avili, éreinté jusqu'à l'âme."[ccviii] In bowing to his brother, who embodies the embrace of both internalized stigma and corruption, Joseph has bowed to the very things that hurt him.

Though it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to examine the nature of familial-based trauma and its impact on mental health, the implications of internalized racism and Joseph's experience of mental and emotional pain bear further study. Robert Carter, writing in the mid-2000s, noted that far less work had been done at the time on the psychological and emotional effects of racism than on economic, social and political outcomes, and that existing studies typically focused on overall characteristics of racism as a form of violent oppression without examining the individual experience.[ccix] Biyaoula's text–published in 1998, during a time where literature on race trauma was even more lacking–thus offers an insight into the mind of an individual, filling in a gap–albeit through fiction–that allows the reader to understand just what these effects might look like. Moreover, this first breakdown also strikes at the heart of performing race or culture in a context charged by race hierarchies.[26] In the eyes of his peers and family, Joseph's crime is to refuse his community's vision of what a Congolese man should be. In Joseph's eyes, they deny their very race by adopting skin-bleaching and Western modes. The question then becomes, what could black or African authenticity look like? Joseph's inability to answer this question or to escape the black-white binary that devalues him as a person will ultimately break him.

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[26] Patrick Johnson writes in *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity:* "In the instance of both the ''white-talking'' black and the ''black-talking'' white, the person's authenticity is called into question by his or her ''own'' based not solely on phenotype but also on the symbolic relationship between skin color and the performance of culturally inscribed language or dialect that refers back to an ''essential'' blackness or whiteness. Within racially and politically charged environments in which one's allegiance to ''race'' is critical to one's in-group status, one's performance of the appropriate ''essential'' signifiers of one's race is crucial," 5-6. Although Johnson considers the US context, I would argue that the racially charged context has wide-ranging applications. In the case of *L'Impasse*, Joseph is torn between his forced identification according to skin color, and his desire to break outside of the black/white binary.

Second Break: Resisting Racism in France

Following this first break, Joseph returns to France, but his relationship with Sabine and his views of whiteness are irrevocably altered. Whereas before he was never fully at ease on French soil, cognizant of his inability to belong as a dark-skinned African, he was at least capable of engaging in dialogue and pushing back against racism in his daily encounters. Now, with Marie's seed of stigma implanted in his mind, and having defiled his own belief system, his defenses begin to falter. Before examining his second mental break however–which is tied to the ending of his relationship with Sabine–it is necessary to first examine how Joseph experienced and reacted to racism in France before his trip home. Indeed, his account of these experiences is placed after the chapters discussing his trip home, and therefore serves as a flashback that informs and elucidates his behavior upon his return to France.

If Joseph is critiqued in Brazzaville in part for his failure to adhere to social standards regarding presentation, in France, he is defined solely according to skin color. Biyaoula thus makes it clear that the racial verdict is in fact alive and well in the metropole, and that it serves to ostracize non-white Others. Indeed, Joseph's first encounter with Sabine's family–wealthy, white, and French–is nearly a parody of the clash between enduring colonial stereotypes and a reality that refutes them. Sabine's parents are very ill at ease with Joseph, and the maid openly wonders at his skin color: "Vous avez vu comment il est noir l'ami de monsieur Alain, madame ? Celui-là, il vient vraiment d'Afrique ! Moi, j'en connais des Africains ! Mais jamais j'ai vu quelqu'un d'aussi noir !."[ccx] That this commentary comes from a maid serving a wealthy family is no accident. Rather, it reminds the reader that whiteness is tied to positions of power, and that even those without wealth such as the maid find themselves at the top of the racial hierarchy, able to comfortably make implicitly racist pronouncements about skin color. However, the maid's comment that she knows Africans–in contrast to the unease of Sabine's parents–indicates that there is also a correlation between wealth and the preservation of whiteness as a status apart. We shall return to this idea in chapter four, but in Biyaoula's text, it implicitly reinforces the link

between blackness and African immigration, wherein even wealthy African immigrants largely do not mix with wealthy whites.

This micro-aggression has an immediate physical and visceral impact on Joseph: his blood boils. He comments moreover, "Décidément il me poursuit partout, ma noirceur […] comme si je trimbalais du monstrueux." Here blackness is once again tied to monstrosity, but Joseph also identifies racism or commentaries on his blackness as "vomissures,"[ccxi] indicating his awareness that the hierarchy of skin color is predicated on a negative history of oppression and stigma. Before his trip to Brazzaville, he nonetheless believes that he has at last accepted his blackness.[ccxii] The placement of this commentary–which predates his trip to Africa–immediately after the pages detailing Joseph's first breakdown and the pain of being called *Kala*–thus serves to highlight the fragility of his self-acceptance.

Sabine's father, Mr. Rosta, in turn makes repeated claims that stereotype Joseph and afro-descendant peoples. Upon learning that Joseph has brought roses, he exclaims, "Et on prétend que les Noirs n'ont aucune éducation !", before assuming that Joseph is not upset–" Ça ne vous a pas vexé au moins, Joseph !"; "Je vous le demande parce que les gens racontent que les Noirs se vexent pour un rien !." The only answer Joseph could possibly provide is of course to claim that he is not offended. Here, Mr. Rosta is both stigmatizing Joseph and preventing him from defending himself. He also proclaims that Joseph must be happy to live in a civilized nation, and upon Joseph's rebuttal that he also has a civilization, once again claims that Joseph surely is not offended. Joseph's willingness to push back, albeit politely, is highly significant, as he will later lose this ability. Finally, Mr. Rosta asks how Joseph identifies after 12 years in France: "Parce que, après tout ce temps, vous ne devez plus vous sentir comme un vrai Africain!," without defining what he means by "true African."[ccxiii]

Hence, in the space of just two pages, we see Joseph defined according to colonial stereotypes of blackness. He shocks because he displays an understanding of social norms, thereby refuting the image of the savage black man, but he cannot possibly be as civilized as a French person. Furthermore, the implication that Joseph cannot be a "true" African after twelve

years in France connotes a lingering image of exoticism, one that will return in full force following his second mental break.

Moreover, it is clear that Joseph has no right to take offense to these racial micro-aggressions, because in the eyes of the oppressor, they are not aggressions but statements of fact. If Joseph were to react, he would only fulfill the image of the angry or violent black man. He is thus locked into a position of silence, where even his attempts at refuting this imposed stigma are ignored. Mr. Rosta's social status is particularly significant here: Biyaoula implicitly ties the imposition of an external verdict to whiteness, wealth, and ideas of a "white" Frenchness. In so doing he recalls not just the colonial origins of the racial hierarchy, but its continued position as the dominant pole of power in the contemporary moment. As Biyaoula also makes clear, the fight against racial verdict is terribly difficult precisely because French society claims colorblindness while still participating in racialization.

Unsurprisingly, Sabine's parents qualify their relationship as unnatural, and repeat that she could have at least chosen an educated black man. Yet, their son is Joseph's coworker, underlining the fact that their real issue with Joseph is his skin color.[ccxiv] Even Sabine's brother, Alain, who has many foreign friends and has traveled extensively in Africa, rejects Joseph. Alain sees himself as progressive, yet, when asked how he feels about his daughter dating black men or foreigners, "il devenait comme fou, il disait qu'il n'envisageait même pas cette éventualité, que ce serait horrible, que d'ailleurs il ne verrait plus ses filles, que sa porte leur serait interdite." Joseph ironically comments in turn, "C'était bon l'Afrique, l'Africain, quand ça se trouvait loin de lui."[ccxv] This in turn reveals the insidious nature of the social verdict regarding blackness.

Nominal acceptance of a coworker or friend in no way predicates true acceptance. Blackness remains threatening when it becomes close, and above all when it threatens to intertwine with whiteness; their children would be of mixed heritage, a progeny that is both darker and whiter than their parents. In discussing the negative comments at the airport i.e. that Joseph is a "Noir vendu" for dating a white woman, Robert Little argues moreover that Sabine is explicitly linked to de-pigmentation, becoming a whitening agent for Joseph.[ccxvi] I would argue that this

holds true in the eyes of outside observers in France as well. But where Joseph's compatriots react to his relationship with Sabine with jealousy masked as derision, white people in France react with rage and sometimes outright hatred when they seen Sabine and Joseph together. In at least one instance, a man–with a six year old girl in his car–leaves his vehicle to threaten Joseph with a large club: "'Viens, sale Noir ! Tu vas voir comment je vais t'arranger le portrait !' qu'il disait, la bouche tordue, les yeux brûlants de haine."[ccxvii] In contrast to claims that race has no place in France then, Biyaoula paints a chilling portrait of a society steeped in racism.

In face of these constant attacks, ranging from micro-aggressions to blatant racism and threats of physical violence, Joseph responds with anger. Sabine's reaction to this might be surprising, and I would argue that it highlights both the individualized nature of experiencing social verdict and the very privilege that defines whiteness in the western world. She would like for Joseph to see himself as a "universal" man, and repeatedly fails to understand the rage racist encounters induce in Joseph. She tells him, "T'as qu'à ne pas te penser en Noir ! Pense-toi en humain, Joseph ! Regarde-moi ! Moi, je me vois comme un être humain ! Jamais je ne me suis vécue en Blanche ! Jamais je ne me suis posé une seule question là-dessus ! Je suis ! C'est tout !."[ccxviii] Though Sabine means well, she also fails here to understand how Joseph's blackness has been imposed upon him from the outside and from birth. I would argue that Sabine can therefore be read as a stand-in for the general privilege of whiteness, able to ignore its own existence as a racial category and the ways in which the racial verdict is imposed upon those read as non-white. Indeed, she fails to understand that Joseph–called *Kala*, charcoal at home, and subject to cries of "sale Noir" in France–is eternally and externally defined by one attribute: the color of his skin. For him to simply stop seeing himself as black, when his daily interactions define him otherwise, is an impossibility.

Moreover, Sabine's declaration that she has never thought of herself as white merely underlines her privilege and her inability to truly understand Joseph's lived experience of racism. I would argue that this moment is intended to be instructional to a reader: we can see exactly how stigma hurts Joseph, and thus Sabine's declaration is shocking. She can go through life without

considering her skin color because whiteness is the standard against which all else is measured, the standard that defines humanity. Joseph in turn occupies the negative pole, defined according to a monolithic image of blackness. Indeed, he remarks that it is forbidden for those read as black to also be individuals, trapped as they are by a collectively imposed stigma.[ccxix] I would argue that in this way both Joseph and Sabine represent archetypes of a racialized society and of the black/white binary: Joseph is consumed by race, in large part because society imprisons him in his skin color, while Sabine has the privilege to ignore it and rise above, once again because as a white woman she can pass through life without noting verdict's impact.

Yet, he takes Sabine's words to heart and shifts his mindset, determined to take the high road. That is, until he travels home. After Joseph returns to France, broken by what he has experienced in Brazzaville, he is confronted once again by his blackness, in a scene that deliberately echoes Fanon. Two children aged 3 to 4 years old see him and cry out, "Maman ! maman ! regarde, maman ! Là, un monsieur tout noir ! un monsieur tout noir !."[27] Like Fanon, who feels nausea and shame when confronted with the inescapable stigma of his blackness,[ccxx] Joseph suffers a violent physical reaction: "C'est comme si on m'avait décoché un coup de poing au plexus, qui m'aurait coupé tous mes moyens. Je reste même planté sur place pendant quelques secondes." He still tries to follow Sabine's advice, to brush off the comments. However, he fails to overcome the horror of the situation, in what marks his first shift towards a breakdown in France.[ccxxi]

Biyaoula's choice of Fanon as an intertext in this moment is significant. *Peau noire, masques blancs* examines the negative experience of blackness in depth, as well as the ways in which internalized racism leads people to wear a "white" mask. This reference thus underlines Biyaoula's examination of stigma in his novel and recalls Joseph's decrying his peers' adoration

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[27] From Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*: "'Maman, regarde le nègre, j'ai peur !' Peur ! Peur ! Voilà qu'on se mettait à me craindre. Je voulus m'amuser jusqu'à m'étouffer, mais cela m'était devenu impossible." Fanon continues, detailing his becoming conscious of his blackness and the stigma that evokes: "J'étais tout à la fois responsable de mon corps, responsable de ma race, de mes ancêtres. Je promenai sur moi un regard objectif, découvrir ma noirceur, mes caractères ethniques,—et me défoncèrent le tympan l'anthropophagie, l'arriération mental, le fétichisme, les tares raciales, les négriers, et surtout : 'Y a bon banania,'" 127.

of a white ideal. Furthermore, for Fanon, the encounter on the train provokes his realization of his own blackness and all of the negative signifiers that entails. For Joseph, this is less of an awakening than it is yet another reminder that he cannot escape his blackness. In both cases though, the cries of the children mark Fanon and Joseph as non-belonging on the soil of France, a theme to which I will return in my study of *L'Exil selon Julia*. Regardless of citizenship, education, or adherence to social norms, the person marked as *noir* is defined according to their blackness by the social verdict and the enduring image of black as savage, provoking at best surprise, and at worst fear.

Following this incident, Joseph finds himself consumed by the question of race, encountering ideas about blackness and Africa at seemingly every turn. The television airs a documentary on skin-bleaching practices in Africa–an already sore subject with Joseph– and he finds himself first rebelling, then consumed by shame and hate. As Goffman has shown, this shame is the expression of internalized stigma.[ccxxii] Joseph's hate in turn is directed towards those who bleach their skin, thereby embracing racism and giving fodder to those who would look down on Africans or those with dark skin. In an ironic reversal of the white claim to racial purity, he sees these individuals as traitors to the black race–they are defiling their blackness.

However, his hate also turns inward. He laments, "La grande culbute de ce que je suis, l'expression de la fanure de la noirceur, de mon intimité, la corruption de mon écorce, de mon être, de mon âme, c'est ce que j'ai l'impression d'avoir eu étalé devant moi. D'autant qu'elles ne paraissaient pas, ces femmes, se rendre compte qu'elles se donnaient des coups, qu'elles crachaient sur elles-mêmes, sur moi."[ccxxiii] If they bleach their skin to appear paler, in so doing marking blackness as a default needing fixing, then this fixes Joseph under the same sign. Still, I would argue that Biyaoula positions Joseph as a bad reader here. Blinded by his own internalized stigma, Joseph lays the blame at the feet of those who share his imposed identity of blackness as shame. Not only does he see them as reflections of his own self, as part of a greater black community, rather than as individuals, he judges them for what he believes is their own blindness without allowing for the possibility that they are aware of their stigma.

Nonetheless, the documentary also gives fodder to prejudices, one of Joseph's greatest fears. The following day his white colleagues reinforce his pain, mocking Africans who whiten their skin and emulate the white ideal: "C'est pour ça que les Africains courent tant derrière les Blanches !," the implication being both that they want to be white, and that this is laughable. Joseph immediately succumbs to horrendous headaches and has to leave work early, "le corps fiévreux et empli de dégoût."[ccxxiv] Ironically, it is the experience of racism and the repeated message that his blackness is a sickness that causes Joseph to fall ill, as it becomes ever clearer that his resistance is a lonely battle. Biyaoula's commentary is evident: society's racial verdict has real and serious consequences for individuals.

Significantly, it is also at this time that Joseph finally loses faith in the idea of *Africanité*, as he sees no path to freedom for those marked as black. Though Biyaoula's focus on racialization recalls the Négritude movement, here he will ultimately critique it.[ccxxv] Every single failing of a black individual will be transmitted to the entire "race," as is the case when a black minister forgets the name of the ministry for which he works–his colleagues once again use this as proof that afro-descendent peoples are inferior. Joseph also comments that those marked as black are irrevocably locked into the racial hierarchy where whiteness is the model to emulate.[ccxxvi] As Eribon contends, consciousness of the violence exerted by the social order is not enough to escape it; rather, "l'assujettissement perdure, et avec lui la soumission."[ccxxvii] I would argue that Joseph's voice can be understood as a stand in for Biyaoula here, as his entire struggle to escape the racial hierarchy begins to fall apart.

Even Joseph's intellectual friends who support "noiritude"–Biyaoula's satirical take on negritude–approve of women bleaching their skin, denying that it has anything to do with a desire to appear "white."[ccxxviii] The irony here is clear: those who proclaim they support the black or African "race" or pan-African ideals are also bound by stigma, unable to see how their valuing of pale skin and European hair as more "beautiful" than natural skin and hair could reinforce the stigmatization of a phenotype associated with blackness. As Joseph remarks, "D'un côté on se joue la comédie d'aimer ce qu'on est, de l'autre on s'escrime à gommer ce qui nous

caractérise."[ccxxix] He also strongly critiques "noiritude" and the impulse to blame all problems on "Blancs" instead of recognizing that poverty and corruption exist.[ccxxx] In this way, Biyaoula reminds the reader of the struggles Joseph faced at home, surrounded by a culture that has embraced corruption and lies for the sake of keeping up appearances, a culture that is also defined by its inability to face its own internalized verdicts.

And yet, there is no way out, because even as Joseph recognizes and grapples with the stigma of blackness, it destroys him. He turns on Sabine and white people in general, seeing in each of them an enemy–a potential aggressor or racist–and shuts himself in. In other words, he begins to slide towards a mental breakdown. Each small micro-aggression becomes a point of obsession and pain, and he fights repeatedly with Sabine over what he sees as racism in encounters and television shows.[ccxxxi] Their difficulty lies in part in Sabine's inescapable privilege as a white person, and the inability of Joseph to cope with an existence defined by rejection. His skin is an "eternal prison," one that no artifice will tear apart.[ccxxxii] Joseph thus turns his impotent rage on Sabine, becoming verbally abusive and making her his scapegoat for the crimes of others.

As incomprehensible as his treatment might seem, as Sabine is far from racist, Biyaoula reveals that Joseph's internalization of the racial verdict is ultimately to blame. He remarks, "Et je me demande ce qui pourrait le motiver, son amour. Si c'est le charbon que je suis, si c'est la nullité sans boulot que je suis, si c'est toute mon acidité, toute ma pourriture qu'il me plaît parfois de rejeter sur elle. Je les comprends de moins en moins, ses sentiments. Quelquefois je soupçonne que je suis peut-être infect, odieux avec elle pour la pousser à bout."[ccxxxiii] Unable to understand how someone as "defective" as he might deserve love, he pushes her away, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy to match his internalized shame and pain. If Joseph represents the fight against racialization, Biyaoula's choice to make him fail underlines the power of a verdict that is both externally imposed and internalized.

The final straw comes with the murder of Joseph's friend Dieudonné at the hands of white men. He was caught having an affair with the wife of a white man who admires Hitler, and

thus his murder can be assumed to be racially motivated.[ccxxxiv] However, once again proving his unreliability as a reader of society, Joseph loses the ability to distinguish Sabine from the enemy, and ultimately drives her away. Furthermore, in his eyes *all* whites become stand-ins for the murderers of Dieudonné,[ccxxxv] in a reversal of the white gaze that marks all those marked as black according to negative stereotypes. Yet Joseph does not have the power associated with the dominant group, and so in the end, his reversal of verdict fails. Joseph regrets the loss of Sabine, going so far as to stalk her former workplace and apartment; after one final encounter with her parents, he suffers a complete mental break. His last conscious thought is that the radio is speaking of immigrants, "Les immigrés…Les immigrés…Elles me battent de plus en plus la tête, mes céphalées…Les immigrés…Les immigrés."[ccxxxvi] Caught between Brazzaville and France, each with impossible expectations, he surrenders.

Joseph Succumbs: Embracing Stigma

Joseph awakens nearly four months later in a mental ward, and eventually undergoes treatment at the hands of Dr. Malfoi (Dr. Bad Faith), a "specialist" in "African culture." This final section of the novel is ironically named, "La Mue," and in it Joseph will learn to embrace his stigma, to embrace racism, and to wear a mask. In other words, his mind will be colonized at the hands of a doctor acting in bad faith. Rather than shed a skin to reveal his true identity, he instead learns to put on a new one–like Fanon's white mask–to please both his peers and a white-dominant society. As Moudileno comments, in this section Joseph's view is reversed, or rather inverted. No longer an outsider looking in with an anthropological or diagnostic gaze, he becomes a full and willing participant in the system that perpetuates the racial verdict.[ccxxxvii]

Significantly, Malfoi is described as having a face both like a snake and a cat, and yet, despite his awareness that something is wrong, Joseph falls under his spell as though drugged, or perhaps–given the references to boa constrictors–like a snake that has been charmed by a flute.[ccxxxviii] Malfoi also dresses in a *boubou* and treats his African patients in a separate room adorned with African masks, in a clear fetishization of blackness, or what bell hooks has referred to as "eating the other."[ccxxxix] Joseph's falling under Malfoi's spell is therefore far more than a

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simple case of being influenced. It is an act of violence: "Ah ! quelle voix il a cet homme ! Il me

subjugue littéralement." As we shall see, Dr. Malfoi uses his own voice to silence the part of

Joseph that sees and understands the harm racial hierarchies enact on the stigmatized.

In response to Joseph expressing his concerns over skin-bleaching, internalized racism,

and the inescapability of blackness, Malfoi answers that white women tan and change their hair,

and that cosmetic products have been used in Africa for centuries ("Je conviens que ce n'était

pas sous les formes actuelles, mais quelle importance !").[ccxl] While the former observation is true,

and indeed points to the human desire to have that which is difficult to attain as a sign of social

status, it also ignores the specific ways in which markers of blackness have been and are

disparaged. Tanning in the West implies access to leisure in a world dominated by indoor work,

but the use of blackface remains a deliberate act of racist mockery. Likewise, as already

discussed, the proliferation of skin-bleaching products in Africa has a strong correlation with the

use of white beauty standards in media, and is strongly associated with internalized racism.

Malfoi's refusal to acknowledge these possibilities is a violent act, a denial of Joseph's reality and

a denial of the history of race-making in the French and francophone contexts. Indeed, his

dismissiveness recalls the erasure of race in French society more generally.

Malfoi instead encourages Joseph to be an individual–recalling Sabine's exhortation–and

to also embrace without question or critique his culture's adoration of elders, its corruption, its

skin bleaching, and its sape vestimentary codes.[ccxli] This embrace of all things African, good or

bad, is necessary, according to Malfoi, lest Africa lose its uniqueness and exoticism: "Si vous ne

gardez pas votre nature, votre culture, pour qu'elles servent d'exemple à la terre entière, ce sera

la mort de l'humanité ! Gardez votre fraîcheur, votre innocence, monsieur !."[ccxlii] It is no

coincidence that this rings of stereotypes of the infantile African, or the *bon sauvage*; in fact

Malfoi also comments on the "gentillesse" and "naïveté" of Africans.[ccxliii] The message is clear: for

Joseph to fit into French society he must conform to this preconceived image of blackness. This

is similar to what Goffman terms a "good adjustment," which requires the stigmatized person to

"cheerfully and unselfconsciously accept himself as essentially the same as normals, while at the

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same time he voluntarily withholds himself from those situations in which normals would find it difficult to give lip service to their similar acceptance of him."[ccxliv] In Joseph's case, this means silencing his critiques of racist practices, accepting his status as an exotic and inferior Other, and conforming to those practices he once hated. He comments, "J'ai compris que ça ne sert à rien de me mettre martel en tête, de me demander pourquoi […] je finirais seulement par me détester, vu qu'il paraît qu'aucun humain ne choisirait ni ne supporterait de ne susciter que de la haine à ses prochains."[ccxlv] His status as stigmatized is unavoidable, and so he can only accept it, lest he lose his sanity once more. Thus ends his resistance, the colonization of his mind complete.

He "sheds" his skin, becoming a parody of himself, embracing everything he once hated, and engaging with gusto in a life built on a façade. In keeping with the need to have a "good adjustment," he explains: "et faut que je me conforme totalement à l'image que je dois donner aux gens, celle qu'ils attendent."[ccxlvi] He therefore buys expensive suits, and takes taxis to create the illusion of wealth. Moudileno argues that this is an attempt to invest his body with codes other than race–clothing, esthetics, culture.[ccxlvii] Yet, in tying the reversal of Joseph's psychology and his adoption of this lifestyle to the advice of a doctor acting in bad faith, Biyaoula implies from the outset that this escape attempt will end in failure.

Indeed, Joseph's "ascent" is a lie. The job provided to him by Malfoi is to clean the bedpans of incontinent–and highly racist–elderly people in a care facility.[ccxlviii] His descent into filth is literal; first a factory worker with a computer technician degree, he now wallows in human feces, a mirror to the societal filth he embraces. He also embraces the term "Black", because it hurts less than "Noir," whitens his skin, and numbs himself with copious amounts of alcohol, gratuitous sex, and parading like a peacock to make sure that people are watching and–as he wants to believe–adoring him.[ccxlix] As Little notes, the symbolism of mirrors underlines the importance of appearance, of making sure the white–or "whitened"–mask has not begun to slip.[ccl] In spite of his best attempts to shed his skin by adopting new clothing and mannerisms, Joseph remains bound by it. As chapter one showed, though cultural markers can influence the racial verdict, it is ultimately founded first and foremost on phenotype, on the physical body.

In what is perhaps the greatest irony, Joseph also adopts a binary view of race that runs counter to his previous impasse, in which he could only see the ways in which blackness is classed as negative by a white standard. In his new worldview he instead embraces conceptions of genetic difference (recalling biological racism). Now he proclaims that Africans are naturally superior dancers. Therefore anyone who dances poorly, notably another rich compatriot Laustel, cannot be truly or wholly African. Rather they must have suspect origins and be partly European: "Ça fait des mois que je ne doute plus que l'Africain, le Noir, il a le rythme dans le sang, que c'est congénital, un caractère racial même s'il me souvient nombre de mes pareils dansant comme des pieds."[ccli] This is however something Laustel vehemently denies. Joseph believes he would announce his heritage if he knew of it, as this would further elevate his social standing. He even celebrates this valuing of whiteness: "une goutte de ce sang-là quand elle s'est ajoutée au nôtre, on le dit ! Puisque ça vous donne une autre dimension aux yeux des Africains !."[cclii] This marks a significant turn from Joseph's previous attitude towards the stigma of blackness; whereas before he railed against this system, decrying the valuation of whiteness as the social ideal, here he nearly celebrates it.

I would argue moreover that hiding mixed blood might also serve as a coping mechanism in a world where any degree of visible blackness effaces whiteness. Yet, to argue that a bad dancer is not truly African also implies an impurity. This would mean that Joseph, as a gifted dancer and the darkest of dark-skinned Africans, is pure and implicitly superior. I would argue that Biyaoula is deliberately parodying the one-drop rule in this sequence, highlighting both the absurdity of racial constructs and the way in which stigma constructs Joseph's new worldview. From an enlightened man who fights against the racism embedded in society, engaging readily in conversations with people to educate them, he has regressed into someone who readily adopts racial stereotypes, and simply gives up on fighting racism in his daily life. All this, to sustain what he calls his "internal coma."[ccliii] The starkness of this transformation, and the failure of Joseph's resistance, ultimately forces the reader to confront the power of the racial verdict.

<u>Resistance Failed: Suicide as Verdict</u>

Indeed, nothing Joseph does erases his pain, the pain of being black in a world that devalues blackness. The novel ends with an encounter with another very dark-skinned African, Justin, who pours his heart out to Joseph, telling his story of how his mother named him *Goudron*, or tar, and horrifically abused him, always tying her treatment to the revolting nature of his dark skin.[ccliv] Justin asks, "Peut-on imaginer ce que peut ressentir un petit enfant quand sa mère le hait, ne l'appelle jamais par son nom ? quand on lui fait sentir en permanence qu'il porte quelque chose de hideux ?." Tar, do this, Tar do that, Tar, you are so ugly. [cclv] His mother hates him for his dark skin, as a reminder of her own blackness, a transmission of a wound from one generation to another. Justin might thus be read as a mirror of Joseph before his transformation at the hands of Malfoi. Yet, shortly after Justin departs, he commits suicide, unable to reconcile with the racial verdict that marks him as unwanted. The novel ends on the very same page, with Joseph hastening to make another appointment with Dr. Malfoi, in the hopes that he has a faster, more effective, more radical method, to erase his memory and give him happy thoughts.[cclvi] The alternative, it would seem, is death. In the end, Biyaoula shows us, neither active resistance nor mental gymnastics can save the person marked under the sign of blackness.

L'Impasse is an utter condemnation of a society that drives men to madness and to suicide, torturing them for the color of their skin. The blame does not lie squarely on France–the people of Congo are willing participants in their own dehumanization. However it must be understood that this dehumanization has its very roots in the colonial structure, and in the creation of racial hierarchies that placed black Africans at the bottom in justification of the slave trade and economic exploitation. As Biyaoula shows, this repeated imposition of stigma can result in a colonization of the mind, leading to a continual cycle of violence wherein the stigmatized re-enforce their own stigma. By laying out this effect of verdict–and its sheer power–*L'Impasse* ultimately refuses the colonization of blackness. If colonization was enacted for the "good" of the colonized, here we see instead how it only serves to harm. Joseph and Justin's pain and self-awareness refute the tropes of savagery and inhumanity tied to blackness; their pain is instead an

expression of undeniable humanity.

L'Exil selon Julia: Valorizing Blackness

Just as Daniel Biyaoula's novel addresses particular themes associated with francophone African literature, while at the same time breaking from the mold of his contemporaries by addressing the impact of racialization in France and in Congo, Gisèle Pineau's *L'Exil selon Julia* at once tackles the stigma of blackness in the metropole and in Guadeloupe, while comfortably inhabiting a zone between the Caribbean and France, and between the genres of novel, memoire and autobiography. Different from Biyaoula's text however, which considers how the racial verdict impacts African immigrants in France and those remaining in the former colonies, Gisèle Pineau's *L'Exil selon Julia* addresses the stigma of blackness as it impacts native French citizens who are rejected as such based on the color of their skin.

Though this chapter focuses on racialization in *L'Exil selon Julia* only, racism is a common theme in Pineau's work, which spans several novels, several short stories and literature for young adults.[cclvii] In fact, she has stated in multiple interviews that she deliberately addresses racism in her writing, both as a means of rehabilitating painful memories of her own childhood, as in *L'Exil selon Julia*, and as a political stance.[cclviii] This use of writing to address stigma is key to my analysis: just as Biyaoula contradicts the racial verdict by revealing its pain, so too does Pineau counteract it both by exposing and by rehabilitating her psyche. This political engagement is typical of Pineau's *oeuvre*, which has also been studied for its representation of women–historically marginalized in the French Caribbean–as well as its study of familial ties, of memory, and of the construction of identity.[cclix]

Like *L'Impasse*, whose opening scene centers on race-based rejection, *L'exil selon Julia* opens with taunts leveled by white schoolchildren at a mixed, yet dark-skinned child named Marie, born in Paris to Guadeloupian parents: *Négro. Négresse à plateau. Blanche-Neige.*

Bamboula. Charbon. Y a bon banania.[28] Rejected upon sight for the darkness of her skin

(*retournez dans votre pays!*), and torn between her origins in Guadeloupe and her native land of

France, the young narrator Marie learns early the cruel lessons of the societal verdict that is

racism. In Pineau's work, writing–both in letters Marie addresses to Man Ya and in the form of the

memoir itself–exposes the viciousness of these verdicts, of being marked under the sign of

blackness, and the pain this engenders. Writing itself can thus be understood as a form of

resistance that gives rise to the text. Like her progeny, Man Ya also resists with her words,

fighting the official whitewashing of history by teaching her grandchildren about slavery, sharing

the cultural heritage of Guadeloupe, and demonstrating a knowledge of the world that cannot be

learned in a Western schoolroom. Accordingly, this section argues that Pineau models in her text

how lived blackness can be both French and Caribbean, metropolitan and Guadeloupean,

defying the binary that positions blackness as inherently negative and *not* French. Whereas

L'Impasse concentrates on condemning society's verdict, Pineau ultimately resists this racism

and othering by offering a positive counterpoint, showing that those classed as *Noir* can be

equally French, and that blackness as an identity or way of being can be multiple.

This resistance takes on greater significance when considered in the contexts of the

reception and marketing of Pineau's work, and the representation of Antillean experience in

French literature. Valéry Loichot remarks that French-language Caribbean literature is often

marketed as "banana French," "spicy," and "vanilla-scented,"[cclx] terms evoking exotic images of

Africa and the Caribbean that are inextricably linked to negative connotations of racial and

linguistic inferiority. Pineau's works are no exception to this exoticization, in spite of her enduring

insistence on her Parisian roots.[cclxi] She has been named the "Creole fairy"–thus doubly marked

as mystical and minor, rather than French and part of a norm–and her language compared to

"island vegetation."[cclxii] Therefore a text like *L'Exil selon Julia* runs the risk from the outset as

being viewed according to a lens that places it on a lesser rung than "true" French literature, or

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[28] Like Marie, Pineau was born in Paris to Guadeloupean parents, and later lived in France,
Africa, Martinique and Guadeloupe. See Lemki, "Écriture migrante," 161.

bound by the frames of "francophone" and "exotic." And yet, Pineau emphasizes that her literature is *not* exotic, and moreover that no literature is exotic; rather she writes from her belly, and writes of what she knows, even if this includes writing of foods that might seem foreign to a French audience.[cclxiii]

Accordingly, the treatment of naked racism and psychological trauma in the text pushes back against this general framing. Scenes set in Guadeloupe that might excite with their descriptions of lush gardens and vanilla notwithstanding, the unifying thread of the narrative–the refrain of *bamboula*–turns its gaze back on France and its hostility toward non-white citizens–as opposed to its exclusion of African immigrants–revealing the damaging nature of such exoticization. In this way *L'Exil selon Julia* has strong resonances with *L'Impasse*. Yet, its highlighting of the rejection of native citizens along racial lines underlines even more strongly how race–as opposed to fears of immigration or non-assimilation–is a deciding factor in the rejection of blackness in France.

This section will first examine the imposition of blackness on the narrator and her family, in contrast to her mixed ethnic roots, before examining in the second part the numerous experiences of racism presented in the text and the trauma they engender. The third part considers the importance of representation and the valorization of positive models of blackness as embodied by Sylvette Cabrisseau's time as a newscaster in France, and the lessons imparted by Man Ya; these two figures provide a source of strength against the traumatic backdrop of racism. Finally, I examine how writing in the text fights trauma, reverses verdict and becomes in turn a model of representation.

Blackness Imposed and Internalized

As previously stated, Pineau's narrator Marie characterizes herself as a dark-skinned girl born in Paris. The family spends four months in Guadeloupe when Marie is five years old, and a year in Africa in her early childhood. Africa however remains elusive; the children see it as an exotic place, isolated by their location in a French military base.[cclxiv] For the older narrator it represents a loss and a sorrow, a home that could have been, while her mother remarks that

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"l'Afrique nous avait pourtant toujours tenus à distance, comme si la couleur de la peau seule ne faisait pas la famille."[cclxv]

This early discussion of the impossibility of belonging to Africa–and the emphasis on skin color *not* serving as a link–is significant, because the time spent in France–indeed, this is the greater part of Marie's childhood–is marked by racial slurs highlighting her African ancestry, her perceived indigeneity, and cries that she should return to her country. These slurs are inspired by her outward physical appearance, by her skin color and hair, the very same features that paradoxically do not allow her instant and easy access to Africa. Yet she is French, including by heritage–as her father's ancestral name comes from Charentes[cclxvi]–and ultimately *only* knows France. Thus Pineau makes it clear that blackness is imposed as stereotype on Marie and her siblings from the outside; they are French citizens as are their parents, but their skin marks them apart, as fundamentally exotic, and as non-belonging. More than this, as we shall see in the following section, they are dehumanized, compared to monkeys and savages, in keeping with the centuries long denigration of black skin and African and afro-descendent peoples examined in chapter one.

Yet, echoing *L'Impasse*, Marie's parents have also internalized whiteness (coded in this text both as physical skin color and as Frenchness or belonging to mainland France) as a positive counter-model to blackness. Though Marie's father, Maréchal, is a "nègre-noir de Routhiers,"[cclxvii] he wins over his future wife, Daisy, in spite of her superior social status as a "mulâtre" with pale skin and silky hair, due to his education, his "français sans coups de roches," and his French military uniform, a guarantee of "noblesse" and "honneur."[cclxviii] Social norms would have allowed Daisy to proclaim her superiority to Maréchal based on skin color–"Vous êtes un Nègre, monsieur ! Passez votre chemin ! Ma peau est trop claire pour vous !"–, but the strong ties Maréchal possesses with mainland France and its status as a bastion of civilization effectively whitewash his skin and "civilize" him, making him a suitable match.[cclxix] Furthermore, Maréchal's family name comes directly from France, further legitimizing him: "Son nom venait directement de France. C'était ni un nom fabriqué au jour d'abolition, ni un vestige d'Afrique. Il en était fier. C'est

pourquoi il n'était pas parti en guerre comme un chien fou. Juste pour imiter les autres. Il était allé secourir la Mère-Patrie, défendre la terre de ses ancêtres."[cclxx] This quote implies that his last name is of "real" European heritage, as opposed to invented, an implication that subtly delegitimizes European-sounding names that cannot be proven to have a direct lineage. In other words, Maréchal has a proven genetic tie to whiteness through his paternal line, in spite of the darkness of his skin.

This link between "Frenchness," paleness, and civilization, invariably placed in opposition to dark skin and markers of "indigeneity" like Creole language, is further confirmed by Maréchal's vision of France. He assures his children upon their move to the mainland that they have reached "un pays de grande civilisation,"[cclxxi] and they initially believe–in spite of repeated encounters with racism and rejection–that they are privileged to have "escaped" the sugar cane fields, the Creole language, and poverty, and that they are "evolved" by comparison to those who have remained in Guadeloupe.[cclxxii] The legacy of negative profiles of blackness is evident here, shaping the value system of Marie and her family in such a way that they devalorize their own Caribbean heritage in favor of their European roots, the later longing for a connection with Africa notwithstanding. However, just as Biyaoula's commentary on Joseph's family extends beyond fiction to a critique of contemporary Congolese society, Maréchal's vision of the world is representative of how the racial verdict has been internalized in the French Caribbean, where dark skin and Creole speech are markers of lower class status, and genetic ties to whiteness are deeply valued.

Indeed, the disconnect between the family's social status in Guadeloupe and their belief in the superiority of France, and the racist treatment Marie and her siblings will endure in the *metropole* is stark, and only confirms the inescapability of their blackness. Once again, we find echoes of Fanon. As Louise Hardwick points out, the difficulty of life in France for Marie and family comes from their experience of "the second-class citizenship bind", or what Julien Daniel calls "la citoyenneté inachevée," which holds Antillean immigrants in France in a state of non-belonging based on their culture and skin color, despite their French citizenship.[cclxxiii] They are therefore trapped between an internalized verdict that leads to an admiration of the metropole

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and whiteness, and the external verdict that marks them as outsiders based on the outward evidence of their African heritage.

<u>Exposing the Trauma of Racism</u>

Let us return then to our seven caustic refrains of *bamboula* to better understand how the pain of a racial verdict forms the backbone of the novel, as an inescapable trauma that is the frame upon which even the narrator's happier memories are built. The text opens on those shocking words, "Négro. Négresse à plateau. Blanche-Neige. Bamboula. Charbon et compagnie," before continuing, "Ces noms-là nous pistent en tous lieux. Échos éternels, diables bondissant dans des flaques, ils nous éclaboussent d'une eau sale. Flèches perdues, longues, empoisonnées, traçant au cœur d'une petite trêve. Crachats sur la fierté. Pluie de roches sur nos têtes. Brusques éboulements de nos âmes."[cclxxiv] The narrator remarks furthermore that above all one must pretend that the words do not hurt, that one must not react, so as to not give the attackers the satisfaction of seeing the pain they cause. The language employed here denotes otherwise however, exposing the visceral, even physical, sensation of pain engendered by the slurs.

These attacks hurt not just because of how they devalorize and dehumanize, but also because they refuse belonging. Indeed, the racist encounters Pineau highlights in the text share the common theme of marking Marie, Man Ya, and her siblings as being outsiders in France who can never be French, in spite of their factual Frenchness. This leads her elder brother Paul to hide his family out of shame as he dates white French girls, who see in him an exotic prize: "La noirceur de sa peau leur fait imaginer des choses excitantes. Elles se figurent une puissance animale ou quelque chose de même acabit."[cclxxv] Though Paul profits from this attitude, in the sense that he willingly pursues those relationships, he must also sacrifice his family so as not to inspire a negative racism that will lead to his rejection. The narrator asks, "Craint-il d'être déposé dans le même *kiwi* que ces Nègres qui n'en finissent pas de compter leur fratrie?," before commenting on the stereotype that black people in France are African immigrants who have large polygamous families, wear colorful clothing, believe in black magic, practice female genital

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mutilation and scarification, and ultimately constitute an invasive threatening force.[cclxxvi] The siblings thus understand Paul's desire to hide his family, and his refusal to acknowledge them in public. It is a delicate balancing act: in embracing his casting as the exotic and thus desirable black man, Paul finds a degree of acceptance. This acceptance is however highly conditional and fragile, and requires him to avoid evocations of the wild, polygamous, invasive black African.

Paul's attitude therefore is also a great source of pain. As Marie writes, the family is branches of the same tree, facing the wind and claws alone, but strengthened by one another. Paul's rejection is a betrayal of this solidarity at the same time that it is an understandable–and understood–method of self-preservation in a community where the family is subjected to degrees of racialized abuse, ranging from stares to slurs, and at best told they are "pas comme les autres Nègres," a community where people touch the narrator's hair without permission and gasp at the paleness of her palms.[cclxxvii]

Moreover, this series of stereotypes marks Paul and the family as African, despite their mixed French and Antillean heritage, and despite the fact that the younger siblings were born on French soil. As Louise Hardwick notes, there is a double structure at play in Marie's experience of diaspora–an experience that I would expand to include the entire family–as racial difference causes white French people to situate Marie (and family) within a "black African diasporic framework," in spite of their Caribbean roots.[cclxxviii] They are thus rejected as French–both as French citizens from Guadeloupe, and as residents, and even native residents, of the *métropole*– and forcibly identified with a foreign land and culture. Whereas Biyaoula's Joseph is torn between the rejection he experiences in France and a homeland that is consumed by corruption and an internalized hatred of blackness, he at least has an identity as African. Marie in turn is denied belonging to any country in spite of her legal status as French. Yet, in both cases, blackness serves as the reason for rejection.

Significantly, it is immediately after this passage that the refrain of *bamboula* returns for a second time as a schoolyard taunt on the playground, like the bombardments of a cannon: "Négresse à plateau ! Bamboula ! Retourne dans ton pays !".[cclxxix] Here, children who otherwise

seem to accept Marie and her siblings quickly turn to racial slurs when playground interactions turn ugly. Viewed in the context of the immediately preceding lament over Paul's desire to distance himself from the family and the precarious nature of his own integration[29] into mainland French society, this also further highlights the doubling of the diasporic experience. Marie was born in France, and Guadeloupe is a French department; there is no country to which she can return. The message is clear: you can never be one of us. Pineau thus reminds the reader that the racial verdict's emphasis on the physical body makes integration conditional; legal status, culture, speech, and clothing may bear the trappings of "whiteness", but they cannot efface phenotype.

The greater number of these taunts have obvious resonances with skin color. *Bamboula* however bears further exploration. Originally an amalgamation of sara and bola words for drum, *bamboula* was used in the 18th century to refer to an African dance–or a *danse nègre*–and by the mid-19th century connoted a primitive and violent dance with accompanying associations of savagery, infantilism and cannibalism that continue today.[cclxxx] It also brings to mind images of highly popular racist trademarks. One, created in 1926, to sell coffee, depicted a black man wearing only striped shorts, dancing and playing a tambourine in the center of a table decorated with cups of steaming coffee.[cclxxxi] More recently, in 1987, St. Michel created a now-defunct line of chocolate biscuits, featuring a brown-skinned African boy named Bamboula, who wears a ragged leopard skin and has exaggerated features, with round eyes, large ears, and a decidedly simian face shape.[30] In 1994 the company also opened a short-lived Ivoirian village ("*Village Bamboula*"), in the Port-Saint-Père Safari Park near Nantes, complete with 25 men, women and children in traditional dress.[cclxxxii] The actors were initially forced to work seven days a week without pay, held on the premises, denied social security, denied child labor protection and schooling for the four children, and had their passports confiscated, until public outrage and

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[29] Integration as I use it here is understood to connote belonging to a social fabric, and is ultimately conditional on acceptance by the dominant social class. Different from assimilation, or the erasure of difference, integration also evokes a degree of continued difference.
[30] See https://www.eighties.fr/biscuits-bamboula/ and https://www.coup-de-vieux.fr/les-biscuits-bamboula/ for pictures and links to advertisements featuring Bamboula.

action taken by 26 regional groups representing migrants and others forced a change.[cclxxxiii] The creation of a modern day human zoo near the former slave port of Nantes for the purposes of marketing a cookie product aimed at children highlights succinctly why a word such as *bamboula* is much more than a simple schoolyard jeer. It, with the other taunts, is also emblematic of the impregnation of the French imagination with the link between black bodies and slave labor, and with the image of grotesque African–where black men and women were (and are) savage, hypersexual, ape-like, brutish and sub-human.

Indeed, rather than a place where French Republican values of inclusion and equality are modeled and practiced, school is a particular source of pain for the young Marie, as it serves as a constant reminder of her difference. From her first day of school, where she is the "seule négrillonne parmi tous les petits Blancs en tablier gris",[cclxxxiv] skin color marks Marie as black and therefore lesser. Marie shows a great aptitude for school, quickly learning her letters and finishing her work far before her peers. Rather than celebrate or encourage Marie however, the teacher instead uses her skin color to exhort the others to work faster: "Les enfants ! La Noire a déjà fini sa copie ! Alors, vous pouvez le faire aussi."[cclxxxv] Marie sees this as praise, but the reader understands that it ultimately implies that the white children are not working up to *their* potential. Accordingly, Marie's success is not due to her aptitude but to their complacency, a subtle evocation of stereotypes of black intellectual inferiority.

Furthermore, the teacher singles Marie out not by name, but by skin color, thereby defining her by an outward appearance that is stigmatized rather than recognizing her as an individual. In the following moments, when Marie is called to the blackboard and both writes with her left hand and from right to left, her illusion of acceptance is shattered. To overcome the trauma of her teacher's rage and having her hand hit with a ruler, Marie imagines children at school in Guadeloupe, believing that theirs is a positive and happy instruction.[cclxxxvi] We see here once again how she is refused belonging and exists in a double exile, unmoored from France, her birthplace, and unfamiliar with Guadeloupe and her main heritage.

Though the incident with the alphabet marks the narrator's memory, Pineau chooses to

focus at length on her sixth grade experience. This period is particularly traumatic, to the point

she writes of it in a series of letters that become a diary.[31] Marie's teacher, Mme Baron, singles

her out for particular retribution, grading her harshly, refusing to call on her, and accusing her of

smirking or smiling "ironiquement." Mme Baron eventually forces Marie her to sit at her feet under

her desk on a daily basis as punishment. Marie is the only non-white child in the classroom.

Moreover, she writes that each time she enters under the desk, she is like a "chien à la niche,"

with an implication that she is sitting at the feet of her master.[cclxxxvii]

This dehumanization is particularly significant, because Marie chooses these words

herself, and because the imagery of a dog obeying a human master also evokes slavery. She is

acutely aware of her own status as subhuman in the eyes of her teacher, a status that is based

on her skin color, or an externally imposed blackness. This link is confirmed by Marie's own

interpretation: "Je suis son souffre-douleur. Elle n'aime pas voir ma figure de négresse, ma peau

noire."[cclxxxviii] Pineau thus highlights the degree to which the racial verdict can be internalized.

More than this, Marie's awareness of the reason behind her treatment once again recalls Eribon's

argument that knowledge of stigma is not enough to escape it.

Furthermore, Mme Baron, as an authority figure who should both teach and practice

equality and inclusion according to the French Republican model of schooling, instead abuses

her power to condemn Marie according to the stigma of blackness. Her crime is to be black and

to be intelligent. The pain of this experience, of suffering the effects of this social verdict cannot

be overstated. She writes: "Je serre les dents pour ne pas pleurer. J'entends les voix des élèves.

J'ai honte. J'ai peur. Accroupie sous le bureau. Personne ne proteste. Personne ne prend ma

défense."[cclxxxix] The shortness of the phrases in this paragraph highlights her emotional distress,

much like someone trying to speak through tears with ragged breath. Hers is a position of

supreme loneliness, singled out for an inescapable trait, and left without defense or support.

During gym class, Marie's peers also compare her to a monkey as she climbs a rope;

they proclaim, "C'est normal, ils grimpent aux arbres dans leur pays!."[ccxc] The effect of this jeering

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[31] I discuss this in greater detail in the final section on writing as a tool to refute verdicts.

is profound. Marie declares, "J'aurais pu lâcher ma corde, pour ne plus les entendre ricaner. Je serais tombée sur la tête. Et il n'y aurait plus eu de couleur de peau, seulement une grande mort sans fleurs ni couronnes."[ccxci] She is of course, as French as they. That students and teachers so easily reject a fellow French citizen as foreign, an attitude antithetical to the ideal Republican model, is symptomatic of the long reach of negative images of blackness. I would therefore argue that Pineau implicates the French state as complicit in failing its citizens in these scenes of school trauma, a notion to which I will return in chapter three. Yet, it is also school that offers Marie (and Pineau) the tools she will use to cope with this burden: the ability to read and write.

Writing Trauma, Refuting Verdict

Marie turns first to reading as an escape, finding solace in French literature. By age 7 Marie is well versed in some of the classics of French literature: *La Princesse de Clèves*, the *Fleurs du Mal*, the *Liaisons dangereuses*. She flees the harshness of school in her imagination, finding strength in the independence of the Marquise de Merteuil and the Princesse de Clèves.[ccxcii] This passage reveals far more than the precocious nature of Marie's childhood. Her ability to identify with canonical heroines of French literature also proves her ability to belong to France and its dominant culture. Indeed, Eribon remarks that access to "legitimate" (or dominant) culture marks the beginning of the social ascent, towards integration or assimilation and away from the minority class. Moreover, Eribon notes that "la haute culture, la grande littérature représentent de puissants vecteurs de désidentification avec sa classe d'origine, quand cette classe est de celles qu'on désigne couramment sous le nom de 'populaires.'"[ccxciii] With a family coming from Guadeloupe, in spite of her father's education, Marie is inevitably marked as lower class in comparison to the "French" resident of the metropole. Add to this the stigma of her skin, and she is doubly a part of a minority class. Pineau's decision to list these specific titles is accordingly a deliberate nod to her acquired social capital. It also legitimizes Pineau as an author herself, and places her text within a canonical tradition that she is simultaneously able to subvert through her explicit treatment of anti-black racism.

By middle school, Marie turns to writing to express her trauma, detailing her experiences

in letters to Man Ya that eventually become instead a personal diary she compares to that of Anne Frank. Significantly, Pineau places the stories of the gym rope and of the horrible treatment she endures at the hands of Mme Baron in these letters rather than in the main narrative. To Marie, these letters are a means of fighting back against Mme Baron, whom she envisions as a sorceress that she, the protagonist, must defeat.[ccxciv] As Hardwick notes, "The letters discuss some of the most pernicious and disturbing examples of everyday racism in the text, and through this stripping of the narrative into short, first-person letters, the reader is left in no doubt as to the traumatic impact of such events."[ccxcv] Thus, these letters aren't just a means of resistance for Marie, but also for Pineau herself. Though they are addressed to Man Ya within the narrative, the structure of the text means that the reader takes the privileged place of the grandmother for whose eyes the letters were intended. Pineau further highlights the impact of the racial verdict through Marie's outward silence: Marie internalizes her experiences of racism, and for a long time does not dare tell her family of what Mme Baron does. Rather, she details it only in writing, expressing her trauma. And trauma it is, as Marie has repeated nightmares about the events until the day she finally tells her sister of her ordeal.[ccxcvi] Breaking the silence arguably exposes the racial verdict, and is the first step of resistance.

It is also while writing of this particular experience that she first compares herself to Anne Frank, whose story gives her courage; Man Ya (who will never receive these letters) will be her Kitty. Marie asks moreover, "Comment vivre dans un pays qui vous rejette à cause de la race, de la religion ou de la couleur de peau? Enfermée, toujours enfermée ! Porter une étoile jaune sur son manteau. Porter sa peau noire matin, midi et soir sous les regards des Blancs."[ccxcvii] Her blackness is a burden imposed upon her by society as a means of marking her under the sign of stigma and keeping her outside of the French "nation," a fact of which she is painfully aware. This awareness reveals another side to these letters: they are also an act of creation that allows Marie to simultaneously expose the ugly continuation of racist practices, and to prove her own value. This is the second step of resistance. She becomes a writer to "s'inventer des existences," to travel from the land that rejects her to an imagined and remembered Guadeloupe. As Dominique

Licops notes, this allows Marie to create a world that includes her, a world where she can assert her place.[ccxcviii] But even here cries of "Retourne dans ton pays !" interrupt her.[ccxcix] In this way Pineau reminds the reader that the racial verdict, once internalized, has a particular power. Even in the world of fantasy stigma is inescapable.

On the occasion of Martin Luther King Jr's assassination, Marie comments explicitly on this racism, exposing it and condemning it: "Les Blancs se croient supérieurs à toutes les races de la terre. À leur idée, ils sont les plus intelligents. Ils croient qu'ils ont le droit d'aller conquérir toutes les terres du monde, mais personne ne doit venir chez eux. Eux seuls ont le droit de dire : 'Retourne dans ton pays !'."[ccc] Writing and excelling at French is therefore also a means of refusing the verdict that casts her as African and thereby incapable of speaking or writing French as well as a "native" French person. Indeed, her classmates cannot comprehend that the "African" is the top of the class.[ccci]

Though Marie is the author of this letter, the role of literature as a means of escape and as inspiration also points to how Pineau's text itself might be read. Achille Mbembe writes in "Nécropolitique" of the colonial racist state's need to assert power of life through death, and the deep ties between slavery, racism and exertion of sovereignty in the Western world; racial slurs and stereotypes enact this need precisely by denying the humanity–and therefore the right to life– of their target.[cccii] Significantly then, Pineau resists this assertion of death, through her use of writing and reading as tools of emancipation for a traumatized child. In so doing she emphasizes the ability of the colonized subject to create new life. Moreover, the very text itself, through recounting the experience of trauma, resists the imposition of stigma. If blackness as it is imposed on Marie and her family is equated with savagery, bestiality and a lack of civilization, the recounting of psychological suffering through literature offers a counter-narrative that highlights the humanity and intelligence of those marked as *noir*.

Valorizing Blackness

While writing is key to representing the negative lived experience of blackness in France, and to refuting the trope of savagery, positive representations of blackness also provide a

counterpoint to the dominant social verdict. In the chapter, "L'Instruction," the narrator comments at length on the impact of seeing the first black newscaster in French television history, Sylvette Cabrisseau, hailing from Martinique. Her presence on the television screen is a revelation for children who have learned to idolize all-white actors and superheroes. Marie and her siblings are first stupefied, then admiring, proud, and finally fascinated: "Une Noire, Martiniquaise, la première de tous les temps, speakerine à la télévision française. Belle Sylvette élue parmi des centaines de milliers de Blanches…Nous n'arrivions pas à l'admettre, même en nous forçant à l'extrême. Se faire à l'idée que tu allais parler combien de fois par jour sur le petit écran, annoncer les programmes des Blancs, nous paraissait sublime."[ccciii] Pineau further elevates the language of the following paragraphs; the experience of seeing Cabrisseau for the first time is like that of a Christian fervently hoping for the Virgin Mary to appear.[ccciv] Sylvette Cabrisseau is an idol, but one that is a figure of salvation and thus pure, associated with light–or enlightenment–rather than dark. Given the white-centered nature of representations of holy figures in Western Christianity, and the positioning of blackness under the sign of darkness, this comparison is significant. Cabrisseau inspires not only because she offers the children a link to their roots in Guadeloupe, but above all because she is a model of success–albeit temporarily–and quite simply somebody who looks like they do, therefore normalizing their existence.

However, Cabrisseau's presence also incites racial hatred from viewers, who proclaim, while insisting on the fact that they are *not* racist ("Je ne suis pas raciste mais…") that Cabrisseau's French is bad and will corrupt the children, that blacks should stay in their country and Cabrisseau frightens the children, and that it is dishonorable for ORTF to use a "*bamboula*" newscaster because there are plenty of beautiful white French women in the provinces who could spare viewers the horror of seeing Cabrisseau's ugly face.[cccv] The narrator compares these attacks to Daniel's descent into the lion's den, thereby once again positioning Cabrisseau on the side of goodness and valor.[cccvi]

But for the children she is a light. After Cabrisseau is removed from the station, Marie and her siblings are horrified and despairing."Tu étais notre gloire, un phare dans la nuit de France…

Ta bouche, la bouche des malheureux qui n'avaient point de bouche, ta voix, la liberté de celles qui s'affaissaient au cachot du désespoir."[cccvii] Moreover, Cabrisseau's suffering is theirs; every racial slur thrown her way is a knife in their sides as well, and her dismissal causes them physical pain: "À la pensée de cette cabale qu'on avait déchaînée contre ta seule couleur, l'eau nous montait aux yeux. Des ongles griffaient nos estomacs et, sans faim, nous avions les entrailles retournées. Des fourmis-folles marchaient dans tous nos rêves, nous mangeaient en dedans même des os. Nous tenions à la verticale, mais c'était simulacre, pur théâtre."[cccviii] This passage explicitly links their pain–indeed trauma–to racism and discrimination based on skin color, belying the supposed tolerance and universal equality of the French nation. If this were not clear enough, immediately after the refrain of *bamboula* returns for the third time: "Bamboula ! Négresse à plateau ! Négro ! Sale négresse ! Charbon ! Blanche-Neige !."[cccix]

Here, Pineau draws the importance of representation of positive role models of blackness to the forefront, flagging it with the return of the traumatic refrain. After Cabrisseau's dismissal, the children lose interest in shows they formerly adored, seeking out instead any and all black figures on television, whether they be relatively positive–like Henri Salvador singing "Nos ancêtres les Gaulois"–or wholly negative and stereotyped–a black servant or a slave making a cameo in a film.[cccx] Any representation is better than none. Following the cue of the above reference to Césaire, I would argue moreover that this episode can once again be referred back to the text itself, which through its representation of humanity–and as we shall shortly see– valorization of Creole culture and history, resists the dominant narrative of blackness as stigma and as savagery. Like Cabrisseau, and like Césaire, both of whom give a voice to the voiceless and valorize visions of blackness other than the savage stereotype, Pineau uses this homage to Cabrisseau and the pain of her loss to un-shadow the experience of stigma and trauma.

And yet, in spite of this negative lived experience, the children still cling for a long time to the belief in the superiority of France.[cccxi] They thus at first reject the idea that black culture and Creole culture have value. That is, until Man Ya offers them an education on the value of their Antillean culture, cuisine and history. This becomes a form of resistance that will complement

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Marie's written fight against stigma as well as the overarching resistance of the text itself.

The very fact that Man Ya educates the children resists the narrative that traditional culture in Guadeloupe is lesser than that of modern France. Maréchal's colleagues, men who are educated, ranking officers and deeply loyal to the mainland, see in her "un état ancien, l'époque reculée avant où l'on ne connaissait pas la ville, ses tournures de phrases, ses souliers vernis à hauts talons, ses beaux habits, toutes ses lumières, ses fards."[cccxii] In this model France and French instruction is civilization, while Man Ya, as a black Creole woman who cannot speak French and who laments the loss of her garden and traditional cuisine, is the past that must be overcome. However, as Molly Krueger Enz notes, Man Ya debunks this idea that France is a land of modernity in plenty; for Man Ya, "it is a country where everything is lacking."[cccxiii] Like her grandchildren, she suffers discrimination and racial isolation, but also geographic, linguistic and cultural alienation.[cccxiv]

For Man Ya to then show Marie and her siblings that a different way of life has value, and for her lessons to greatly impact them in a positive fashion, is to refuse France as either superior or the land of true enlightenment. Pineau's decision to title this chapter "L'Education"–rather than those that recount Marie's experiences in the French school system–is thus significant. As Hardwick comments, Man Ya serves as a link to Guadeloupe and Antillean culture, thereby giving Marie and her siblings an anchor to hold onto, roots with which they can identify in a land that rejects them, and is "simultaneously the culturally dislocated figure whose guileless ingenuity actually enables her to destabilize the supposed superiority of metropolitan France."[cccxv] I would argue that Man Ya can accordingly be read as a symbolic figure of creolity and of resistance. Though there are many notable instances of cultural displacement wherein Man Ya reveals her strength and ability to adapt, I will focus instead on how she teaches her grandchildren, both through oral instruction and by modeling resistance.

Where others refuse to speak of slavery, Man Ya drills the history of the French abolitions and the year 1848 into the children's heads, along with horrific visions of slave ships, in so doing giving them a historical link to their present suffering. Oral instruction–or history–resists their

French schooling by its very nature; for the children, "Lire, Écrire, Compter représentent la sainte trinité au Panthéon du Savoir."[cccxvi] Man Ya instead discusses that which has been largely silenced in a school system that focuses on France proper to the exclusion of its other departments or colonies: the first abolition and reinstitution of slavery, the pain of slavery and its continued links to the present, internalized racism that has led to racial hierarchies and the desire for whiter skin, and above all 1848, the final date of abolition.[cccxvii] This education matters, because the present demand is for descendants of slaves to simply forget the past: "On nous demande seulement de vivre au jour présent, laisser reposer la lie du passé, ne pas découdre ces sacs miteux où l'on a enfermé la honte et l'humiliation d'être descendants d'esclaves nègres africains."[cccxviii] This education is not just for the children however, but also for the reader, who is forced to confront a whitewashed history and the continuing legacy of slavery. Moreover, by placing this historical instruction in the figurative mouth of Man Ya, Pineau gives a voice to oral Creole culture, in a stark counterpoint to the Republican school system.

Furthermore, the repeated cries of *bamboula*, *retourne à ton pays*, *négresse*, etc. throughout the text prove that the shadow of slavery does endure in the contemporary moment. This is the continued racialization of blackness according to the same dehumanizing signs that justified the slave trade. To demand that descendents of slaves simply forget that trauma and ignore the ways in which the continued legacy of racism affects their lives, from internalized trauma to economic status, is to implicitly demand their acceptance of the status quo. Man Ya's lessons are therefore a model of resistance.

The singular word "l'esclavage" remains taboo even for Man Ya however.[cccxix] Hardwick links this refusal to openly name slavery to Man Ya's own status as dark-skinned "négresse laide," who occupies the bottom of the class hierarchy in Guadeloupe thanks to the legacy of plantation hierarchies. In this reading, the refusal to speak the word is not superstition but a societal means of coping with trauma. [cccxx] Indeed, Pineau explicitly links slavery to Man Ya's contemporary status, including her treatment at the hands of her husband, Asdrubal. Asdrubal, whom Pineau identifies as a fair-skinned mulatto, worked as a plantation overseer, thus

continuing the old hierarchy of the slave plantation. His skin is in fact so fair as to make him pass for a "Blanc-pays" from far away. Furthermore, Pineau repeatedly compares him to a master and Man Ya to his slave, thereby co-opting the vocabulary of slavery to show how its vestiges endure in the contemporary moment.[cccxxi] Women also flock to Asdrubal in his youth thanks to his "yeux délavés" and his "cheveux crantés," indicating the value placed on phenotypical signifiers of whiteness. Asdrubal embraces his "superiority," mistreating those with darker skin.

Though his behavior is explicitly linked to the trauma he suffered in war,[cccxxii] it likely also stems in part from his own internalized racism, in what would be a mirror to Joseph's lashing out at Sabine. In fact, it is thought that he seeks out darker women in order to shame his father.[cccxxiii] In other words, he mixes his blood to push back against the racial hierarchies that define his African heritage as negative. The narrator indeed remarks, speaking for Man Ya, that his hatred for her might be provoked by her inescapable blackness: "Peut-être, quand il me regardait avec mes cheveux grenés, mon nez large, il sentait qu'il m'aurait tuée tellement j'étais pas à son goût. Négresse noire à gros pieds." I would argue that Asdrubal therefore likely lashes out at Man Ya because of what he hates in himself: both his attraction to blackness, and his own inescapable heritage.

Still, Man Ya endures. Not without scars and suffering, but she endures nonetheless. I would argue that Man Ya's experience of brutality and her resilience offers another education, both for the children and the reader. By highlighting Man Ya's endurance of abuse at the hands of her husband and her strength during her exile in France, Pineau exposes and educates the reader on the continued consequences of slavery and the lasting damage of internalized racism––echoing Man Ya's oral history––while also conveying the strength of the black woman. Hardwick comments that while in France, "the almost silent, ridiculed and subaltern woman [Man Ya] is thus subtly transformed into a figure of dignity and resistance, whose idiosyncratic but creative and pragmatic ways of behaving expose metropolitan French society as closed, rigid and racially intolerant." Even more so, she also exposes Guadeloupe as suffering from the same illness as

France: blackness is devalued in both places while France is held up as the bastion of freedom and civility.

To return to Man Ya's oral education then, her lessons also prove that the French model of learning is not inherently superior to other methods. They have inherent value in that they give the children a link back to Guadeloupe during their time in France. In Guadeloupe in turn these lessons offer an anchorage that allows the children to stabilize their identities as both metropolitan French and Antillean. Indeed, it is after the family's return to Guadeloupe that Man Ya–whom Marie and her siblings tried and failed to teach reading and writing in France–shines brightest. She teaches the children how to garden and recognize plants, how to cook, and how to roast coffee, a practical and cultural education.[cccxxiv]

Where in France the children were harsh schoolteachers, ridiculing Man Ya for her incapacity as a traditional student, Marie now comments, as her grandmother climbs a tree with stunning agility, "À présent, elle était là-haut dans la lumière et nous en bas dessous l'ombrage, bien incapables de la rejoindre. Et l'insolence de sa vieillesse, sa science nature et la richesse de son jardin nous obligeaient à l'humilité".[cccxxv] Now they are in her school. Furthermore, the choice to equate *science nature* with light, recalling the Enlightenment, rather than the darkness that evokes savagery and lack of civilization, pushes back against the dominant narrative that celebrates Western schooling as superior to other forms of knowledge. Eribon writes that the "light" of education that spreads "culture" to those who ascend socially and find in it a certain emancipation, is also the same violent mechanism that ostracizes unwanted groups from society.[cccxxvi] He argues furthermore that the school system is one of the main vectors of this inequality, and the adoration of being "cultivated" can also encourage hate or discrimination towards those who are perceived as "ignorant" or immigrants who have not mastered French.[cccxxvii]

Thus education therefore has still greater significance when we consider that Man Ya exemplifies a French stereotype of a black and uncultured Antillean, the opposite of what is valued: unable to speak or understand French, illiterate, a gardener, and a connoisseur of Creole

cuisine. Yet she is an inspiration for the children, much like Sylvette, giving them an alternative model to emulate. They wholeheartedly embrace their Caribbean roots, attempting to speak Creole, although their attempts are mangled by the persistence of the French *r*, and do their best to adapt to a different way of life,[cccxxviii] though the trauma of racism may never fade. Indeed the way the haunting refrains of *bamboula* pursues Marie and even her mother across the Atlantic indicates that the stigma will continue to echo in their minds.[32] Full assimilation may not be possible, but I would argue that this is not a failure. Rather, Pineau models in her text through the example of Man Ya and the children's evolution how blackness can be *both* French and Caribbean, metropolitan *and* Guadeloupean, thereby defying the Manichean system that states that to be black is to be not French, that to be black is negative, and that blackness can be reduced to a simple set of stereotypes. In offering a positive and diverse model of blackness she offers a way out of the binary, an escape from the verdict that black is negative.

In this way, *L'Exil selon Julia*, like Biyaoula's *L'Impasse*, countermands verdict. In refuting the tropes of savagery and bestiality and inhumanity, both texts decolonize blackness, while simultaneously condemning the social verdicts that bind non-white peoples into a continuing trans-generational trauma. No longer the judged, they become the judge. This may seem paradoxical in the case of *L'Impasse*, as Joseph fails to resist verdict, succumbing to a colonization of the mind, or the imposition of internalized racism. Indeed, Biyaoula's emphasis on the inescapability of the physical body reminds the reader that when the racial verdict is predicated on phenotype–as it is in the case of anti-black racism–no amount of work to figuratively whiten the skin through dress, speech, wealth acquisition or other cultural cues will lessen its hold. Rather, the individual marked as black, as *noir*, remains trapped by skin color, trapped within the classificatory system that marks blackness as savagery, infantilism, bestiality

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[32] The fourth through sixth refrains of *bamboula* come with the departure of Man Ya, who returns to Guadeloupe, and with the family's own preparation to leave France, in Marie's nightmares and fears. This is a trauma that returns to haunt her thoughts and dreams even as she hopes to soon find people like herself, and a place where blackness may be valorized. The final refrain is echoed in the thoughts of her mother, Daisy, as she thinks of the pain her children have suffered in France, enduring years of racism and isolation. See Pineau, *L'Exil selon Julia,* 167-173, 209-10.

and inferiority. It is for this reason that Joseph succumbs, like his countrymen before him, and like Justin who end his life as a means of escape. Biyaoula thus poses the question: can one undo the internal verdict when the external verdict is endlessly imposed?

The answer would seem to be no, and yet, through his emphasis on psychological and emotional pain, Biyaoula undermines the basis for that verdict: that to be black is to be less human. Rather, Joseph is wholly, painfully human. Thus Joseph's failure to resist also forces the reader to confront the breadth of society's verdict on blackness, and to interrogate it. As Eribon argues, the very act of interrogating a social verdict–or in these texts, exposing it–calls into question its veracity, and "appeals" the sentence.[cccxxix] More than this, Joseph is also deeply intelligent, able to observe the society around him and understand its flaws and motivations where others remain blind.

Similarly, Pineau emphasizes the humanity of her subjects while making clear the degree to which the stigma of blackness traumatizes. Like Joseph, the narrator Marie is unable to wholly escape the internal verdict: racist refrains haunt her even as she leaves France for Guadeloupe, even as she resists through writing and reading. However, faced with the explicit pain of a child, the reader cannot write off cries of *bamboula* and *négresse à plateau* as harmless jokes, as simple words. Pineau accordingly forces the reader to confront the impact of negative stigmas on their targets. Unlike *L'Impasse* however, *L'Exil selon Julia* does more than undermine and critique the racial verdict. Where Joseph succumbs, Marie resists, in large part due to her ability to write. Writing is therefore not just a means of resisting verdict through social commentary that targets the reader. It is also defiance at the personal level, a way of rehabilitating trauma by envisioning a society where full participation is possible. Marie also resists thanks to the lessons imparted by Man Ya, and as Pineau makes clear, her grandmother's role as a positive image of blackness– alongside Sylvette Cabrisseau–is key to refuting stigma. Accordingly, in showing how blackness can be good and valuable, Pineau offers the second piece to decolonizing blackness and refuting the racial verdict. While it is first necessary to expose the existence of verdict, in order to then interrogate and critique it, rehabilitation of identity via a positive alternative has the potential to

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disarm it. More than this, it can unmake the black-white binary by creating a different category

that does not position blackness as stigma. Indeed as the following chapters will show, the

dismantling of categories is perhaps the most vital channel through which to resist verdict.

clxix Loichot, "'Devoured by Writing,'" 329.

clxx Cazenave and Célérier, *Contemporary Francophone African Writers*, 117; Moudileno, "Re-bonjour à la Négritude," 68.

clxxi Ibid.

clxxii Cazenave and Célérier, *Contemporary Francophone African Writers*, 117; Moudileno, "Re-bonjour à la Négritude," 69.

clxxiii Moudileno, "Re-bonjour à la Négritude," 62-63.

clxxiv Cazenave and Célérier, *Contemporary Francophone African Writers*; Little, "Keeping Up Appearances"; Moudileno, *Parades Postcoloniales* and "Re-bonjour à la Négritude".

clxxv Kom, "Pays, exil et précarité," 52.

clxxvi Biyaoula, *L'Impasse*, 24.

clxxvii Ibid., 15.

clxxviii Ibid.

clxxix Ibid.

clxxx Goffman, *Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity*, 7.

clxxxi Biyaoula, *L'Impasse,* 15-16.

clxxxii Ibid., 16

clxxxiii Ibid., 18.

clxxxiv Ibid., 18-19.

clxxxv Ibid., 29; Thomas, Dominic, "Fashion Matters," 951-55.

clxxxvi Ibid., 37.

clxxxvii Moudileno, *Parades Postcoloniales*, 146.

clxxxviii Ly, et. al, "Aesthetic problems associated with the cosmetic use of bleaching products," 16-17; Souza, "The concept of skin bleaching in Africa," 28.

clxxxix Ibid.,15-16.

cxc Souza, "The concept of skin bleaching in Africa," 27.

cxci Biyaoula, *L'Impasse,* 84.

cxcii Ibid., 84-85.

cxciii Speight, **"**Internalized Racism: One More Piece of the Puzzle," 130.

cxciv Biyaoula, *L'Impasse*, 85.

cxcv Speight, **"**Internalized Racism," 132; Eribon, *La société comme verdict*, 47-48; Goffman, *Stigma*, 7.

cxcvi Moudileno, *Parades Postcoloniales*, 143.

cxcvii Biyaoula, *L'Impasse,* 53.

cxcviii Moudileno, *Parades Postcoloniales*, 146.

cxcix Biyaoula, *L'Impasse,* 86.

cc Ibid., 38-39.

cci Ibid., 38.

ccii Ibid., 56-58.

cciii Ibid., 44-45.

cciv Ibid., 94.

ccv Ibid., 98.

ccvi Ibid., 96.

ccvii Ibid., 137.

ccviii Ibid., 141.

ccix Carter, "Racism and Psychological and Emotional Injury," 14.

ccx Biyaoula, *L'Impasse,* 151.

ccxi Ibid., 151.

ccxii Ibid., 152.

ccxiii Ibid., 153-55.

ccxiv Ibid., 164.

ccxv Ibid., 163.

ccxvi Little, "Keeping Up Appearances," 144.

ccxvii Biyaoula, *L'Impasse,* 165.

ccxviii Ibid., 166.

ccxix Ibid.

ccxx Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs*, 130.

ccxxi Biyaoula, *L'Impasse,* 169-70.

ccxxii Goffman, *Stigma*, 7.

ccxxiii Biyaoula, *L'Impasse,* 178.

ccxxiv Ibid., 179.

ccxxv Moudileno, "Re-bonjour à la Négritude," 63.

ccxxvi Biyaoula, *L'Impasse,* 180-84.

ccxxvii Eribon, *La société comme verdict*, 37.

ccxxviii Biyaoula, *L'Impasse,* 197-99.

ccxxix Ibid., 197.

ccxxx Ibid., 172.

ccxxxi Ibid., 194-95.

ccxxxii Ibid., 191-92.

ccxxxiii Ibid., 225.

ccxxxiv Ibid., 215-225.

[ccxxxv] Ibid., 229.

[ccxxxvi] Ibid., 241.

[ccxxxvii] Moudileno, "Re-bonjour à la Négritude", 67.

[ccxxxviii] Biyaoula, 253.

[ccxxxix] Ibid., 254; Johnson, *Appropriating Blackness*, 4.

[ccxl] Ibid., 254-55.

[ccxli] Ibid., 257-59.

[ccxlii] Ibid., 259.

[ccxliii] Ibid., 260.

[ccxliv] Goffman, *Stigma*, 121.

[ccxlv] Biyaoula, *L'Impasse,* 263.

[ccxlvi] Ibid., 268

[ccxlvii] Moudileno, "Re-bonjour à la Négritude", 70.

[ccxlviii] Biyaoula, *L'Impasse*, 263-65.

[ccxlix] Ibid., 266-73; 316-320.

[ccl] Little, "Keeping Up Appearances," 143.

[ccli] Biyaoula, *L'Impasse,* 297-98; 276.

[cclii] Ibid., 278.

[ccliii] Ibid., 296.

[ccliv] Ibid., 323.

[cclv] Ibid., 323-24.

[cclvi] Ibid., 327.

[cclvii] Githire, "Women in Exile", 74; Ionescu, "L'*ici-là* selon Gisèle Pineau", 2.

[cclviii] Githire, "Women in Exile", 77; Ionescu, "L'*ici-là* selon Gisèle Pineau", 2-3; Lemki, "Écriture migrante", 172; Loichot, "'Devoured by Writing", 329; Veldwachter and Pineau, "An Interview with Gisèle Pineau", 182.

[cclix] Githire, "Women in Exile"; Ionescu, "L'*ici-là* selon Gisèle Pineau"; Lemki, "Écriture migrante"; Popkin, "'Growing up with Julia'".

[cclx] Loichot, ""Devoured by Writing," 333-34.

[cclxi] Bacholle-Boskovic, *Paroles d'auteurs jeunesse*, 147-48.

[cclxii] Ibid., 334.

[cclxiii] Ibid.

[cclxiv] Pineau, *L'Exil selon Julia*, 19.

[cclxv] Ibid., 20

[cclxvi] Ibid., 115.

[cclxvii] Ibid., 18.

[cclxviii] Ibid., 18, 26.

[cclxix] Ibid., 27.

[cclxx] Ibid., 115.

[cclxxi] Ibid., 83.

[cclxxii] Ibid.

[cclxxiii] Hardwick, *Childhood, Autobiography and the Francophone Caribbean*, 147.

[cclxxiv] Pineau, *L'Exil selon Julia*, 11.

[cclxxv] Ibid., 79.

[cclxxvi] Ibid.

[cclxxvii] Ibid., 79-80.

[cclxxviii] Hardwick, *Childhood, Autobiography and the Francophone Caribbean,* 151-52.

[cclxxix] Pineau, *L'Exil selon Julia*, 80.

[cclxxx] "« Bamboula », genèse d'une insulte raciste," *Le Monde.*

[cclxxxi] Hale, "French Images of Race on Product Trademarks during the Third Republic," 138.

[cclxxxii] "L'indignation monte contre l'expo coloniale," *L'Humanité.*

[cclxxxiii] "La dignité marque un point au Safari Parc," *L'Humanité.*

[cclxxxiv] Pineau, *L'Exil selon Julia*, 57.

[cclxxxv] Ibid., 60.

[cclxxxvi] Ibid., 60-61.

[cclxxxvii] Ibid., 151-52.

[cclxxxviii] Ibid., 152.

[cclxxxix] Ibid.

[ccxc] Ibid., 149.

[ccxci] Ibid.

[ccxcii] Ibid., 62.

[ccxciii] Eribon, *La société comme verdict*, 115-16.

[ccxciv] Pineau, *L'Exil selon Julia*, 86.

[ccxcv] Hardwick, *Childhood, Autobiography and the Francophone Caribbean*, 151.

[ccxcvi] Pineau, *L'Exil selon Julia*, 157.

[ccxcvii] Ibid., 153.

[ccxcviii] Licops, "Reading and Danger," 249.

[ccxcix] Ibid., 140-41.

[ccc] Ibid., 151.

[ccci] Ibid., 159.

[cccii] Mbembe, "Nécropolitique," 29-60.

[ccciii] Pineau, *L'Exil selon Julia*, 101.

[ccciv] Ibid.

[cccv] Ibid., 102.

[cccvi] Ibid.

[cccvii] Ibid., 102-03.

[cccviii] Ibid, 103.

[cccix] Ibid.

[cccx] Ibid., 103-04, 145.

[cccxi] Ibid., 83.

[cccxii] Ibid.

[cccxiii] Enz, "Ex/île on the Île-de-France," 89.

[cccxiv] Ibid.

[cccxv] Pineau, *L'Exil selon Julia*, 149.

[cccxvi] Ibid., 111.

[cccxvii] Ibid., 111-115.

[cccxviii] Ibid., 111.

[cccxix] Ibid.

[cccxx] Hardwick, *Childhood, Autobiography and the Francophone Caribbean*, 156.

[cccxxi] Pineau, *L'Exil selon Julia*, 68, 95, 106.

[cccxxii] Ibid., 118.

[cccxxiii] Ibid., 95.

[cccxxiv] Ibid., 218-19.

[cccxxv] Ibid., 217.

[cccxxvi] Eribon, *La société comme verdict*, 110.

[cccxxvii] Ibid., 110-11.

[cccxxviii] Pineau, *L'Exil selon Julia*, 183, 209-10.

[cccxxix] Eribon, *La société comme verdict*, 253.

CHAPTER THREE

ARABNESS: CITIZENS IN EXILE

The link between North Africans, Arabs, Islam and terrorism has long been established, and, as discussed in chapter one, has only strengthened in recent years with the advent of the internet, the flattening of the world in terms of migration, media and politics, and with terrorist attacks perpetrated on Western soil by Islamist terrorists. Though terrorism–understood as the use of violence and fear in the service of political or religious goals–has a lengthy history, and has been present in popular fictional accounts since the late nineteenth century,[33] the prevalence of media reports of terrorism–a term that now often subsumes the terms "massacre," "assassinations," "bombing," "torture," and "repression"–has greatly increased since the 1970s.[cccxxx] Whereas this shift was first inspired by the IRA, the imaginary of terrorism in Western media has since been overtaken by the threatening image of the Arab-Muslim, a shift first traceable to 9/11[cccxxxi] and more recently to the spate of Islamist terrorist attacks on French and European soil, starting with the January 2015 attacks in Paris.[cccxxxii]

Moreover, on November 15, 2015 President Hollande declared a state of emergency that gave exceptional and temporary powers to the French police and government. On October 30, 2017, France signed these powers into common law.[cccxxxiii] This law has significantly increased police power and now allows for the detention of suspects without approval of a judge, and both warrantless searches of private spaces–including homes, luggage and vehicles–and seizures of data from computers and mobile phones.[cccxxxiv] The Ministry of the Interior can also place any suspect under house arrest, requiring up to three visits to the police station per day.[cccxxxv] Where Didier Fassin's work on policing in the *banlieues* indicated nearly a decade ago that the anti-crime brigades, or the BAC, regularly overstepped the bounds of their power by engaging in sweeping and warrantless searches of buildings, such actions are now fully legitimized by the French state. In other words, the state of emergency is now the norm. As would be predicted both by Fassin's

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[33] Margaret Scanlon identifies Dostoevsky's *Demons*, James's *The Princess Casamassima*, and Conrad's *Under Western Eyes* as early texts linking intellectuals with political violence and revolutions. See *Plotting Terror: Novelists and Terrorists in Contemporary Fiction*, 11.

work with the BAC and the fact that these measures were put into place in response to Islamist terrorist attacks, the primary targets of this increased state surveillance and detention are lower income "Arabs" and Muslims living in the *banlieues*. To date over 400 house arrests and 3600 warrantless searches have been conducted, with virtually no real arrests.[cccxxxvi]

Those living on the socioeconomic margins of French society who are also marked under the sign of the *arabo-musulman* therefore now find themselves in a Foucauldian state of politics as war, subject to particular surveillance and generalized punishment in the form of arrests, searches and police aggression.[cccxxxvii] Indeed, Mike Taussig, Edward Said, Noam Chomsky, and the anthropologists Joseba Zulaika and William A. Douglass have each argued that in the modern context, the concept of "terrorism" serves as a polemical tool that allows states to legitimize their own violence against those who are marked as outsiders due to some form of deviance from mainstream values that may take a religious, ethnic, moral or political form.[cccxxxviii] As these thinkers argue, Western governments and media now follow a "terrorism discourse" that "pays enormous attention to bombings by revolutionary groups, while slighting the much larger incidence of domestic violence or, in the United States, deaths from firearms."[cccxxxix] Accordingly the state can curtail the civil liberties of its citizens in exchange for the promise of security.[cccxl]

Fundamentally at question then in the larger discourse surrounding terrorism and emergency measures is the notion of citizenship and the rights afforded by belonging to a state. As chapter one showed, for those marked under the sign of North African or Muslim in contemporary France, the societal verdict is clear–to be an "*arabo-musulman*" is to be a threat to French society. The need to protect the citizenry from this perceived threat then justifies a legal verdict: the stripping of judicial protections and the unequal application of the rule of law. In fact, in 2016 President Hollande's government proposed a constitutional change that would strip French citizenship from individuals with dual citizenship who are convicted of terrorism.[cccxli] The subsequent outcry, including Christine Taubira's resignation from the Ministry of Justice, led Hollande to withdraw the suggestion.[cccxlii] The French government has nonetheless made clear that it considers citizenship to be a privilege that can be revoked. Furthermore, given the way in

which terrorism is tied to the figure of *arabo-musulman* in France, those read as North African are at increased risk relative to other populations. If the negativity of the social and political narratives surrounding *arabo-musulmans* can lead to such verdicts, what is the power, if any, of fictional narratives that portray the ways in which the social and legal marginalization of Arabs and Muslims leads to their disenfranchisement?

In her study of novelistic representations of terrorism from the late nineteenth century to the twenty-first century, *Plotting Terror: Novelists and Terrorists in Contemporary Fiction,* Margaret Scanlon identifies a growing pessimism with the novel's social power and with the power of marginalized persons to change history.[cccxliii] However, she also argues that these texts "elucidate the process that allows militants, journalists, and politicians to construct terrorism as a political reality" and that fiction "embodies an acute critique of the power of discourse as opposed to the power of the individual's self-assertion."[cccxliv] Accordingly, this chapter examines a less-studied novel by Leila Sebbar, *Le Chinois vert d'Afrique*, alongside Zahia Rahmani's *"Musulman" roman*, as texts that question the nature of terrorism, of citizenship and of belonging to the state in France.

Both Sebbar and Rahmani have been classed as *beur* writers, primarily for reasons of heritage.[cccxlv] The vast majority of *beur* and North African literature set in France tackles hybrid identities, memory–particularly of the Algerian war–, immigration, lack of equal treatment, or questions of language. In particular, the idea of a binary identity split between France and North Africa forms a motif in many *beur* texts, with a commonly concurrent theme of racism and rejection on the basis of religion and ethnicity, a rejection that leads to either the denial of citizenship or asylum, and the return to the country of origin, or to the discrimination against and denial of civil rights to native born or naturalized citizens.[34]

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[34] The works of Assia Djebar, Tahar Ben Jelloun, Driss Chraibi, Azouz Begag, Leïla Sebbar, Nina Bouraoui, and Zahia Rahmani are well known for their usage of these themes. See Alex Hargreaves, "Resistance at the Margins"; Hélène Jaccomard, "Guerre d'Algérie dans la littérature *beur*"; Susan Ireland, ""L'exil et le conflict culturel"; and Siobhan McIlvanney, "The articulation of *beur* female identity."

In keeping with these themes, the external imposition of Arab and Muslim identity and accompanying episodes of over-policing, racism and intolerance, are integral to the intrigues of *Le Chinois vert d'Afrique* and *"Musulman" roman*. However, I argue that these texts stand apart from typical *beur* literature due to their protagonists' refusal to accept the rights afforded by French citizenship. Rather than continue the fight for equal treatment and integration in France, the protagonists of these novels instead ultimately choose exile, in an ironic rejection of the nation-state that has denied them belonging. Moreover, these texts push back against the binary or hybrid identity of the French-North African by pointing out the failures of categorization and the complexity of North African descent, in turn troubling the very system of labeling that leads to an author being marked as francophone or *beur*. In this way they undermine both the social and legal verdicts that target the figure of the *arabo-musulman*.

Le Chinois vert d'Afrique portrays the flight of and police hunt for a young boy of Vietnamese and Algerian descent, whose names vary from Momo to Mohamed to Mahomet to Monsieur le Chinois vert d'Afrique, and whose physical appearance defies easy racial categorization. This text has been studied for its themes of memory–in particular that of the Algerian war–as well as its intersections with photography and music.[cccxlvi] Yet, it also presents a boy who refuses to live in relative comfort at home, choosing instead a form of exile within his French homeland, isolated in a cabin in an urban garden, a boy who is sought by the police–who try and fail to categorize him according to their various notions of ethnicity and types of savagery– a boy who inspires armed vigilantism with his wanderings and suspicious behavior. In turn, *"Musulman" roman*, which is also a text about memory and language, portrays the impossibility of escaping the outwardly imposed labels of Muslim, Arab, and terrorist. Here too, the protagonist flees French society, to the extreme of denying her French nationality and attempting to choose statelessness and a life of nomadism in the desert.

These texts thus question the social standards that position fixed residence or rootedness, access to basic utilities like running water, and belonging to a state as the ideal, and in so doing undermine commonly held assumptions regarding human rights and the protections

afforded by citizenship.[35] Otherwise stated, by indicting the race and religion-based refusal to allow "Arab-Muslims" full belonging in French society, much as Pineau and Biyaoula indict anti-Black racism, they disrupt the common narrative that citizenship is good and leads to belonging. Different than *L'Exil selon Julia* and *L'Impasse* however, whose intrigues largely center on the personal impact of the internalized racial verdict, *Le Chinois vert* and "*Musulman" roman* indict the French state itself as a surveillance state, and French citizens as willing participants. In this formulation, we see how verdict functions on a truly society-wide level. Here verdict is also heavily tied to culture and to religion, and thus is about race in its largest form: a societal verdict that moves beyond the phenotype-focus of the anti-black racial verdict.

Le Chinois vert d'Afrique: The Inscrutable Child, In Defiance of Boundaries

Born in 1941 in Aflou, Algeria to a French mother and an Algerian father, Leila Sebbar is best known for her work on memory, the Algerian war, and the difficulty of reconciling Algerian and French identities.[cccxlvii] Though the classification of *beur* is most often used to refer to the French-born children of Algerian parents,[cccxlviii] Sebbar is nonetheless frequently classed as a *beur* author, given her dual Franco-Algerian heritage and history of living in Algeria and France.[cccxlix] Furthermore, her works frequently portray mixed-heritage protagonists–*croisés*–born in France to one North African parent, who thus fit the classical definition of *beur*.[cccl] Siobhan McIlvanney also identifies autobiographical elements as a key motif in *beur* women's writing, and Sebbar's work often echoes her own proclaimed difficulty with finding a place between Algeria and France.[36] Indeed, a great deal of critical work on Sebbar's writing focuses on autobiography,

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[35] Under international law, eradicating statelessness–generally defined as those who are "not considered as a national by any state under the operation of its law"–has been considered a duty of nation-states since the passage of the 1954 UN Convention on the Status of Stateless Persons. In the most recent decade the right to nationality has been reaffirmed as a fundamental human right. Nonetheless there is not consensus over the broader definition of statelessness, and the implementation and enforcement of relevant treaties is difficult. See Victoria Redclift, *Statelessness and Citizenship: Camps and the creation of political space*, 3-5.

[36] Karina Eileraas gives us this excerpt of a letter between Sebbar and a friend in her article on photography and feminist resistance: "I am neither a Maghrebian writing in French nor a Frenchwoman with French roots. ... If I talk about exile, I am also referring to cultural crossings.

identity struggles, memory, heritage, the Algerian war, and femininity–the last most notably as regards the *Sherezade* trilogy.[cccli] As with many of Sebbar's texts, the Algerian war is also an undercurrent in *Le Chinois vert d'Afrique*, but I argue that the linking of its presentation with policing tells us more about the structure of the state than about the role of memory.

I propose here to move beyond an autobiographical, *beur*-centered, or Franco-Algerian-centric study of *Le Chinois vert d'Afrique*, examining instead how its presentation of identity and societal belonging is multifaceted to the point of making neat categorization of its actors impossible. As Eileraas writes, Sebbar "rejects exclusionary constructions of French or Maghrebian identity," an attitude echoed by her well-studied protagonist Sherezade, of the eponymous trilogy.[cccli] Sebbar instead affirms the right to a "composite" and multifaceted identity that defies easy categorization; in other words, Sebbar can be considered an engaged author who writes to push back against the dominant pulse of social verdicts that prefer neat lines of identification.

Indeed, opacity and fragmentation define the *Le Chinois vert*, in stark opposition to its characters' desires–and above all the desires of the police–to categorize and define non-normative actors. This deliberate ambiguity, which finds itself reflected foremost in the characterization of Mohammed and the non-chronological narration of the novel, throws into question the ability of the French nation-state to identify and protect its own citizens, particularly those who defy easy identification or whose very existence recalls a traumatic colonial past like that of the Algerian war. If the French state cannot be trusted to identify or fulfill its duties towards its citizens, then the legal verdicts it issues against *arabo-musulmans* are inherently suspect.

The moment of publication of this novel is significant, as like Sebbar's other works, *Le Chinois vert* is in conversation with its sociopolitical context. Published in 1984, following an outbreak of police and vigilante violence directed at North Africans in France,[37] the novel's

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It's at these points of junction or disjunction where I live and write, and contest simplistic notions of identity;" see Eileraas, "Reframing the Colonial Gaze," 833.

[37] In his historical and political text, *French Hospitality*, Tahar Ben Jelloun lists the names of forty-nine North African adults and children who were killed or wounded in racially motivated attacks by

presentation of a male "Arab" child who is targeted by both the police and by openly racist

vigilantes who dream aloud of shedding the blood of immigrants is no accident. Rather, it

resonates strongly with its contemporary moment, evoking the real deaths and suffering of those

marked as Arab. This novel also recounts the stories of a multitude of characters who defy easy

labels, and should not be read as the sole story of Mohammed. Indeed, as Caroline Clifford

notes, the multiplicity of character narratives serves to break apart the timeline, forcing an

asynchronous recounting of events that is far more than a "developmental account of the creation

of Momo's identity."[cccliii]

      I nonetheless center my analysis on Mohammed as the guiding thread, as he is

emblematic of Sebbar's critique of labeling. Specifically, I focus primarily on the role of the police

and community surveillance in the text, and how they interact and intersect with the character of

Mohammed, his chosen semi-nomadic exile within the boundaries of the city, and his flight. I

argue that the police and vigilante narratives frame Mohammed as a potentially violent threat due

to his perceived Arabness, which is compounded by his fascination with war. In some ways, he

does embody the role of a delinquent youth that is given to him, running away from home,

stockpiling weapons, fleeing the police, and seemingly stalking a young girl. Yet Mohammed's

fascination with music, photography, and culture ultimately defy the stereotype of an aggressive

male "Arab-Muslim" youth;[38] in the end, as the police evidence boxes pile up, he cannot be

categorized. This blurring of lines is compounded by the fragmented nature of the text itself, with

its non-linear and non-chronological narrative, as well as the plethora of characters that embody

cultural, religious, and ethnic mixing. Together these elements serve to refute the state's desire to

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police officers, far right extremists, and neighborhood vigilantes, as well as a number of other
attacks whose victims are unnamed. Ben Jelloun also identifies this as a continuation of the
violence of October 17-18, 1961, or as the continued inability of certain individuals of the French
nation-state to accept the presence of North Africans in France and as French. See *French
Hospitality*, 47-52.
[38] Recall that the "Arabo-musulman" male is seen as deceitful, dirty, and aggressive and that
male youths in the *banlieue* are also stereotyped as being homophobic, misogynistic, anti-
Semitic, Muslim fanatics who are also potential rapists.

classify and exert control over its subjects. As such, Sebbar destabilizes the verdicts that mark Mohammed–and by extension the young men of the *banlieues*–as violent and threatening.

Labeling Mohammed

One of seven children born to an Algerian father and a Turkish mother, Mohammed shares his name with his paternal grandfather, who as a *tirailleur* fighting in Indochina fell in love with a Vietnamese girl, Minh, Mohammed's grandmother. This complicated lineage comes to light in the first sixty pages of the novel, yet it is not laid out in linear fashion. Rather, the pieces of Mohammed's identity are presented in fragments, interspersed with scenes of his flight, the police investigation into his belongings, and memories of his pre-nomadic past. I would argue that this piece-meal presentation of the novel's central character is emblematic of the very complexity–and difficulty–of categorizing Mohammed.

In fact, the novel opens with a scene of his flight–"Il court"–wherein the reader learns only that the runner is a male child, has been running for an unknown period of time, that he has a gift for running–with fluid form, breath, and rhythm–that inspires onlookers to move aside to let him pass, and perhaps most importantly–that the runner "n'a pas l'air de quelqu'un qui se sauve."[cccliv] Opacity thus defines Mohammed's first appearance. Moreover, his outward appearance while running masks that he is fleeing the police, therefore hinting at a disconnect between visual perception and reality. Indeed, Mohammed's physical appearance is also obscure: "Mohammed était le seul à avoir des cheveux si noirs et si bouclés, le seul des sept enfants à avoir les yeux si bridés, les yeux de sa grand-mère du Vietnam, Minh."[ccclv] Though at first glance his hair (and likely his skin tone) marks Mohammed as North African in appearance, his eyes belie a different heritage, confounding attempts to name him according to ethnicity.

Mohammed's nickname, le Chinois vert d'Afrique, encapsulates this multifaceted descent. Yet even here naming–or categorizing–proves problematic. Mohammed answers to a multitude of names, most given to him by family or friends: Momo, Hami, Monsieur le Chinois vert d'Afrique, le Chinois, Mehmet, and Madou.[ccclvi] He is also called le Chinetoque by a lifeguard and *bougnoule*, un Arabe, un petit Viet, un Zoulou, le Sauvage, l'Indien des jardins ouvriers, and le

Samouraï by the police.[ccclvii] Though the familiar names for the most part are diminutives or variations on Mohammed, Monsieur le Chinois vert and le Chinois both mark him according to perceived ethnicity. Mohammed in fact enjoys when his friends call him *Le Chinois vert d'Afrique*; he finds it amusing.[ccclviii] Importantly though, the narrator directly prefaces this commentary by recounting how Mohammed has disliked going to the pool since the day the monitor threw him into the pool while yelling "Allez, Le Chinetoque, à l'eau, on va voir si tu ris jaune."[ccclix] Whereas he accepts his friends' nicknames in good spirit, Mohammed attacked the monitor.[ccclx] By juxtaposing these two modes of naming–one as jest or term of endearment and one as racial slur–Sebbar thus makes it clear that the source of naming–and the intent–informs its power. Mohammed accepts being categorized as different when it is done with affection by other marginalized youths; here the naming is not done out of aggression but rather in solidarity. When those in power name Mohammed however, the intent is generally to categorize him as marginalized and to denigrate: this is the racial verdict in action.

Turning to the police officers, the main source of racially charged names in the text, we see that their impulse is to name their targets using terminology that invariably invokes colonial images of "exotic" and "lesser" civilizations. Though no one has seen Mohammed, the officers nonetheless attempt to directly link his collection to a specific culture and ethnicity, leading to the above names of Zulu, Indian, Viet, and Samourai.[ccclxi] Much of their confusion on how to name Mohammed does arise from the child's complexity: he writes in Chinese and Arabic letters, collects feathers, arrows, bows, "amulets," and other odds and ends that the inspector Laruel simply classes as "gris-gris."[ccclxii] These objects clearly inform the police officers' naming of Mohammed, but I would argue that their perception of his collection is also tinged by their presupposition that he is a "savage," an assumption that is informed by a popular imagination. Indeed, these same kinds of objects–feathers, bows, and "talismans"–are regularly sold in the gift shops of ethnographic museums for visitors to buy and display at home as cultural curiosities or mementos of travel. Yet, where Mohammed's necklaces and arrows could resemble such a collection, in the eyes of the police they must be the "gris-gris" of a Zulu or talismans of an Arab.

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The weight of the social imaginary surrounding other cultures, and above all former colonies, helps to mark Mohammed as Other; his assorted objects are viewed as informing on his (non-European) heritage rather than as the knick-knacks of a youth.

Significantly though, Sebbar makes it clear that categorizing people according to an exotic imaginary is not unique to France. Rather, Mohammed's grandmother Minh is also subjected to labeling in Algeria: the other women call her *La Chinoise* and marvel at the coppery tone of her skin.[ccclxiii] To them, her skin is like that of the "*Peaux-rouges*" the children read about in American cartoons.[ccclxiv] I would argue that in creating this narrative Sebbar both marks the widespread nature of exotic colonial images and underlines the human impulse to label. Once again however, the intent of the labeling matters: *La Chinoise* is not used as a slur, and the community accepts Minh, embracing multiculturalism. Sebbar thus reminds the reader that verdict's power is ultimately contingent on stigmatization.

Moreover, verdict is explicitly tied to power. In stark contrast to the Algerian women, the police officers' discovery of Arabic writing leads to their first anti-Arab slur: "Pour l'instant il fait une découverte: l'Indien n'est pas un Indien, ni un Samouraï, ni un Zoulou, c'est un Arabe. Bonnin et Mercier avant lui ont pensé : *un bougnoule* presque en même temps."[ccclxv] Bonnin and Mercier go on to remark aloud, "Un *bougnoule*, Chef, on aurait pu s'en douter."[ccclxvi] The omniscient narration significantly allows the reader to see that Bonnin and Mercier not only think slurs, but feel comfortable using them openly, though Laruel immediately reprimands them for doing so.[ccclxvii] I would argue that this naming serves as a means of asserting their power over the boy, as agents of the state, even though they cannot see him. Rather, in deliberately verbally denigrating Mohammed, they ostracize him.

The officers go on to discuss the possibility that Mohammed might be a *basané* from Morocco–meaning of partial sub-Saharan heritage–or instead Kabyle, but they cannot know without seeing him. The reader is aware however that these attempts at labeling Mohammed are erroneous: Mohammed is not Moroccan, nor is he solely North African. The objects' inability to give a clear picture of Mohammed also highlights the futility of labeling race based on outward

appearance. Rather, they create a multifaceted and nigh incomprehensible picture that refuses categorization, just as Mohammed's appearance earns him the moniker *le Chinois vert d'Afrique*.

As the novel progresses, Sebbar fleshes out Mohammed's character and the story of his Vietnamese grandmother, further refuting the impulse to label individuals according to neat categories. The portrait that emerges first seems to confirm the portrait of the troubled Arab youth living in the *banlieues*, but ultimately counters this two-dimensional static archetype. The reader learns early on that Mohammed had difficulties at school and at home, and that after a violent confrontation with his father over pornographic magazines, ran away, returning home only when his sister is present, to shower in secret and get food.[ccclxviii] These domestic scenes of a troubled childhood are juxtaposed with the police investigation, and thus give a sense that Mohammed is a delinquent youth in the most classical sense. As such, one might expect him to steal, to engage in vandalism or speak slang.

Instead, we learn that Mohammed collected the pornographic magazines in order to trade them for cassettes of Algerian and Egyptian music for his mother.[ccclxix] He is also deeply devoted to his grandmother Minh, regularly writing to her and carrying her portrait everywhere. Furthermore, he pursues an active interest in opera–preferring Wagner–and classical war-oriented stories like Tristan and Siegfried, while also playing flute, and learning karate.[ccclxx] In other words, contrary to the image of a delinquent youth incapable of integrating into French society, Mohammed has surprisingly refined and intellectual interests for any youth of middle school age, and most importantly, displays a desire to engage with multiple cultures. Read in this light, his collection of objects takes on a new tone: it marks a curious and open mind. Significantly, though, Laruel reads the cassettes of Wagner and Russian operas as contraband: he assumes that Mohammed collects pirated cassettes to traffic them.[ccclxxi] Though Laruel is uncertain of his theory, it seems unlikely that pirated opera would have the same market as popular music. Such an assumption thus further highlights the absurdity of trying to pin Mohammed as a stereotypical delinquent, while also revealing the extent to which the racial verdict has impregnated the imagination.

Yet it is not just Mohammed's collection and heritage that discourage labeling: Sebbar also repeatedly ties him to characters who defy easy categorization, either because they too are *croisés*, or because their open-mindedness allows them to transcend cultural barriers.[39] As Clifford notes, these complex multicultural characters are portrayed in the most positive light in the novel, whereas those who resist the dissolving of boundaries–Bonnin, Mercier, and the vigilante group–are clearly unsympathetic.[ccclxxii] Mohammed's friends are therefore not just North African, nor are they all youths; rather, Mohammed also regularly engages with blue-collar workers who are Kabyle, Berber and sub-Saharan African, as well as three intellectual booksellers. [ccclxxiii] Like the workers, two of the booksellers are women who do not fit the narrative of the standard French citizen: Rosa is Spanish and married to a North African Jew, and Eve has a Parisian father and Polish Jewish mother.[ccclxxiv] Furthermore, both women are marked by their connection to war: each lost parents in World War II, while Eve's husband contested the Algerian war, but was drafted and killed. Eve in turn joined the FLN and was imprisoned for months.[ccclxxv] As we shall see, this connection to war resonates with Mohammed. I would argue moreover that the political engagement and cross-cultural heritage of these women is also significant to Sebbar's overall rebuttal of the dominant societal verdict that both marks Arabs as bad and unassimilable, and seeks to efface the Algerian war.

Though most of the positive characters swirling around Mohammed are marked by a shared minority heritage, the first bookseller, Jean Luc, is a white Frenchman. However, he is open to difference and guides Mohammed's interest in opera.[ccclxxvi] The reader also eventually learns that Laruel fathered a child with an Algerian woman whilst stationed in Algeria. [ccclxxvii] Thus he too is tied to the world of the *croisés*, and as we shall see, his policing is far more moderate in tone than that of his colleagues. As this cast of characters makes clear, *Le Chinois vert* is not just a portrait of Mohammed, his flight and the police hunt, but is instead a tapestry of the lives and beliefs of *croisés* and others, wherein the intrigue swirling around Mohammed forms the guiding

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[39] See Clifford p. 56 for a discussion of the varied *croisés*: Karim, Nadia, Melissa, Slim, Philippe, Myra, Flora and others.

line. This is fundamentally in keeping with the themes of Sebbar's *oeuvre* as a whole and allows her to present a positive view of multiculturalism.[40]

The Police State and the Panopticon

The contrast between Mohammed's complexity and his treatment at the hands of the French state–the police–and those who believe themselves representative of France–the vigilantes–is stark. In their eyes, he *is* the classical dangerous Muslim savage, a threat to France. Moreover, as a child of Algerian descent born in France to a former Algerian *tirailleur*, he is a living reminder of France's colonial failures in both Indochina and Algeria. As previously stated, the police investigation in Mohammed forms a significant part of the text; Clifford identifies nearly 40 out of 241 pages devoted to the police hunt.[ccclxxviii] I argue that this fictional investigation is representative of the real violence the French state enacts through its police forces on non-white residents and citizens living in the *banlieues*, echoing Tahar Ben Jelloun's contemporaneous text on anti-Maghrebi violence, *L'hospitalité française*, and foreshadowing Didier Fassin's work on policing in the *banlieues* two decades later. In fact, the police regularly use racist slurs, engage in aggressive racial profiling with inhabitants of the *banlieues* other than Mohammed, and use violent tactics.

Let us first consider the second passage concerning Inspector Laruel and his lieutenants Bonnin and Mercier. We learn that the inspector is furious because he has missed lunch due to the investigation and will have to go far away to find a café where he is unknown. Immediately after, Laruel uses a slang term ("C'est la galère"), and the narrator writes: "Il se met à parler comme les jeunes loubards qu'ils ramassent régulièrement la nuit, des mineurs en fugue…De plus en plus de filles, et des Arabes, mignonnes en général… Ses hommes aiment bien ce genre de prise sur les deux, trois heures du matin, ça les excite."[ccclxxix] Notably, Sebbar has constructed

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[40] See Anne Donadey on cross-cultural relations in *Marguerite* and Sebbar's work as a whole. Donadey notes in particular that what Rosello calls "performative encounters" between estranged groups–encounters that allow for a vision of a society unrestrained by racial and cultural verdicts– forms the core of Sebbar's works. In "Leïla Sebbar's *Marguerite*," 360.

this passage ambiguously, so that the pejorative term "loubard" may be associated with either the voice of the inspector, his listeners, or the narrator. As we shall see, this is in keeping with the nuanced portrait of Laruel, who works to keep the worst impulses of his men in check whilst struggling with his own prejudices.

However, this passage also links the agents' anger to the length of the investigation, meaning that Mohammed is blamed for inconveniences suffered by his investigators, thereby adding a layer of guilt. Indeed, this is the very attitude of Bonnin and Mercier, who swear that he will suffer for making them miss multiple lunches at their favorite café in turn.[ccclxxx] Yet, the passage also makes clear that the "délit de faciès" already existed to a degree in the 1980s–the targets of the police are non-white youths, mostly Arab, whose crime is to be out at night. The text implies that it is the capture of the girls that "excites" the men–thereby coding them as sexualized prizes–, but it is possible that the arrests of any and all youths serve this purpose late at night. In either case, the implications of the text are disturbing, given that these are minors at the mercy of police forces, during a time when police violence against "Arabs" was rising.

In fact, Sebbar makes it clear that excess use of force is the norm in raids. One single raid is said to be inspired by a multitude of crimes: "des bagarres dans la cité, des vols signalés par les grandes surfaces autour, des cambriolages de commerces et de résidences secondaires, à cause d'histoires de drogue achetée, revendue, consommée sur place, de plaintes déposées en nombre impressionnant au commissariat."[ccclxxxi] This is a long list of wrongdoings for one raid, but conforms both to the image of the *banlieues* as drug and crime-infested zones that need to be heavily policed, as well as the reality depicted by Fassin, wherein little to no evidence is needed to justify a raid or arrest of a suspect.[ccclxxxii] Furthermore, the police enter residences without warrants, in a pattern that is "presque la routine, dans les blocs qu'ils contrôlent régulièrement."[ccclxxxiii]

Though this depiction of a police raid is relatively peaceful, mere pages later the inspector Laruel ponders the culture of violence that defines many raids. He forbids his men from intimidating or using physical force against the inhabitants, but this is not the norm and goes

against the desires of the officers: "lui, Laruel, avait interdit qu'on frappe. Pas de passage à tabac, de ratonnade, de tabassage dans son service, malgré l'envie de certains de donner des coups de pied et des coups de poing."[ccclxxxiv] This commentary predicts Fassin's portrayal of BAC raids twenty-odd years later, in which police enter apartments without warrants and commonly use excessive force against residents, regardless of whether or not they are suspected of a crime.[ccclxxxv] Furthermore, Sebbar also portrays a culture of mistrust between the police and the residents of the *banlieues*, once again foreshadowing Fassin's work.

Recall that Fassin notes that BAC members regularly use racial slurs and war terminology to characterize their work in the *banlieues*; residents are savages, animals, thugs, and monkeys and the neighborhoods themselves are a war zones and a jungle.[ccclxxxvi] In turn, Bonnin and Mercier and other police officers employ slurs such as *bougnoule* and display clear prejudice against "les Arabes et les Noirs, les hommes de couleur, mais surtout les Arabes."[ccclxxxvii] Ironically, in spite of their repeated use of racist slurs and tendency to call Mohammed a "savage," Bonnin and Mercier insist when Laruel reprimands them that they are not at all racist (but their colleagues are).[ccclxxxviii] Though Sebbar's text is fiction, its carefully detailed and realistic depiction of police excess thus forces the reader to consider a counterpoint to the dominant image of the *banlieues* as lawless zones where police forces act solely to protect French citizens. Sebbar's portrayal instead shows how French citizens and residents are subjected to an unequal application of the law based on their ethnic heritages. More than simple stigma then, the racial verdict also has real and serious legal implications.

Even Laruel, whom as we have seen serves as a moderating force against his officers' worst impulses, thinks of the neighborhoods as the "ghettos d'Arabes," where the entire populace is united as accomplices against the police.[ccclxxxix] This reveals an us versus them mentality, where the "Arab" residents and citizens of the impoverished *banlieues* are the enemies of the police and therefore of the French state, and due to their united front, universally suspect as potential accomplices; indeed, the term Laruel uses is "complice."[cccxc] The distrust is mutually felt: when the men are gone the women block the doorways of the apartments with their bodies,

knowing that if the male officers were to enter it would cause a scandal.[cccxci] In this way they exercise what minimal power they have in face of a nearly omnipresent police presence. Significantly, Laruel–who is a veteran of the Algerian war–also compares these neighborhoods to *mechtas*, or North African villages, in this same passage, thereby recalling the French occupation of the Maghreb and the Algerian War. This latter view is confirmed by his insistence that in spite of the difficulty of obtaining information on Mohammed, "Il n'allait pas se mettre à interroger comme ils l'avaient fait là-bas. C'était la crise, pas la guerre."[cccxcii]

Sebbar's depiction of policing in the *banlieues* reflects the reality of policing on metropolitan French soil, but more than this, it also raises the specter of a Foucauldian state wherein the violence of colonization and of the Algerian War can still be found on French soil itself. Thus regular officers see their targets not as fellow citizens or residents of the same nation-state, but as savage enemies in an unending war, where their very presence threatens the republic and the safety of the "true" citizens. I would argue that the concentration of this conflict in a specific geographic space–the *banlieue*–serves to create a state apart, a minoritized France within France, where the police can operate according to their own laws. However, the way in which this policing is tied to non-white bodies means that this separate state is also localized to the individual. A person like Mohammed can therefore never enjoy the full rights of a French citizen; he will always be marked as a target, suspected of breaking the legal and social codes of his nation. Indeed, as we shall see, one of his greatest transgressions in the eyes of the vigilantes is to pass from the space of the *banlieue* into that of the city, thereby bringing Otherness across an invisible border into a sacred "French" space. Citizenship and statehood is therefore at once tied to geographic space and separate from it; we shall return to this idea in the following section on *Musulman, roman.*

Furthermore, in the Foucauldian state police ideally act as an extension of the state and exercise their power over even the most miniscule and ordinary elements of daily life.[cccxciii] The warrantless searches and youth interrogations in Sebbar's text reflect this reality: the police have enough power over the minority populace that they can act as judge and jury in their interactions.

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In other words, they can and do deliver verdicts on the "Arab" populace. This verdict is ultimately one of criminality, and forcibly excludes the *Arabo-musulman* from equal participation in French society.

Yet, police power in the Foucauldian state must also become an instrument of "surveillance permanente, exhaustive, omniprésente, capable de tout rendre visible, mais à la condition de se rendre elle-même invisible."[cccxciv] This is best achieved when the population internalizes surveillance mechanisms and the fear of punishment–when Bentham's Panopticon is embodied in the fabric of the social sphere.[cccxcv] In this view of society, civilians enforce the power of the state on one another and on themselves. I would argue that this is closely linked to Eribon's *tribunal invisible*, through which verdict is enforced out of fear of a social judgment by one's peers. In other words, society operates as verdict because of surveillance.[cccxcvi]

In *Le Chinois vert*, the neighborhood vigilantes are the logical end-point of the surveillance state, wherein civilians take up arms and the role of the police in order to enforce a socially constructed notion of the nation-state that excludes the "Arab," marking him under the sign of contamination and danger. Mohammed is seen wandering their neighborhood and lingering near the window of Myra, a young *croisée* whose father is Moroccan and with whom he exchanges letters.[cccxcvii] Mohammed also photographs Myra–unbeknownst to her or her grandfather, M. Cordier–and sneaks into her room to steal pictures, including one of her identity photos.[cccxcviii] This behavior is outwardly unusual and certainly invokes concerns of privacy. It is also compounded by the lack of face-to-face interaction between Myra and Mohammed.

However, Sebbar's descriptions of Mohammed's acts reveal their motivation to be benign. Indeed, Mohammed thinks of his photograph of Myra as being as precious as his photograph of his grandmother Minh. During his flight he pauses out of fear to make sure both pictures are still safe in his pocket: "S'il les a perdues, s'il les a oubliées, si les flics les trouvent…".[cccxcix] He thinks moreover: "Ils les auront pas, Minh et Myra."[cd] For Mohammed, Myra represents something precious: a fellow child of mixed-heritage born in France. Given Mohammed's reluctance to interact with most people, and his chosen lifestyle hidden away in a

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cabin, it is easy to read these interactions as two young *croisés* seeking connection in a society still heavily shadowed by the memory of the lost colonial wars. Yet, this is knowledge that Sebbar gives to the reader of her text. Within the narrative itself, the characters do not have the luxury of this information. The way in which they react to Mohammed's wanderings is telling, and I would argue, highlights the counter-verdict running throughout the novel.

Namely, the neighbors who form a vigilante committee focus on Mohammed's physical appearance, and read him as a threat. Their main spokesperson, Tuilier, states: "Ce gosse, il doit avoir douze à treize ans, je l'ai vu s'enfuir une fois, il court vite. J'ai juste vu ses cheveux, noirs et frisés…vous voyez ce que je veux dire… Pensez à votre petite fille, monsieur Cordier."[cdi] Mohammed is also "sûrement un voyou des blocs."[cdii] The implication is clear. Based on Mohammed's hair alone, he is marked as North African, or more specifically as an Arab, and as a *banlieue* resident belonging to the lower strata of society. By mentioning Myra, Tuilier also implies in this breath that Mohammed is a potential sexual predator, thereby squarely positioning him within the paradigm of the aggressive, sexual, *arabo-musulman*. The deliberate tie to the *banlieues* might nonetheless at first seem to imply that Mohammed is also suspect for socioeconomic reasons, rather than purely racial ones. However, the vigilantes are themselves blue-collar workers: a mechanic, a police officer, a retired railway worker, a taxi driver, and a retiree who was a radio operator during the Indochina war.[cdiii]

Consequently, we can reasonably conclude that it is Mohammed's apparent North African heritage that concerns them. While they are not wrong about his descent, the reader is aware that this is not the whole of Mohammed's heritage. Moreover, such an assumption, tied as it is to lingering resentment and aggression regarding Algeria and her people living in France, positions Mohammed as an enemy. The fact that he is only twelve years old–a child only just approaching adolescence–does not spare him from this view. Rather, by perceiving Mohammed as a potential sexual predator and a physical threat to their neighborhoods, the vigilantes judge

him according to the characteristics of a much older person.[41] In other words, the reality of his childhood is rendered meaningless in the face of their verdict; he is judged as an adult. One might question how this viewpoint would shift were Mohammed a well-dressed child with light hair, skin, and eyes. Indeed the vigilantes clearly accept Myra–who despite her Moroccan heritage has blonde hair–as a fully French member of society, rather than an invasive force.[cdiv]

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the vigilantes directly tie Mohammed's perceived threatening nature to the Algerian War. Significantly, Tuilier prefaces his news about Mohammed's presence in the neighborhood with a long digression on the Algerian war and the ongoing "invasion" of France by North Africans: "Tuilier parle de ses armes, de la guerre, du club de tir, de l'insécurité des banlieues, des voyous, des Arabes qui colonisent la France, de la légitime défense."[cdv] As Sebbar makes clear, for Tuilier, the formation of the vigilante committee is a chance to live out an unsated bloodlust. A radio technician during the Indochina war who never saw actual combat, he longed to fight in Algeria. Despite his lack of actual experience, Tuilier fancies himself a true soldier, stockpiles weapons, and has dreamed for years of how he would have helped win the Algerian war: "Il aurai su comment s'y prendre."[cdvi] He also justifies the creation of the committee by stating: "À propos, vous savez que dans le quartier on commence à se méfier de ceux des blocs. Ils viennent chez nous, dans nos rues. Ils envahissent. On va constituer un comité de vigilance."[cdvii] The "ils" here clearly refers to the "Arabs" who are "colonizing France." Rather than accept Algerians moving to France as French citizens, the vigilantes read them as an invasive force–thereby also evoking fears of contagion and disease, both in the literal and figurative senses. Additionally, the Arabs are invading not just by moving from North Africa to France, but also by transgressing the limits between the *banlieues* and the city proper. Mohammed's second transgression is therefore to move out of the space prescribed to him: his nomadism and wanderings transgress a physical boundary. Sebbar provides a significant positive counterpoint to

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[41] Sebbar later reveals that the head of the vigilante committee is a serial rapist who sought out the youngest women and girls while stationed in Algeria, and at least once orchestrated a massacre. Thus the vigilantes' accusation rings doubly hollow. See Sebbar, *Le Chinois vert*, 249-50.

this narrative however. Cordier–whose life is defined by an embrace of multiculturalism and who has taught France to immigrants from North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, Turkey and Yugoslavia for three years–is unmoved, and the text makes clear that he is the far more sympathetic character of the two.[cdviii] By juxtaposing Tuilier and Cordier, Sebbar therefore counters the social verdict marking Arabs as Other with a positive view of cultural mixing.

The vigilantes nonetheless return to Cordier after discovering a photo of Myra near the train tracks.[cdix] They wish to provoke a police investigation, and will do anything it takes–including exaggerating the supposed threat–if they find another photo.[cdx] As the tension with the group escalates towards the end of the novel, they start a petition to form an armed militia.[cdxi] Four members visit Cordier once again: Tulier, the police officer Louis Petit, M. André and the taxi driver. Here, the narrative transitions to a stream of consciousness diatribe in a single paragraph that covers three entire pages. Importantly, this diatribe is not attributed to any one member of the militia, but rather represents their collective voice. In so doing, Sebbar both makes it clear that the group shares Tuilier's unfavorable stance on Algeria and immigrants, and creates the impression of a howling and unthinking mob.

Accordingly, the vigilantes complain again about the *banlieues*, but this time their disdain spreads beyond North Africans: "Ils plaignent les familles françaises qui trouvent pas ailleurs à se loger et qui sont tombées si bas dans le ghetto arabe, d'ailleurs, y a pas que des Arabes, de plus en plus d'Antillais, des négros, des Portos bien sûr et petit à petit des Chinetoques…l'Afrique, l'Asie tout ça c'est des grands continents, pourquoi ils restent pas là-bas."[cdxii] In the next breath they proclaim that they are not racist–echoing the viewers' complaints about Sylvette Cabrisseau in *L'exil selon Julia*–and insist that the issue is the sheer number of immigrants causing issues. However, they also state in the same moment: "On est pas obligé de supporter leur tam-tam." In the space of just a few sentences then, the reader is treated to several social verdicts based predominantly on racism and other prejudices. Those who are not considered white–including the Portuguese–are forcing out true French families, who have a predetermined right to the housing spaces. Moreover, French citizens from the Antilles are not French. Finally, peoples coming

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predominantly from the formerly colonized world are explicitly tied to notions of savagery via racial slurs and allusions to tam-tams.

Importantly, this diatribe takes place directly after a scene depicting Mohammed discussing opera, Wagner and Isolde with patrons in an Algerian café.[cdxiii] I would argue that Sebbar uses this placement to highlight the absurdity of the vigilantes' attitudes and presentation: they dream of violence on the grounds that immigrants are uncivilized, whilst the reader is reminded of their target's cultural refinement. The vigilantes accordingly become a two-dimensional caricature of racism, fear and hatred, in a less than flattering representation that serves to further underline the positive interactions that take place between the characters that embrace multiculturalism and the blurring of labels.

The vigilantes still continue in an unintentionally ironic fashion. They proclaim that they are neither violent nor aggressive–despite their desire to use firearms–and argue that they would know who the real perpetrators are. And yet, violence is at the heart of the committee's desires: "On donnera des petites leçons au début, après si c'est l'escalade, on avisera. On a rien sans rien. Si on pouvait employer les grands moyens, ils retourneraient tous chez eux, vite fait. Dommage, c'est loin la guerre d'Algérie, parce que alors là, on rigolerait pas, balayés, ratissés."[cdxiv] Much like the police, the vigilantes believe they are at war with immigrants. Importantly, their main organizer, Marcel, searches for unemployed white men who are overtly racist: "Marcel les trouvera chez les chômeurs des bandes de durs, des Français, uniquement, qui veulent pas de bougnoules avec eux, ils peuvent pas les sentir; il en connaît pas mal comme ça… s'ils pouvaient, ils leur feraient la peau aux métèques."[cdxv] Once again, the echo with Fassin's findings on the constitution of BAC forces is remarkable, and underlines how the vigilantes have willingly taken up the role of police in a surveillance state.[cdxvi]

When Cordier pushes back, stating that he participated in the Resistance but sees vigilantism as unnecessary during peace times, the entire group proclaims that they too were in the Resistance–even those who are too young.[cdxvii] Participation in the Resistance–as opposed to collaboration–thus becomes an automatic line of defense to further bolster claims that racism and

prejudice do not motivate them. But the narrator's commentary, "Même ceux qui n'avaient pas

l'âge," points to a different reality. Indeed, the taxi driver immediately launches into a slur-laden

diatribe about the ills of colonization–colonization by immigrants, that is:

> Vous savez bien que la profession est infestée…Je dis bien infestée, des rats qui nous rongent. On est colonisé dans le Taxi. Vous avez pas remarqué ? Déjà on est envahi par les gonzesses…mais ça s'arrête pas là, c'est des Françaises au moins, de plus en plus c'est des bougnoules, des Chinetoques… ça se reconnaît non ? Les basanés, les Jaunes, quelques négros, des Antillais surtout, ceux-là ils disent qu'ils sont français, citoyens français, et ils nous marchent sur les pieds, à l'aise…Pourquoi pas les Peaux-rouges…On sait jamais, des fois qu'on les chasserait des Amériques…[cdxviii]

Significantly, Sebbar carefully spreads the escalation of the committee's prejudice, from

the first somewhat nuanced implication of Arabs as sexual predators to this finale of overt racism,

over the course of the novel. As the militia reveals itself, Mohammed's portrait becomes more

complex, and the investigation becomes absurd. In fact, just as Laruel begins to conclude that the

investigation into Mohammed has nothing to offer–the only achievement has been labeling boxes

upon boxes of collected items, magazines, knick-knacks, cassettes of classical music–and

implicitly allows Mohammed to escape, the vigilantes reach their most frenzied state, going so far

as to lie to the police in order to provoke an investigation into non-existent armed robberies that

they link to the photos of Myra.[cdxix] As Clifford argues, "The multicultural characters pose a threat

as characters precisely because they possess no cultural *identity*, no cultural oneness."[cdxx]

Otherwise stated, the vigilantes fear those who refuse society's labels and embrace a different

way of being. In part, this embrace of multiculturalism threatens a white dominance that based on

racial assumptions and stereotypes, rooted both in biological and cultural racism.[42]

Perhaps more unsettling though, it explodes the very system of labeling itself. This

serves to at once reveal how civil society operates as verdict and highlights Sebbar's counter-

verdict, which condemns the blanket judgment of those marked as *arabo-musulman* and the

sorting of individuals into neat categories. Clifford remarks that the positive and negative views of

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[42] As Clifford notes, "The members of the neighborhood militia and the two cops, Bonnin and Mercier, view children from non-French cultures as subversive and threatening to their idea of French culture." See "The Music of Multiculturalism," 57.

multiculturalism–or the "ethnocentric" and "multicultural" groups–give the sensation of a debate between various voices.[cdxxi] If this is a debate, then it is one in which the positive view of multiculturalism is heavily privileged, in stark contrast to the ironic presentations of overt racism. I would additionally argue that the failure of the monoculture–or those who wish to label and impose a certain order to society–is also the failure of the police and surveillance state. For all the attempts by the police to label Mohammed, and the vigilantes' work to force an investigation, neither group gains insight into whom their target truly is.

<u>Mohammed's Fight and Flight</u>

Given Mohammed's many connections with people who are marked as Other, or for whom the state of difference is not a negative, why does he run? On the one hand, the novel never gives an explicit answer to this question. On the other hand, I would argue that the way in which Mohammed's flight intertwines with the narratives of the police, the vigilantes, and the multicultural tapestry points to an answer. Specifically, by running–first away from home, and then from the police–Mohammed refuses the system of law and order that requires him to be labeled, in so doing sacrificing the comforts of proper food, shelter and care–elements associated with both basic human rights and citizenship. Instead he chooses a state of exile within the French state. In so doing, he confirms the vision of the delinquent dangerous Arab youth in the eyes of the police and the vigilantes. However, for the reader, Sebbar's presentation of Mohammed's actions forces a reckoning with the spaces and forms of liberty in France.

To be sure, even before his flight Mohammed's movements are transgressions of the order ascribed to the Parisian landscape. Laila Amine writes in her book, *Postcolonial Paris: Fictions of Intimacy in the City of Light*, that the myth of the *banlieues*, pervasive across representations of the areas in films, television and political discourse, "deems these spaces the cultural foil of the republic, namely, lawless zones where misogyny, homophobia, and Islamism flourish."[cdxxii] In this imaginary, the central Parisian space might be understood as a pure counterpart to this lawless land, wherein the presence of residents of the *banlieues* constitutes a contamination. We can see this mentality in the vigilantes' talk of contamination and invasion, and

their strong reaction to Mohammed's presence in their neighborhood. To be a racial other from the *banlieues* is ultimately to be an outsider in the French republic.

In fact, Sebbar refers to the *banlieues* as Mohammed's "pays natal," in contrast to the streets of Paris proper.[cdxxiii] More than simple metaphor referring to Mohammed's comfort with his environs, this phrase ("Son pay natal") points to the division between suburb and city, between partial or non-citizen and full citizen. Moreover, theorists of statelessness and citizenship point to the role of the border in giving power to the state over its citizens and non-citizens. As Victoria Redclift explains, borders create a space for the state to exert its control, but citizenship is not necessarily tied to residence within the nation-state's borders. Rather, the problem of the "alien" allows states to justify controls within their own territory and not just at the border itself.[cdxxiv] The end result is that the entitlements of citizenship can be–and often are–unequally enacted due to social and political exclusions.[cdxxv] In Mohammed's case, this exclusion takes the form of aggressive policing and community surveillance that target him as an Arab and an outsider within his own country and metropolitan area.

In this context, I would argue that Mohammed's decision to flee home and then the police constitute an act of rebellion that highlights the failures of the nation-state: in essence, Mohammed refuses the trappings of a citizen, choosing an exile within the borders of his countries–both France and the figurative country of the *banlieue*. Consequently, though Mohammed reveals that he at times identifies with the *bled* and with France–in what at first seems to be a classic hybrid identity–at he also states that "il pense qu'il est comme les Palestimens [sic], sans pays, sans terre, sans maison, sans oliviers, sans mouton."[cdxxvi] Otherwise written, he feels stateless. Read in the context of Sebbar's portrait of police and vigilante surveillance, this is a damning commentary on the place in French society–or lack thereof–for a male youth read as Arab. It also gives a reason for his flight from home: he ultimately belongs nowhere, and his cabin was his attempt to create his own controlled space. A state of his own.

This reading is further supported by Mohammed's obsession with the Algerian war–and colonial wars in general. In a society that pins him as a Muslim-Arab delinquent, he creates his own path. The narrator makes it clear through the police inventory of his belongings and flashbacks of Mohammed's pre-flight life that he is fascinated by war, by boats and water, and by images of children at war. He builds a shrine to the Algerian war and collects photos of wars in Iran, sub-Saharan Africa, Iraq, Algeria, Palestine, Vietnam and more, with a recurring theme of death and children.[cdxxvii] This is more than a simple morbid fascination. Donna Wilkerson-Barker reads the photography in *Le Chinois vert* as fundamentally tied to memory, and Mohammed himself as an allegory of memory. In this interpretation, Mohammed's shrine to the Algerian war functions as a means of addressing his present trauma and the trauma of his heritage.[cdxxviii] Wilkerson-Barker writes moreover that because Mohammed has no personal memory of the war, Sebbar is also highlighting the power of the image to create memory.[cdxxix] I would like to draw upon this second line of thought, as it is consistent with the presentation of photography as having the potential for violence in Sebbar's larger *oeuvre*.[43]

Significantly, Mohammed asks Rosa and Eve to take down a book on the Algerian war because it holds a photo of a dead man that he has enshrined in his cabin. His given reason is: "À cause des Frères," "C'est pas une photo pour les Français."[cdxxx] While Mohammed's identification with the Algerian cause certainly relates back to his heritage and a search for belonging, I also read this as an attempt to push back against the violence of the state by protecting the dead men from further surveillance. Mohammed's obsession with war photography is therefore not simply an attempt to reconstruct a lost memory. It is at once a means of controlling the narrative surrounding the colonial wars–sometimes by removing images from the potentially voyeuristic view of the "French," who act as proxies of the surveillance state–and a way of remediating the state violence inflicted upon colonial peoples by rendering homage to their

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[43] As Stafford notes, Sebbar's work has consistently been concerned with the violence of image creation. Eileraas discusses moreover how the protagonists of *Shérazade*–and by extension Sebbar–push back against the violence of Marc Garanger's colonial photography and the colonial gaze. See Stafford, "The violence of photography?", 150; and Eileraas, "Reframing the Colonial Gaze," 810.

suffering. When he loses this fight, as the police take control of his cabin–thereby inflicting further violence by categorizing and examining his photos and precious objects–Mohammed turns to flight.

As previously noted, the "Il court" sections portray Mohammed as wholly in control of his movements as he runs. He is not just a natural runner though; he is "souverain."[cdxxxi] I would argue that this commentary is indicative of how the reader might understand Mohammed's running away from home and his flight from the police: as a means of exerting control over his life. Furthermore, it is precisely through his defiance of social conventions–intimately tied to his transgressions of physical space–either through stockpiling mementos in his cabin, running from the police, or spying on Myra–that Mohammed introduces unease into the minds of those who would seek to classify him. In other words, Mohammed's chosen nomadism and exile–and their very inexplicability–push back against the narrative of a simple delinquent Arab youth. Clifford contends that the "Il court" fragments function as lyrical reiterations of the novel's most important action, but do not announce a transformation because the movement of this action is circular rather than developmental."[cdxxxii] I would argue however that the "Il court" sections are neither circular nor developmental: instead, as Mohammed moves across the urban space, they function as snapshots of time that are perhaps not wholly linear but still moving forward, snapshots that remind the reader of Mohammed's ongoing "war" with the police.

It is perhaps fitting that a text so concerned with naming and categorizing should end with a letter: Myra reads Mohammed's final words aloud several times, in which he both names himself as M. Le Chinois vert d'Afrique and threatens violence against the police in retaliation for the loss of his beloved possessions. He writes: "Ils m'auront pas. Je reviendrai, et je les tuerai. Je passerai chez toi avant, peut-être tu joueras du piano, je saurai que tu es là. Quand je reviens, je les tue. M. Le Chinois vert d'Afrique."[cdxxxiii] The police have violated something sacrosanct, re-enacting the violence of the colonial wars in Mohammed's mind by burning his cabin and his shrine to the dead soldiers. Ironically, in this moment Mohammed also threatens to become what the vigilantes and police believed him to be from the start: a violent youth of Arab descent. The

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fact that Mohammed has only threatened violence is ultimately irrelevant in the eyes of French society, as is the fact that his desire for violence is motivated by a sense of revenge and defense, and is thus not an initiation of aggression. This forms Sebbar's final verdict: labeled, condemned without being seen, and hunted, Mohammed is forced by society into the role that was prescribed him. Society's verdict towards the male Arab youth creates what it sees; police surveillance creates a criminal by inventing a crime. And yet, this creation remains fractured and fragmented by Mohammed's very complexity.

"Musulman" roman: Inescapable States

Written in five thematic acts whose chronology is nonetheless heavily fragmented, *"Musulman" roman* in turn interrogates the way in which the specter of the Arab-Muslim terrorist is manufactured by political and social discourse in the West in the post-9/11 world. This interrogation takes place at the level of the narration, but also in the very form and content of the text itself, which both troubles the genre of the novel–as indicated by the word *roman* in the title– and resists the social expectation for a "Muslim" author to explain Islamist terrorism or embrace Western values.[44]

The novel first opens with a quote from John Maxwell Coetzee's *Foe* which discusses the cutting of a tongue and the loss of language, followed by the opening paragraph of Melville's *Moby Dick*, in which the need to travel as an alternative to suicide is central.[cdxxxiv] Accordingly, nomadism, language and naming are central preoccupations of the text.[45] However, like in *Le Chinois vert*, naming in this text is imposed from the outside, leading the narrator to fight for an identity free from labels. Accordingly, while the novel interrogates memory and childhood, the plot ultimately hinges on the narrator's multiple attempts to escape labeling–including by fleeing the physical space of France–and the imposition of identities to which she does not subscribe: Muslim, Arab, terrorist, threat, French. Key to this fight is a valorization of her Berber heritage, a

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[44] We can contrast this with Tahar Ben Jelloun's *L'Islam expliqué aux enfants* (2002), *De l'Islam qui fait peur* (2012), and *Le Terrorisme expliqué à nos enfants* (2016).
[45] Memory and the role of the mother figure also figure heavily in the novel but are not directly related to my own vein of study. See Rice, "Le Lieu sacré de la mémoire maternelle.

rehabilitation of Islam and Arab culture, and a critique of the global order. Through her narrator's fictional travails and strong written condemnations of reductionist views of the world, Rahmani thus resists the social verdict of the *arabo-musulman* on two fronts. She reveals how citizenship and the rules of hospitality fail to protect those marked as Other, and as an author refuses to be reduced to her heritage.

Like Pineau's *L'Exil selon Julia*, *"Musulman" roman* contains a strong autobiographical element. Hélène Jaccomard lists Rahmani as a *beur* author, inscribing her work within the lineage of texts dealing with the Algerian War.[cdxxxv] Brought to France as an exile at age 5, as her family fled Algeria, Rahmani is a member of several stigmatized groups: Algerian, Berber, and daughter of a harki.[cdxxxvi] As with Sebbar then, the Algerian War forms a key backdrop to Rahmani's work, most notably in the first book of her trilogy, *Moze*, which addresses her father's role as a harki and his subsequent suicide in France on Armistice Day.[cdxxxvii] However, unlike Sebbar, who is indeed of "Arab" descent, Rahmani is of Berber heritage. This distinction–meaning Rahmani is not Arab, although she will be marked as such–informs each novel in her trilogy, and, I will argue, forms the basis of the narrator's rejection of her citizenship in*"Musulman" roman*.

Though I do not examine *Moze* in this chapter, its thematic connections to *"Musulman," roman* are significant. In particular, *Moze* explores the concepts of *accueil* and hospitality, with clear links to immigration, asylum and displacement.[cdxxxviii] Indeed, even though Rahmani's father was conscripted into the French army during the Algerian war–thus raising questions of agency– he was rendered stateless and imprisoned following the ceasefire.[cdxxxix] Upon fleeing to France with around 60,000 other harkis, Rahmani and family were held in resettlement camps for over a decade before finally gaining settlement in rural northeastern France.[cdxl] Statelessness and the fragility of citizenship is therefore a key marker of Rahmani's life, and clearly informs her writing. Furthermore, judgment of the crimes of state is a hallmark of her work. The narrator in *Moze* interrogates the French government, and denounces the lies it told to the harkis, who–upon arriving in the country for which they shed their blood–are denied hospitality and belonging.[cdxli] Forced into exile by their country of origin, they are held in an enduring exile in the country of

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arrival. This denunciation of the French state and its failure to care for its own also runs through *"Musulman" roman.* This time however, it shifts from the denial of *accueil* to new arrivals to the rejection of long-term citizens, who are denied equal treatment under the law at the same time their heritage is effaced under the monolith of "Arab-Muslim."

The inaccuracy of the label Arab is also fundamental to understanding Rahmani's text. The plight of Algerians in France is well documented, but less has been written about the particular experience of Berber communities, both in France and Algeria. Though Berbers make up a large percentage of the North African diaspora, and form ten to fifty percent of the population of North Africa, their treatment under colonial rule and later in post-independence Algeria bears examination here.[cdxlii] As chapter one detailed, Kabyles (Berbers)[46] were favorably represented in contrast to Arabs under French colonial rule.[cdxliii] This representation became a handicap following Algerian independence however. As the Algerian state implemented its Arabization policy, claiming that Algeria only has one language–Arabic–and one religion–Islam–Kabyles were effectively silenced and effaced.[cdxliv] In fact, Arabization sought not just to eradicate the former French presence, but to erase a pre-Islamic (Berber) history, including the Berber language.[cdxlv] In this new climate, historical exploitations of the "Kabyle Myth" served to delegitimize Berber claims to rights and representation.[cdxlvi]

Moreover, in an ironic turn of events, until recently it was considered polite in Algerian urban circles to dismiss or deny Berber heritage, as Berbers were associated with "backward, vulgar, and primitive behavior."[cdxlvii] The echo with French characterizations of Arabs is clear: the once devalorized Arabs have shifted their negative classification to the population once deemed "civilized" whilst claiming superior status for the purposes of control. In recent years authorities in Morocco and Algeria have shifted the discourse to claim that all citizens have Berber lineage, yet again as a means of exerting control over populations that might resist Arab dominance.[cdxlviii]

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[46] See Fazia Aïtel's book, *We Are Imazighen*, for a discussion of the etymology of the terms Berber and Kabyle and for a detailed analysis of Berber literature.

Thus the history of those of Algerian-Berber heritage is in some ways one of continued exploitation and loss of autonomy at the hands of a state.

This history directly relates to Rahmani's own life. As Lucy McNair writes, "Rahmani grew up the child of a colony she never knew in a country that denied her a cultural past. She was in effect silenced by both sides."[cdxlix] Rahmani's heritage as Berber and as the daughter of a harki positions her differently within both French and Algerian societies, making her effectively an outcast in each. As we shall see, this double mode of being Other marks Rahmani's vision of the global order and the nature of citizenship: her narrator in *"Musulman" roman* lays claim to no country and instead seeks freedom from all nation-states. Importantly, the accusation of "Arab" also forms an important complement to the accusation of "Muslim" in *"Musulman" roman*, both of which Rahmani takes care to refute or trouble.

After 9/11: "Arab," "Muslim," and Silenced

While Sebbar's novel is tied to anti-Arab sentiment of the 1980s, Rahmani's text is heavily marked by the attack on the World Trade Center, the following invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan, the detention of suspects at Abu Ghraib, and by extension the first Gulf War. This context changes the idea of who an "Arab-Muslim" is. Different from Sebbar's Arab youth who is seen as a delinquent, and who is also associated with immigration-induced fears of contamination and invasion of the home soil of France, Rahmani's "Arab-Muslim" is condemned as a suspected Islamist terrorist. Significantly, this iteration exists as a specter that is conjured in the minds of the French people and projected onto anyone who might look the part, much as Mohammed is repeatedly mislabeled in *Le Chinois vert*.

Because *"Musulman" roman* interrogates the global order and links its narrator's treatment in France to US events, I would argue that it can be read not just as a Francophone text but as being in conversation with Anglophone texts that also address the changing treatment of those marked as Arab and Muslim after 9/11. Indeed, Carol Fadda-Conrey's study of Arab American fictional texts written after 9/11 raises several parallel themes: these texts problematize unilateral nationalism, racial stereotyping, blanket labeling, and discriminatory profiling by

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presenting complex characters who defy simplistic visions of Arab Americans.[cdl] Significantly, these texts also push back against reductionist conceptualizations of US citizenship.[cdli] Whereas conventional representations of Arabs in US fiction once relied on Orientalist tropes of the "rich Arab oil sheikh" and "belly-dancing harem girls," they have since shifted to a conception of Arabs as religious, violent and intimately linked to terrorism.[cdlii]

Though the French context differs, as chapter one noted, this shift towards fears of Islamist terrorism also took place in Europe, and has only intensified in the past two decades. In the US binary of the "citizen-patriot"–a binary in no way unique to this one nation–"good" Arabs must distance themselves politically, religiously and even physically from "bad" Arabs, or those "purportedly bearing the neo-Orientalist designations of fundamentalism, terrorism, and cultural stagnation."[cdliii] Similarly, those who do not conform to a certain vision of "Frenchness"–and particularly to a laic model–are marked as undesirable. Rahmani accordingly investigates the production of such outcasts in democratic societies in both *Moze and "Musulman" Roman*.[cdliv] Here, laws created in the service of human rights and citizenship can serve to exclude, creating what Rahmani calls *"hommes bannis*," or those forced to live at the edges of humanity and citizenship.[cdlv]

In France this conflict often arises in the battle between *laïcité* and the expression of Muslim faith–most memorably in the headscarf and burqa affairs–, but as Rahmani makes clear in *"Musulman" roman*, fear of Islamic terrorism is a driving force behind the creation of *l'homme banni*, one that ultimately overrides previous fears of cultural change. This labeling is nonetheless deeply tied to the global order post-9/11, and accordingly Rahmani's novel ultimately moves beyond France. As Anna Kemp writes in *Voices and Veils: Feminism and Islam in French Women's Writing and Act*, "since 9/11 the focus of the immigration/integration debate in the West has switched from 'immigrants' in general to 'Muslims' in particular, and people who were previously defined by their racial identity have come to be perceived in terms of their religion."[cdlvi] However, in the same week the Netherlands, which has had a similar law in place since 2010, stripped citizenship from two brothers convicted of terrorism.[cdlvii]

Accordingly, from the opening pages of the novel Rahmani's narrator is named "Musulman," effacing other identity markers that would position her as an individual rather than as the face of an entire religion that is the "enemy" of the West. The narrator opens with the words, "Sur moi s'est abattue une entente entre des hommes. Je suis devenue, redevenue 'Musulman'."[cdlviii] The reader thus learns that the label "Musulman" is not the purview of one state or one person, but rather is related to an agreement. Yet, as the verb "abattre" makes clear, for the narrator this agreement to label her as Muslim is not peaceful but is instead a form of violence. Moreover, the term "Musulman" is masculine, thereby effacing her gender while evoking the aggressive threat associated with the male *arabo-musulman*.

This interpretation is further supported by a forceful condemnation of those who apply such labels: "Et contre la meute on ne peut rien. Elle vous condamne sans sommation : 'Musulman tu as été, musulman tu es !' Ainsi elle me nomma. De ce nom seul, du 'Musulman', je devais répondre."[cdlix] Those naming her–and others–as Muslim do so not out of thoughtful consideration, but instead act as a howling unthinking mob that refuses to see the individual or any characteristic beyond presumed religious faith. She is consequently forcibly tied to God against her will, by virtue of her heritage.[cdlx] As Rice notes, this "demonstrates a pernicious racist attitude that is nearly impossible to overcome" because it effaces the individual in favor of a vision, almost like a negative platonic ideal that can have no true counterpart in reality.[cdlxi] Much more than a simple label or name, this term "Musulman" therefore has a particular power. It suffocates the narrator, who refuses to accept society's chosen identity for her. She writes, "C'est au silence qu'on me condamne".[cdlxii] As we saw with Pineau, the very act of writing then becomes a form of speech that allows Rahmani to refute the monolithic imposition of the label "Musulman," while also condemning the social verdict that allows for its creation in the first place.

In order to refuse this verdict however, the narrator must first confront its power and the myriad ways in which the labeling she has endured in France has effaced the true markers of her identity and heritage. This first takes place through the loss of her native language at age 5, only a few weeks after the family has arrived in France. The narrator recalls a dream in which she is

trapped in the belly of elephants, without voice or language.[cdlxiii] From the next morning, she

speaks nothing but French with her mother.[cdlxiv] This scene takes place in the first act of the

novel, "La Nuit de l'Eléphant," the placement of which deliberately foregrounds the importance of

language and voice as essential to identity. Significantly, the lost language is also oral and minor:

"Je suis née au monde avec une langue mineure. Une langue qui ne fait que se dire et que par

tradition on ne lit pas. Nous l'appelons langue tamazight."[cdlxv] Hence the narrator's switch to

French represents a severing with her Berber heritage.

Though this passage recalls preoccupations with the language of the colonizer found in

other North African texts, such as the *oeuvre* of Assia Djebar, I am interested here in how the loss

of Tamazight removes an anchor that would have allowed the narrator to resist the imposition of

other labels. Instead, we learn that the Night of the Elephant is also the story of the birth of

Muslims, but that the narrator does not identify as such. Neither is she an Arab: "De ceux de

l'Éléphant, je n'ai pas voulu être. Et des Arabes, dont j'ignorais la langue et les règles, en France,

je souffrais d'être, je n'en étais pas. Je les ai quittés. Les laissant tous pris dans le cube de ma

chambre. D'eux, je m'écartais."[cdlxvi]

Yet, French society will not allow an Algerian to choose his or her own identity. Instead,

the narrator is marked against her will as an Arab, a fact that breeds resentment towards her

family and the very things the labels represent. [cdlxvii] She laments, "Si seulement nous étions

arabes, lui disais-je, si seulement nous l'étions, mais nous ne l'étions pas. Si seulement nous

étions des immigrés, mais nous ne l'étions pas. Si seulement nous étions français, français

depuis des décennies, mais nous ne l'étions toujours pas."[cdlxviii] Though the family is composed of

French citizens who were exiled to France following the war, much like the *pieds noirs*, as harkis

every marker of their identity is effaced in favor of a social verdict that allows for the denial of their

rights as French citizens.

This is in a way a greater violence than that suffered by an Arab who is discriminated

against on the basis of being Arab, because in the case of the Berber family, their very existence

is denied in favor of the marginalized identity of another. Furthermore, to be marked as

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immigrants in particular puts the rights of citizens at risk, as it both casts them under the shadow of illegal immigration[47] and fears of cultural change. However, Rahmani does not only condemn France for the erasure of non-Arabs; the narrator also recounts a visit to her great uncle in Algeria during the period of Arabization, where she discovers that, though he is a respected imam, as a Tamazight-speaker he is no longer allowed to preach, that their native tongue is being effaced, and that their way of life is disappearing.[cdlxix] In Rahmani's view then, the desire to control identity is a problem unique to no nation, but rather highlights the shortcomings of citizenship across borders.

Refuting Stereotypes: the Rehabilitation of Memory, Language, and Voice

Like Sebbar, Rahmani pushes back against these negative characterizations, against verdict, by offering a counter vision of the "Muslim" and the "Arab." Rather than focus on multiculturalism and the blurring of identities though, the narrator in *"Musulman" roman* instead uses a tripartite approach. She first seeks to rehabilitate Kabyle culture and language specifically, second, addresses her internalized stigmas surrounding Islam and Arabs, and third, pushes back against the label "Musulman" by troubling its gender.

The centrality of language and its placement within the text points to the power of naming and words. The rediscovery of language begins in Act II, "Le Petit Poucet et le noyau magique," when the narrator begins to actively resist the dominant narrative that says her language is dead. She writes, "Ta langue est morte, me disaient les livres. Pourtant ses mots je les avais seulement murés. J'ai appris qu'une langue ne meurt pas. Les langues ne meurent pas."[cdlxx] Yet, the loss of language still haunts her and is associated with nightmares and memories in which she cannot understand the language spoken by others.[cdlxxi] To counter this, the narrator offers a second traditional story, that of the "Noyau magique," thereby proving that her mother tongue still lives within her memory.[cdlxxii]

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[47] As the "*délit de faciès*" in the *banlieues* makes clear, the burden of proving citizenship falls with unequal weight on those perceived as immigrants due to phenotype.

This rehabilitation takes center stage in the Act III, "Ma langue ne veut pas mourir," the traditional point of climax in a five-act play.[48] The narrator comments that the French education system leaves no place for study of her heritage. Rather, it is wholly unknown: "En France, ceux qui m'ont éduquée ne m'ont jamais entendue dans ma langue. Ils ignoraient même que j'avais une langue. Et dès qu'ils se penchèrent sur moi, je ne l'ai plus parlée. Je ne parlais plus en cette langue. Seule la langue française vivait. Je l'ai apprise avec envie."[cdlxxiii] Simultaneously, Arabization in Algeria threatens to destroy her grandfather's culture, her culture.[cdlxxiv] Just like her people, the Berber language no longer has a home; it is exiled.[cdlxxv] Thus both French and Arabic mark the silencing of her maternal tongue.

Accordingly, neither her French nationality nor the label of Arab that is imposed upon her fits comfortably. Indeed, upon learning in high school that she has French nationality, the narrator is unsettled and uncertain of what "nationality" signifies for her.[cdlxxvi] Rahmani therefore defies the convention of *beur* literature in two ways. First, the narrator rediscovers her maternal tongue in the works of Mouloud Mammeri and other Kabyle poets and writers, apprenticing herself as a writer who will follow in their footsteps.[cdlxxvii] Significantly, she sees her study as an act of resistance that frees her: "Pareille à une résistante qui se doit de taire son activité, je me voyais comme en dissidence avec le monde."[cdlxxviii] As Kemp notes, this "reverses a common cliché of *beur* women's writing whereby the narrator feels oppressed by her parental language and culture and seeks emancipation through Western literature."[cdlxxix] Second, Rahmani once again troubles the convention that French nationality–the lack of which defines the plot of so many Francophone texts centering on exile or migration to France–offers greater security or freedom for someone of immigrant heritage.

This foregrounding of language is essential to Rahmani's efforts to right the verdicts that efface her identity and mold her as an Arab-Muslim terrorist. Without language, she has no way of speaking back, and must continue to suffer in silence. Though this rediscovery is placed within

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[48] As Allison Rice notes, this structure is also in and of itself an act of resistance, as it troubles the word "roman" in Rahmani's title. Labels are therefore suspect. In "Answering to "Muslim," 347.

a fictional account, it nonetheless refutes the verdict of the *arabo-musulman* by offering the reader an insight into a culture that has been heavily silenced. By making a point of taking the reader on a journey to rediscover her mother tongue–which then serves to give a written voice to an oral language, preserving it against death–she breaks that imposed silence and gives life to her own identity and heritage.

In so doing, Rahmani also rehabilitates Arabic culture and history, as well as Islam. Though the former is not her own heritage, as we have seen she is outwardly defined by it. The narrator quickly realizes in her efforts to learn everything about the Kabyle masters that there are no texts in Arabic, nor are there any texts on the history of the Arab people.[cdlxxx] She at first sees this as proof that the negative stereotype of Arabs in France is true, and uses it to distance herself as a Berber: "À eux je ne ressemblais donc pas. Et l'Islam, cette religion qui était commune à ceux de ma langue et aux Arabes, je le concevais volontiers autrement qu'eux."[cdlxxxi] Moreover, she assimilates the societal verdict condemning Arabs as negative: "Ils ne savent pas penser, pas lire, pas s'émanciper, ils ne savent pas vivre, me disais-je des Arabes. Ils étaient à jamais des hommes soumis à des règles de vie et de pensée qui leur étaient propres."[cdlxxxii] However, the narrator frames this negative commentary within the lens of her current-day knowledge, making it clear that her attitude has changed. She refers to these negative beliefs as "toute la boue qu'on servait à leur sujet," and as "mots négatifs et régressifs."[cdlxxxiii] Rahmani thus makes it clear for her reader that the verdict on Arabs is wrong. By painting that judgment as "mud" and "regressive," she also condemns it in turn.

This is supported by the repeated references to Islam in the text that tie it to her dreams and memories of Algeria–such as the story of the elephant and her memories of her grandfather. As Kemp argues, "To these reductive notions of Islam as obscurantist and oppressive, Rahmani opposes a vision of Islam as transcultural and inclusive. The narrator recounts the story of Islam and of the Prophet Mohammed as one of continual adaptation, transformation, interpretation and transferral."[cdlxxxiv] The notions of adaptation and transformation are particularly important to Rahmani's project, as she fights against the strict labels that seek to pin her as one image.

Indeed, though the novel's narrator is female, she refers to herself as "musulman", rather than the feminine "musulmane." Though on the one hand this speaks to the monolithic nature of the label of *arabo-musulman*, and the gendered nature of the "Islamist terrorist" in the popular imaginary, this at the same time shows Rahmani's refusal to bow to verdict, even as she proclaims that the label is forced upon her narrator. Rice argues similarly that this establishes a distance between the labels applied to Rahmani, the author, and her female narrator's voice.[cdlxxxv] Yet, I read the narrator's commentary as a means for the author to reflect upon societal labels outside the landscape of the fiction itself. By embracing a masculine form and by speaking out against monolithic terms that seek to silence individuality, Rahmani's narrator defies the stereotype of the submissive Arab woman. She accordingly refuses to conform to the binary expected of her, what Kemp identifies as "the role of the 'enemy'–the West's negative opposite and dangerous double–or that of the female martyr whose perceived suffering justified political or military intervention."[cdlxxxvi]

The Paradox of Citizenship: Exile Both Imposed and Denied

Resisting these labels via self-education, writing and the rehabilitation of her memories does not allow the narrator to find freedom however. Like Marie of *L'Exil selon Julia*, haunted by racist refrains, Rahmani's narrator remains trapped by the weight of the collective verdict, by the image of the *arabo-musulman*. As we shall see, this verdict is not unique to France, but is instead echoed around the world. France is nonetheless the country of her citizenship, and the denial of belonging there marks the narrator's trajectory for the rest of the novel.

Set closer to the present time of the narration, the novel's fourth act, "Dialogue du fonctionnaire," reveals how the verdict surrounding *arabo-musulmans* has shifted from the 1980s' discussions of immigration to center on the fear of terrorism. From the first paragraph, the narrator makes it clear that violence has overtaken the imaginary of the world: "Quand les armes, la guerre, les barbes, les voiles, les morts, les bombes, la viande, les mots, les cris, les femmes, les enfants, les pleurs, l'ignorance, le vol, la haine, le mensonge, la bêtise, le vulgaire, l'ignorance, le viol, la chair, les soldats, les vociferations, les claquements de gueule, le dédain, le

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mépris, l'abject, l'infamie, la destruction, l'ignominie ont tout envahi, j'ai eu peur."[cdlxxxvii] More than simply afraid though, she also feels ill. The references to war, Islamic terrorism, and Islamophobia are transparent. But by positioning herself as an individual who feels fear over these events, the narrator pushes back against the tide that seeks to mark her as the object to fear, as an unfeeling threat.

She continues, making it clear that Muslims specifically are the inspiration for this change: "À longueur de journées, on ne parlait que d'eux et on ne voyait qu'eux: les musulmans. Les musulmans. Pas des femmes, des hommes, et des enfants à qui on faisait la plus vieille saleté du monde, mais seulement des musulmans."[cdlxxxviii] As Rice remarks, this is the point in the text where the word "fear" becomes pervasive for the first time.[cdlxxxix] Thus it shifts abruptly from an exploration of heritage that seeks to establish a voice back towards the "horde" and its accusatory slurs that opened the novel. I would argue that this highlights the difficulty of fighting an overwhelming social verdict: despite the narrator's personal redemption, society remains blind to anything other than what it wishes to see.

The narrator's treatment at the hands of the French government reinforces this theme. She first exiles herself within France, retiring to the countryside to seek solace from the accusations of the French people. The narrator expects the hordes, "un peuple vagabond," to come to her door to accuse her to her face of being a "musulman." Instead, a government functionary comes to her door, demanding proof of her citizenship and explanations of her intent.[cdxc] Their dialogue makes it abundantly clear that the town suspects her of having ties to Islamic terrorism, based on nothing more than her outward appearance. At one point, the employee even intimates that due to the narrator's background in engineering, she must know how to sabotage an airplane's engine.[cdxci] The link to the events of 9/11 is merely implied, but inescapable.

The narrator refuses to give in to the interrogation, replying with the bare minimum, and perhaps most significantly, refusing to claim a country as her own. Rather, like Mohammed, she proclaims that she has no country.[cdxcii] The functionary struggles to understand this, in part

because it goes against the international understanding that no person should be left stateless, but above all because in avowing statelessness, Rahmani's narrator refutes the French state itself. This dialogue therefore serves two purposes. On the one hand, despite living in France for the majority of her life, the adult narrator finds the fact of her citizenship and French nationality put into question. On the other, she also proactively refuses her French citizenship, because her country of residence refuses to recognize her. In so doing she lays bare the failures of citizenship in France, where those read as Arab are maintained as "foreign" irrespective of legal status.[49]

Exiled and hunted within France, the narrator resolves to flee, to seek out the origins of the name "Musulman" and in so doing assert her liberty. She returns to the desert in the fifth act, "*Desert Storm*," only to discover that–just as Algeria has fallen to Islamism and Arab nationalism- the desert has been "repeuplé de chacals."[cdxciii] The jackals are Islamist terrorists, caught in a war with the powers of the West. Ironically, though the narrator's citizenship is questioned and disbelieved in France, leading her to renounce it and to flee, the global powers refuse her this freedom. The narrator is arrested and placed in a detention camp reminiscent of Guantánamo Bay alongside suspected Islamic terrorists. Here, the prisoners kneel in the sand, clad in orange jumpsuits with their hands tied behind their backs, awaiting interrogation.[cdxciv]

The narrator is held not because she is a terrorist though, but because she has fled France: "Aujourd'hui, cette nationalité je l'ai égarée. Et c'est pour cette raison, cette trahison que je suis maintenue dans cette tôle."[cdxcv] In other words, refusing belonging to the French state is an act of treason, irrespective of the state's refusal to truly accept her as one of its own. She, like all those marked as non-belonging, is thus maintained in a permanent state of limbo, neither French nor anything else. This is the ultimate expression of state authority, and in one sense places the *arabo-musulman* who is a French citizen in a more precarious place than an undocumented

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[49] As Laura Reeck explains, "one of the dangers or pitfalls of the laws of hospitality is that for them to be effective, someone must remain a foreigner, a métèque, xenos, and someone else a host, which keeps an obvious power differential in place—someone has ownership of something that is offered to the other; someone invites the other into his or her home." Thus those citizens who are judged as outsiders in France, like Rahmani's narrator, are permanently maintained as foreign and as lesser. In "The law/laws of hospitality *chez* Zahia Rahmani," 87.

immigrant: the former is falsely accused of the latter's crime and simultaneously denied the full rights their legal status should accord them. In this way, the state enacts a slow and enduring violence against its own people. As Kemp writes, "the camp environment in *'Musulman' Roman* comes to represent the paradigm of a modern state order that divides the population into 'citizens' and *hommes bannis*, only this time the action is played out on a global scale."[cdxcvi]

The narrator is subjected once more to interrogation, this time at the hands of the American soldiers running the detention camp. Like their counterparts in France, the soldiers are convinced that Muslims are dangerous; "Nous sommes, ont-ils dit, le mal."[cdxcvii] Once again, she faces a binary choice: "Ou avec nous ou contre nous."[cdxcviii] The reference to the United States and the invasion of Iraq and Afghanistan is clear, but this declaration also reminds the reader of the narrator's treatment in France. Nothing she does will satisfy the global powers, because she must fulfill the role of the Arab Muslim. Indeed, she comments that despite her best efforts to flee their conflict, it is impossible.[cdxcix] By displacing this interrogation from France to an unnamed soil, Rahmani points to the global nature of the verdict condemning *arabo-musulmans*.

Caught between two powers embroiled by hate–the West and the terrorists in the desert– the narrator refuses to bow to either side, in an act of revolt that breaks apart the binary and exposes its reductive and false nature. Indeed, the language Rahmani uses makes it clear that neither side is in the right: "De la fange du monde captialiste, le pétrole boueux, sont parvenus les pourvoyeurs de morts, les Instrumentateurs de la planète. Des hommes-à-face-de-pitbulls que leur force mécanique pervertit et enrage croisent des hommes-en-noir-cracheurs-de-morts tout aussi animés de violence et de bêtise."[d] In an ironic turn, Rahmani therefore condemns them precisely for their desire to judge and control the world, for their verdicts that render all who disagree an enemy. Indeed, each side wishes her death, making it clear that like the howling mob, the powers have lost their senses.[di] Moreover, Rahmani devotes extended sections of the chapter to denouncing these attitudes. These sections split from the intrigue of the text and function as a meta-commentary, giving a strong voice to the author herself.

Yet, just as Sebbar's child protagonist threatens violence in the end, thereby fulfilling an expected role, Rahmani's narrator embraces–albeit ironically–the label of terrorist. She proclaims to her interrogator, "Tous les habitants de ce pays sont des terroristes. Moi-même j'en suis une."[dii] When questioned as to why she calls herself a terrorist, the narrator answers that it is because she has been arrested and made a prisoner, because she–and those like her–are inconvenient. She is ultimately a terrorist simply because society–and the global powers–deem her to be one: "Je ne suis ni soldat, ni armé et vous m'arrêtez, c'est qu'à vos yeux je suis une terroriste."[diii] Thus the social verdict of the *arabo-musulman* reaches its culmination. Even those who wish to flee all nations are pinned under the predetermined labels of dangerous and terrorist. In a final attempt to flee, the narrator names herself Elohim, or God–the one who cannot be named–commenting furthermore that she has no religion, and that "Je n'avais que des livres, des carnets et pas de papiers d'identité."[div] Her voice is intimately tied to writing here, further highlighting the role of Rahmani as an engaged author. The narrator's flight ultimately ends in failure: they have found her nationality, and impose the identity of a Frenchwoman–a citizen of France–, condemning her as a traitor.[dv]

While the narrator's flight does not succeed within the level of the plot, Rahmani's text nonetheless offers a way forward. First, the condemnation of societal verdicts runs throughout the text, and blames no one nation, not France, not Algeria, not the United States, but rather groups them together as succumbing to the same impulse to exclude, classify, label and stereotype. In so doing, Rahmani reveals the failure of the nation state and the ideals of citizenship. Kemp comments accordingly that, "for Rahmani, the issue is not to sweep away the foundations of human rights discourses themselves, rather it is to criticize their abuses" which constitute a betrayal of republican principles rather than their logical outcome.[dvi] Second, the interrogation scenes portray faceless agents of governments, who–like the stereotyped *arabo-musulman*–have no name, no individual identity, and no apparent agency. In one sense this is contrary to their own impulse of identifying and labeling. As the narrator argues, "Je ne souhaite pas de papiers. Pas d'identité. Pas de ce principe qui régit vos conquêtes. Je n'en veux pas de ce principe. C'est

ce qu'on vous apprend dans vos académies militaires. Ficher, inscrire, noter, identifier l'autre. Vous êtes malades. Malades de la traque."[dvii] In another sense, by denying them individuality, Rahmani also reverses this impulse, so that the government agents have no autonomy to define themselves, just as she is forced to be "Muslim" and "Arab." The greater lesson then is the global nature of humanity's failure. It has succumbed to the mob, and those governments whose principles are founded on the protection of human rights and liberty have failed their ideals. As Reeck notes, "By laying bare the difference between the narrator's French and Iraqi desert contexts, Rahmani evokes the coloniality of all societies."[dviii]

I would argue that Rahmani's solution, like Sebbar's, is to embrace a form of universalism that celebrates multiculturalism and eschews strict markers of identity. As her narrator proclaims, "Je ne serais pas qu'une exilée, une immigrée, une Arabe, une Berbère, une musulmane ou une étrangère, mais plus. Quoi qu'ils fassent pour m'y retenir, je n'irais plus sur ces territoires où sont assignés ceux qui les vivent. J'accueillerais tous ces mots pour ce qu'ils ont d'universel, de beau, d'humain et de grandeur. Le reste, le revers noir des particularismes, je le laissais aux affamés de l'identité."[dix] Though the narrator's physical flight ultimately fails, Rahmani's written word endures and offers the reader insight into the problematic nature of labels, and the possibility of existing without nationality, without citizenship, without a concrete identity. Rather than an *arabo-musulman*, or a *musulmane*, she is a subject of the world who finds freedom in her refusal to succumb to the powers of the state. From the ashes of the *arabo-musulman* and the broken ideals of citizenship comes a universal human.

Ultimately, like Sebbar's novel, Rahmani's text reveals the ways in which the French state fails its citizens marked as North African, as *arabo-musulmans*. For them, citizenship does not guarantee equality. Rather, the language of the rights of citizenship, according to which all citizens are equal, imprisons them, allowing the state to proclaim their inalienable status as full subjects while simultaneously marking them as outsiders, subject to different treatment under the law. Furthermore, as we have seen, this different treatment is justified by perceived threats; the *arabo-musulman* is either a delinquent or potential terrorist and thus must be treated differently

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for the sake of society as a whole. This need to counter threats, along with the *de jure* equality of

citizens, renders critiques of state violence particularly difficult for marginalized groups. From this

paradox arises each text's uneasiness with labels, as it is through categorizing that a state–and

its social actors–can maintain outsiders and insiders, holding the former up as a threat.

Accordingly, by portraying citizens who reject France and citizenship on the grounds of

their unequal treatment at the hands of the state and its subjects, Sebbar and Rahmani engage in

a radical act. First, they break apart the binary that creates outsiders, thereby refusing to

acknowledge a division the state uses to justify increases in its power, as exemplified by policing

and laws targeting suspected terrorists. In so doing they also reveal the false nature of the

societal verdict leveled against *arabo-musulmans*; in essence, they show the *arabo-musulman* to

be little more than a myth that exists only in the mind of those who cannot or will not accept the

legitimacy of North African-descendent peoples in France. Both authors' embrace of a positive

view of multiculturalism and mixing offers a counterpoint to this verdict, while also once again

highlighting the hollowness of declarations of official equality and acceptance. More than this, the

very fact that these texts were published in France makes them subversive, as they work within

the bounds of the French language and literary scene to deconstruct the roles forced onto not just

the people their protagonists represent, but also the authors themselves. Just as nomadism at

least partially frees their protagonists, writing thus becomes a means of liberation from the prison

of the *arabo-musulman*.

[cccxxx] Scanlon, *Plotting Terror*, 12.

[cccxxxi] Fadda-Conrey, "Arab American Citizenship in Crisis," 195.

[cccxxxii] Tonner, "Muslim Citizens! After the January 2015 Paris Attacks," 281.

[cccxxxiii] Amine, *Postcolonial Paris*, 4.

[cccxxxiv] Ibid., 13.

[cccxxxv] Ibid.

[cccxxxvi] Ibid.

[cccxxxvii] Foucault, *Surveillir et punir*, 170.

[cccxxxviii] Scanlon, *Plotting Terror*, 109.

[cccxxxix] Ibid.

[cccxl] Ibid., 110.

[cccxli] "Révision constitutionnelle en vue."

[cccxlii] Le Cain, Blandine and Roland Gauron, "Taubira: 'Je quitte le gouvernement."

[cccxliii] Scanlon, *Plotting Terror*, 2.

[cccxliv] Ibid.

[cccxlv] Jaccomard, "Guerre d'Algérie dans la littérature *beur*," 150.

[cccxlvi] Clifford, Caroline, "The Music of Multiculturalism"; Wilkerson-Barker, Donna, "Photographic Memories."

[cccxlvii] Vassallo, *The Body Beseiged*, 2.

[cccxlviii] McIlvanney, "The articulation of *beur* female identity," 131.

[cccxlix] Clifford, "The Music of Multiculturalism"; Jaccomard, "Guerre d'Algérie"; Naudin, "Formation post-moderne des Beurs."

[cccl] Clifford, "The Music of Multiculturalism," 52.

[cccli] Bourget, "Language, Filiation, and Affiliation"; Merini, *Two Major Francophone Women Writers*; Panaïté, "Étrangèreté et écriture du nonsavoir," *The Colonial Fortune*; Rice, "Sexualités et sensualités."

[ccclii] Eileraas, "Reframing the Colonial Gaze," 833.

[cccliii] Clifford, "The Music of Multiculturalism," 54.

[cccliv] Sebbar, *Le Chinois vert*, 9.

[ccclv] Ibid., 37.

[ccclvi] Ibid., 19, 26, 33, 183, 256.

[ccclvii] Ibid., 15-26, 19-20, 41, 43, 45.

[ccclviii] Ibid., 20.

[ccclix] Ibid.

[ccclx] Ibid.

[ccclxi] Ibid., 16.

ccclxii Ibid., 12-16, 41-45.

ccclxiii Ibid., 73.

ccclxiv Ibid.

ccclxv Ibid., 45-46.

ccclxvi Ibid., 46.

ccclxvii Ibid.

ccclxviii Ibid., 33-34, 60.

ccclxix Ibid., 33.

ccclxx Ibid., 79-81.

ccclxxi Ibid., 204.

ccclxxii Clifford, "The Music of Multiculturalism," 52, 56.

ccclxxiii Sebbar, *Le Chinois vert*, 21-24, 78-80, 162, 225-36.

ccclxxiv Ibid., 225-36.

ccclxxv Ibid., 231.

ccclxxvi Ibid., 79-80.

ccclxxvii Ibid., 104.

ccclxxviii Clifford, "The Music of Multiculturalism," 54.

ccclxxix Sebbar, *Le Chinois vert*, 39.

ccclxxx Ibid., 149.

ccclxxxi Ibid., 145.

ccclxxxii Fassin, *La Force de l'ordre*, 72, 86.

ccclxxxiii Sebbar, *Le Chinois vert*, 145.

ccclxxxiv Ibid., 149.

ccclxxxv Fassin, *La Force de l'ordre*, 13-20, 68-69.

ccclxxxvi Ibid., 70, 74, 87-88.

ccclxxxvii Sebbar, *Le Chinois vert*, 43, 102.

ccclxxxviii Ibid., 102.

ccclxxxix Ibid., 148.

cccxc Ibid., 148.

cccxci Ibid., 145.

cccxcii Ibid.

cccxciii Foucault, *Surveillir et punir*, 215.

cccxciv Ibid.

cccxcv Ibid., 201-204, 207, 210.

cccxcvi Eribon, *La société comme verdict*, 140.

[cccxcvii] Sebbar, *Le Chinois vert*, 131-32, 207.

[cccxcviii] Ibid., 129-31, 178.

[cccxcix] Ibid., 153.

[cd] Ibid.

[cdi] Ibid., 143-44.

[cdii] Ibid., 143.

[cdiii] Ibid.

[cdiv] Ibid., 88.

[cdv] Ibid., 142.

[cdvi] Ibid.

[cdvii] Ibid., 143.

[cdviii] Ibid., 138.

[cdix] Ibid., 178.

[cdx] Ibid., 178, 182.

[cdxi] Ibid., 247.

[cdxii] Ibid.

[cdxiii] Ibid., 246.

[cdxiv] Ibid. 248.

[cdxv] Ibid.

[cdxvi] Fassin, *La force de l'ordre,* 87, 122-24, 262-63.

[cdxvii] Sebbar, *Le Chinois vert*, 250.

[cdxviii] Ibid., 251.

[cdxix] Ibid., 206, 242, 253.

[cdxx] Clifford, "The Music of Multiculturalism," 55.

[cdxxi] Ibid., 57.

[cdxxii] Amine, *Postcolonial Paris*, 6.

[cdxxiii] Sebbar, *Le Chinois vert*, 17.

[cdxxiv] Redclift, *Statelessness and Citizenship*, 33.

[cdxxv] Ibid., 36.

[cdxxvi] Sebbar, *Le Chinois vert*, 166-67.

[cdxxvii] Ibid., 150, 183-85.

[cdxxviii] Wilkerson-Barker, "Photographic Memories," 35.

[cdxxix] Ibid., 35.

[cdxxx] Sebbar, *Le Chinois vert*, 223.

[cdxxxi] Ibid., 47.

cdxxxii Clifford, "The Music of Multiculturalism," 59.

cdxxxiii Sebbar, *Le Chinois vert*, 243.

cdxxxiv Rahmani, *"Musulman" roman*, 7, 9.

cdxxxv Jaccomard, "Guerre d'Algérie dans la littérature *beur*," 150.

cdxxxvi Ibid.

cdxxxvii Reeck, "The law/laws of hospitality *chez* Zahia Rahmani," 83.

cdxxxviii Ibid.

cdxxxix McNair, "Towards an ethics of traumatic memory," 163.

cdxl Ibid.

cdxli Ibid.

cdxlii Ibid., 157.

cdxliii Goldsworthy, "Images, ideologies, and commodities," 160.

cdxliv Aïtel, *We Are Imazighen*, 3.

cdxlv Ibid., 113.

cdxlvi Ibid., 3.

cdxlvii Ibid., 21.

cdxlviii Ibid., 21.

cdxlix McNair, "Towards an ethics of traumatic memory," 169.

cdl Fadda-Conrey, "Arab American Citizenship in Crisis," 194.

cdli Ibid., 201.

cdlii Ibid., 195.

cdliii Ibid., 197.

cdliv Kemp, *Voices and Veils*, 91.

cdlv Ibid.

cdlvi Kemp, *Voices and Veils*, 103.

cdlvii "Condamnés pour terrorisme."

cdlviii Rahmani, *"Musulman" roman*, 13.

cdlix Ibid., 15.

cdlx Ibid., 15-16.

cdlxi Rice, "Answering to "Muslim," 352.

cdlxii Rahmani, *"Musulman" roman*, 16.

cdlxiii Ibid., 21.

cdlxiv Ibid., 23.

cdlxv Ibid., 27.

cdlxvi Ibid., 31-32.

[cdlxvii] Ibid., 85.

[cdlxviii] Ibid., 84-85.

[cdlxix] Ibid., 80-82, 84..

[cdlxx] Ibid., 61.

[cdlxxi] Ibid., 61-64.

[cdlxxii] Ibid., 64.

[cdlxxiii] Ibid., 73.

[cdlxxiv] Ibid., 81.

[cdlxxv] Ibid., 74-75.

[cdlxxvi] Ibid., 86.

[cdlxxvii] Ibid., 86-87.

[cdlxxviii] Ibid., 87.

[cdlxxix] Kemp, *Voices and Veils*, 104.

[cdlxxx] Rahmani, *"Musulman" roman*, 87.

[cdlxxxi] Ibid.

[cdlxxxii] Ibid., 88.

[cdlxxxiii] Ibid., 87-88.

[cdlxxxiv] Kemp, *Voices and Veils*, 105.

[cdlxxxv] Rice, "Answering to "Muslim," 347.

[cdlxxxvi] Kemp, *Voices and Veils*, 104.

[cdlxxxvii] Rahmani, *"Musulman" roman*, 97.

[cdlxxxviii] Ibid.

[cdlxxxix] Rice "Answering to "Muslim," 352-53.

[cdxc] Rahmani, *"Musulman" roman*, 98-107.

[cdxci] Ibid., 106.

[cdxcii] Ibid., 99.

[cdxciii] Ibid., 107.

[cdxciv] Ibid., 118, 121.

[cdxcv] Ibid., 86.

[cdxcvi] Kemp, *Voices and Veils*, 103.

[cdxcvii] Rahmani, *"Musulman" roman*, 17.

[cdxcviii] Ibid., 111.

[cdxcix] Ibid., 118.

[d] Ibid., 45.

[di] Ibid.

[dii] Ibid., 133.

[diii] Ibid.

[div] Ibid., 122.

[dv] Ibid., 145.

[dvi] Kemp, *Voices and Veils*, 110.

[dvii] Rahmani, *"Musulman" roman*, 134.

[dviii] Reeck, "The law/laws of hospitality *chez* Zahia Rahmani," 84.

[dix] Rahmani, *"Musulman" roman*, 93.

CHAPTER FOUR

REFRACTING WHITENESS

White is commonly thought of as the absence of color: a blank canvas, an unadulterated page, what is left as colors fade. Indeed, a white hue reflects all light, absorbing none.[dx] In the imagery and imaginary of racialization, white as a color, as an ethnicity or as a race functions much the same. Whiteness is the foundation against which all other "races" and ethnicities are compared; they only exist as "colored" by comparison with whiteness. And yet, white light contains all the colors of the visible light spectrum, the blending of which renders them invisible to the human eye without refraction.[dxi] This chapter accordingly draws upon race theory–specifically that pertaining to "whiteness"–to examine two novels that undo whiteness, both in a specifically French context, and in a more universal sense: Cyril Bedel's *Sale nègre* and Bessora's *53 cm*.

Sale nègre is a first-person narration by an unnamed albino protagonist, who passes as white. He recounts his ascent into wealth and the privileged world of whiteness, and his subsequent fall, which coincides with his being unmasked as black. The plot of *53 cm* in turn hinges on the attempts of its mixed-race protagonist, Zara, to obtain a *carte de séjour* in France, and her conflicts with the classification-obsessed French immigration system. Each novel could easily be studied through the lens of blackness, as in the second chapter of this dissertation, while Bessora's text is often read as a commentary on immigration, nationalism and ethnography.

I instead propose to examine how these texts, each of which has an afro-descendent protagonist, reflect on the role of whiteness and its intersections with class, nationhood and the racialization of non-white minorities. I argue that both texts deconstruct race and the process of racialization by exposing the foundations upon which whiteness stands. In so doing they also refract whiteness, revealing it as colored. In this way they break down the black/white or white/Other binary that still informs notions of social value, Frenchness, and belonging, revealing it as a false construction.

Different from the texts studied in chapters two and three, these novels do not just critique society's verdict by revealing its wrongness, by seeking to rehabilitate the minority

ethnicity or by showing how belonging to the state is refused, although these are certainly components. Rather, they also mark whiteness itself according to the same signs that stigmatize non-white peoples. This is to say, by revealing whiteness as a color that refuses to see itself, and by troubling what whiteness *is* through the presentation of non-white characters who are phenotypically colorless (albino) or who hold the social trappings of whiteness despite having dark skin, they reveal its power to name and to judge as being built upon an illusion. In so doing, they force a confrontation with that which is unread and unspoken, thereby undermining its strength. As Sinéad Moynihan notes in her study of fictional accounts of racial and gender passing, *Passing into the Present: Contemporary American Fiction of Racial and Gender Passing*, "Historians such as David Roediger, Noel Ignatiev and Matthew Frye Jacobson have shown that only by exposing the constructedness and permeability of whiteness – including the existence of multiple whitenesses rather than a monolithic Whiteness – can its hegemonic power be overcome."[dxii] Because whiteness derives its power from the racial verdict, this means that when whiteness is overcome or undermined, the racial verdict itself falls apart.

Though prominent black intellectuals in both the Anglophone and Francophone worlds have long written against the ways in which whiteness structures society according to its own image–as the apex of the "races" against which all others are measured–, in academia the concept of "whiteness studies" has a much more recent history, beginning with the work of Stuart Hall in the 1980s.[dxiii] Generally whiteness has been considered to operate from a position of normalcy and invisibility, through a systematic marking of Others as "non-white" and thereby deviant from the presumed norm.[dxiv] This marking typically involves evaluation of skin color, but as chapter one discussed, racialization can also be heavily tied to cultural components. Whiteness is also often implicitly–even explicitly–tied to ideas of nationality and belonging;[dxv] we can think here of how the imagined French nation-state is used to racialize and exclude those marked as "Arab" or "black" on the grounds of cultural difference, a perceived inability to assimilate, or assumptions regarding citizenship.

Nonetheless, whiteness might first be understood as the benchmark for observing and classifying individuals, primarily based on skin complexion. Here, its particular form of invisibility becomes clear: as Macé suggests, "if 'the colour' was really the measure for comparison of the various skin pigmentations, one would have to consider white people to be 'depigmented'."[dxvi] This is to say, whiteness allows those marked as white to ignore that their own skin is also colored. Thus whiteness exists in opposition to groups marked as non-white, and sets itself as the standard. Indeed, in her introduction to a collection of essays on whiteness, Ruth Frankenburg argues that "whiteness is a construct or identity almost impossible to separate from racial dominance. For the term *whiteness,* expressing the idea that there is a category of people identified and self-identifying as "white," is situated within this simultaneous operation of race and racism."[dxvii]

Significantly though, the conscious racialization of others does not necessarily lead to an awareness of whiteness as a category in and of itself for those marked as white; since it is the position of "normalcy," their whiteness can go unquestioned and unexamined. As Richard Dyer and other scholars have argued, this is how whiteness gains its power.[dxviii] Yet this ability to at times ignore whiteness is a privilege held by those who are seen and accepted as white; for those marked as non-white in opposition to whiteness, the presence of the dominant category is made clear by processes of racialization and exclusion.[dxix] As we shall see, Bessora and Bedel each trouble this linkage of skin color and whiteness. More than this, Bessora also toys with the link between nationality and whiteness while Bedel interrogates whiteness and class.

Even so, though for two decades scholarship on whiteness focused on the notion that whites "generally have a lower degree of self-awareness about race and whiteness than do non-whites," it is accepted that contemporary demographic shifts in the United States have made whiteness increasingly visible, on both the left and right of the political spectrum.[dxx] Indeed, Charles Gallagher argued in the mid-nineties that whites display high levels of racial awareness when they feel threatened by another racial group or when they are the racial minority.[dxxi] In other words, whiteness remains invisible so long as it confers unquestioned privilege and power. I

would argue that this shift can also be seen in Europe, with the rise in tensions over immigration, refugees and Islam. As a result, current studies of whiteness are moving from a focus on that privilege and power towards the "relationships between white racial (un)consciousness and whites' relationship to inequality and racism."

In the United States whiteness is most commonly considered alongside (or in opposition to) blackness.[dxxii] Though chapter one showed how this also holds true in France, in her article on racism in Switzerland, Viviane Cretton nonetheless rightly warns that in Europe, the relationship between whiteness and blackness, or whiteness and other minority groups must be considered in context.[dxxiii] Significantly, though whiteness is often intertwined with national mythologies, or tensions surrounding immigration, it is also tangled with the international, particularly as concerns humanitarian aid and development projects.[50] Even in the United States, whiteness is now also understood to be a "constantly morphing identity refracted by context."[dxxiv] As Sara Ahmed argues, this means that whiteness can be both inherited–as phenotype and class–, but is also actively reproduced, as it is viewed as a positive "property of persons, cultures and places."[dxxv] Accordingly, whiteness is more than the physical body: it is also the abstract social. This understanding of whiteness' multiplicity is particularly important to our study of Bessora and Bedel: for each, whiteness is not just skin color, but also class and the privilege of belonging to society or to a nation. The context-dependent nature of whiteness makes it slippery, elusive even, and it is this that will prove to be its weakness. Yet, as I argued in chapter one, whiteness still exists as a structuring force in Europe (and in France specifically); indeed, it is thanks to whiteness that the "*arabo-musulman*" and *noir* have meaning as racial categories.

Sale nègre: Passing into Power and Privilege

Published in 1998 by Albin Michel, *Sale nègre* is a first-person novel narrated by an albino black man, who details his rise into wealth and privilege so long as he passes as a "white"

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[50] Loftsdóttir examines the particular entanglement of whiteness and humanitarianism in Iceland, but the idea of the "white savior" as a motivating force in international development and NGO marketing has also been studied by Adia Benton. See Benton, "Risky Business", "White People's Shit"; and Loftsdóttir, "Within a 'white' affective space."

man, and his fall from grace, coinciding with the arrival of his outwardly black brother, whom he murders, and his own subsequent exposure as "*noir*". Handpicked from the streets of the *banlieues* by a wealthy white banker, whom the reader later learns is dying of a wasting illness, the narrator is groomed to greatness in the world of banking. His whiteness goes unquestioned, but in order to maintain his "façade" he must cut off contact with his black family. Thus Bedel at once ties whiteness to class mobility and to race. Moreover, as we shall see, whiteness in this text is intimately linked to heterosexual masculinity and virility. For the narrator, his blackness is at once something that defines him and something to spurn in the hopes of a better life, but passing into the world of whiteness offers cold comfort. Accordingly violence also permeates the text: sexual, physical, and verbal, with a paired motif of the outward emptiness associated with the world of whiteness and wealth, and the inner burning turmoil of a white man who knows he is also black.

Though this text has strong resonances with the psychological trauma of *L'Impasse*, and could easily be studied from the angle of blackness and stigma, I am interested here instead in examining the notion of "passing" as white, and how Bedel exposes whiteness as a construct that derives its power from assumptions based on skin color and class privilege. The narrator's ability to rise unquestioned from poverty in the *banlieues* to the summit of the white man's world of banking via a "lie" reveals whiteness as an illusion that depends on belief to continue, while also intimating that whiteness is indeed only skin deep, so long as blood remains unknown. Significantly, the novel is set in a large city that rings of Paris, with its segregated *banlieues* and white center, but the locations are never named. Thus it is also universal, set nowhere in particular. Even its narrator remains unnamed; the only named individual in the text is his brother, Adi. The narrator then might be anyone, any man. This anonymity serves to destabilize whiteness as an outward marker of skin and as something revealed by class; anyone might be a person of color "passing" as white. But if a person might be mistaken as white, then whiteness is no longer impregnable. Instead it is weakened and with it the racial hierarchy that gives power to verdicts.

However, the narrator's fall still reveals the enduring strength of whiteness; once revealed as "black," he is lost.

Neither the author–Cyril Bedel–nor the text itself–have been studied in published critical works, though Bedel has published one other novel, *Le désir des victimes: Roman* (1999) and is the founder of Edunao, a platform that hosts online courses.[dxxvi] Accordingly, I will not read this text autobiographically, but instead consider it as a literary work divorced from the author.[51] I would like nonetheless like to situate the novel within critical work on "passing" and on albinism in literature. The notion of passing is not restricted to movement across racial lines, but rather denotes appearing to belong, or being accepted as belonging, to a different social group than that to which the individual is normally assigned by social or legal discourses.[dxxvii] Passing most often refers to racial boundaries–e.g. passing as white–gender lines–e.g. a transgender woman passing as female,[52] or sexuality–e.g. passing as straight. In these instances, passing challenges notions that link the physical body to social groups; in each case, it is assumed that one's link to the stigmatized minority will be outwardly visible and discernible. In American history, the notion of passing is closely associated with the black-white binary, wherein afro-descendent persons who are legally and culturally defined as "black" pass as "white"; in this context it also connotes fraud, as blackness is presumed to always override any claim to whiteness.[dxxviii] To enjoy the privileges of whiteness is to challenge that rule and destabilize white identity.

Indeed, as Moynihan writes, "to pass as white, if one is 'black', or male, if one is 'female', is to challenge assumptions that the evidence of one's race and/or gender is always visually available by recourse to a set of physical characteristics considered immutable – skin colour, hair texture, fingernails, genitalia and so on."[dxxix] In this way, passing inherently troubles the boundaries that separate identity categories by disturbing the markers that delineate the majority

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[51] The literature of race passing is most often read under the assumption that the author has internalized society's dominant views of race; in the Western context this places whiteness as the ideal. Autobiographical readings of passing texts by black authors are thus common. Bedel *appears* white, but making assumptions about his racial identity for the purposes of an autobiographical reading without information about the author risks reinforcing the very assumptions his novel undermines. See Ginsberg, "Introduction: The Politics of Passing," 9.

[52] Here female denotes biological sex, not gender.

groups from minorities. Moreover, though physical appearance is key to passing, geographical movement is also necessary: "the individual had to leave an environment where his or her "true identity" -that is, parentage, legal status, and the like-was known to find a place where it was unknown."[dxxx] However, as well-documented in French literature of the *parvenu*, passing can also involve crossing class lines; as we understand it today, this is an invisible sort of passing that can be divorced from the physical body. I would argue that in each of its forms passing risks always being a transitory state, particularly when it involves the physical body (race, gender), a state that is always at risk of disappearance if the "truth" is discovered; as we shall see, this risk defines the social trajectory of Bedel's protagonist.

Becoming "White Class"

Different from the mixed-race individual who passes as white due to some degree of European ancestry, Bedel's protagonist is an albino born to dark-skinned parents.[53] The novel opens thus: "Je suis un noir blanc de peau et sale nègre est mon histoire. Je suis une curiosité de hasard né blanc comme vous l'êtes sans doute, de parents tirant plutôt sur l'ébène."[dxxxi] In a way his albinism makes his passing particularly transgressive: as far as he knows, and as far as the reader knows, he has no ancestral claim to whiteness.[54] Yet, his skin is "undoubtedly" as white as that of the reader. His albinism thus marks him both as an outlier and as an invisible "fraud" who may pass unnoticed among "true" whites. In presenting an outwardly white protagonist who self-identifies as black, Bedel's text therefore troubles whiteness. As TuSmith writes, the figure of the albino "transcends or circumvents the polarities of black and white. A black person can as easily be an albino as a white person. The translucent, colorless state of

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[53] As Baker explains, "The term 'albinism' refers to a group of related conditions which are the result of altered genes that cause a defect in melanin production." Like Baker, I use it to refer to "oculocutaneous albinism, which results in the absence of pigment in the skin, hair and eyes so that albinos have a pale or pink complexion, and blonde or even red hair." See "Chromatic Ambivalence," 144.

[54] As Bonnie TuSmith remarks, the white skin of albinism does not equate to "whiteness" in American (or European) society, and has also historically evoked "feelings of revulsion and horror in agrarian and industrial societies alike. This is not restricted to European or American contexts. Rather, research shows a cross-cultural abhorrence of albinos born to dark-skinned parents; albinism in humans is tied to evil and to disease. See "The 'Inscrutable Albino'," 86.

albinism enters a realm of ambiguity which threatens the breakdown of familiar boundaries; it moves us from the rigidity of either/or formulations to the fluidity of 'both/and.'"[dxxxii] Bedel's narrator's white-black body accordingly undoes the notion that whiteness and blackness are phenotypically visible. Though TuSmith writes in relation to American literature, Bedel shows us how race can be pulled across the Atlantic to an implicitly French context.[55]

In fact, the physicality of the white albino body is key to Bedel's text, much as the dark-skinned black body haunts Joseph in *L'Impasse*. Baker notes that representations of the albino in literature and film always focus on the external appearance of the albino body, on its abnormally pale hair and skin and eyes, and Bedel's novel is no exception.[dxxxiii] Rather, the narrator pays special attention to physical markers that might reveal his non-white heritage, working carefully to mask them.[dxxxiv] From the outset then, Bedel creates a dichotomy between outward whiteness and internal blackness; the narrator's blood is "black," and his whiteness is a Fanonian mask. Like blackness then, whiteness is therefore intimately tied the physical. In this way Bedel creates a significant link between the two: if whiteness is predicated on the physical body like blackness, then it too is a "race," a construct. The difference comes down to which holds the position of power. Accordingly, so long as the narrator hides signs of his other color, of his internal stigma, he can pass unnoticed into privilege.

And pass he does, transgressing the boundary between the *banlieues* and the city, between poverty and wealth, between blackness and whiteness, between an immigrant background and unquestioned belonging. The narrator's parents are "pauvres" and "braves" immigrants of unknown provenance, who have successfully integrated: they have papers, five children who have gone through some degree of school, a 3-room apartment, jobs and a car "pour aller nulle part."[dxxxv] In contrast to his law-abiding hard-working parents, the narrator

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[55] See Baker, "Chromatic Ambivalence," for an analysis of the figure of the black African albino in works by French writers Didier Destremau and Patrick Grainville. Both Destremau and Grainville portray albinism as a negative quality, and write their protagonists as being both defined and trapped by their white skin.

intimates that he comes from a life of violence, and does nothing with his days.[dxxxvi] Yet, while

hitchhiking in the *cité* he is picked up by an evidently well to do man driving a luxurious car.[dxxxvii]

The fact that the man stops to collect the narrator, no questions asked, is notable. First,

the narrator comments that he could easily force the driver to the curb and rob him with the help

of someone on the sidewalk: "il y aura toujours quelqu'un pour le sortir avec moi de sa berline et

se casser avec, les poches pleines de son larfeuille."[dxxxviii] The narrator's place of residence is a

violent one. Moreover, his use of slang marks him as belonging to a lower stratum of society;

read in a French context, it also racializes him according to stigmas associated with the

banlieues. The driver nonetheless trusts him, and this trust surprises the narrator; perhaps it

stays his hand.[dxxxix] Significantly, he assumes the driver is a homosexual due to his manicured

hands, but the narrator also implies he is in error, stating: "je ne sais pas encore qu'il n'y a pas

que les pédés qui se font faire les mains."[dxl] Thus the driver presumably trusts the narrator for

another reason. Though it is never made explicit, I would argue that he picks up the narrator due

to the apparent whiteness of his skin.

Indeed, when the narrator weaves a tale of his origins, pretending that he is twenty years

old, recently orphaned, and has just failed his BAC, the nameless driver offers him a choice:

return home with money in his pocket, or follow him into his world.[dxli] The narrator chooses the

latter, and joins a rich world he can only recognize from films, becoming a banker and rising to

wealth.[dxlii] Passing accordingly becomes a geographical movement that is also a binary choice: to

ascend the narrator must leave behind his world of poverty, a world that is inextricably tied to his

blackness, embodied in both his family and his slang.

Consequently, he first cuts off contact with his (supposedly dead) family, telling his

mother he is on vacation.[dxliii] He furthermore refuses all questions about his family, understanding

that only with physical distance and anonymity can he maintain his whiteness: "J'oublie que je

suis noir, le regard en biais de ceux qui m'ont vu en famille, petit canard couleur cachet au milieu

des macaques. Ici personne ne sait."[dxliv] He then closes his mouth and listens and learns, seeing

his participation in the world of banking and the new culture surrounding him as a game: "Je me

tais et j'écoute ce qu'on m'explique. Je suis calme, c'est encore un jeu. C'est toujours un jeu".[dxlv]

Importantly, though the narrator feels out of place, "comme un plouc endimanché," he quickly

realizes that he is the only one to perceive something as amiss: "mais je comprends vite que je

suis le seul, qu'on me parle gentiment, que depuis longtemps l'habit fait le moine, que cette ville

est trop grande qu'y soient venus dévastateurs des rascals en groupe, un rascal dans mon genre

quand Monsieur m'a ramassé sur le bord de la route."[dxlvi] If the clothing makes the monk, this is

first and foremost due to his physical appearance, which allows him to pass unquestioned as

white, his blackness invisible. Indeed, he is able to ascend socially precisely because to an

outsider observer, his whiteness is unquestioned.[56] Though adherence to class conventions–

clothing, speech, the rules of the workforce–is also important, the narrator's insistence on his

albinism and his hidden black roots underlines the fact that skin is his first and primary disguise, a

disguise that allows him easy access into a world that is off limits to his dark-skinned family.

Consequently, each day the narrator erases the physical marks of his blackness from his

body: "Je prends le rasoir et la tondeuse et je refais le corps net de la négritude qui me sort déjà

crépue de la peau. Soigneusement."[dxlvii] The term negritude in this context intimates that this

passage is not an easy one, despite the luxuries it will ultimately afford the narrator. Indeed, to

erase ones negritude implies erasing pride in one's blackness, rejecting it. This is nonetheless

necessary; as Baker writes, "The external whiteness of the albino body is identified as a sign of

civilization or assimilation, almost perversely fulfilling Fanon's ironic declaration in Peau Noire,

Masques Blancs that 'pour le Noir, il n'y a qu'un destin. Et il est blanc'."[dxlviii] As a black albino, the

narrator's physical whiteness does not afford him true freedom, as the one-drop rule will always

tie him to his family, to that other identity.[57] In this way he differs from someone who is "truly"

white–that is to say, someone whose whiteness will never be questioned. Rather, "white bodies

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[56] To quote Ahmed, "bodies 'move up' when their whiteness is not in dispute." This means that passage across the social sphere is contingent on passing in a multifaceted fashion: culturally, phenotypically, etc. See "A phenomenology of whiteness," 160.

[57] As Moynihan and Baker write, the albino is constrained and even trapped by the physical whiteness of their body; in order to hide their legal or social blackness, they must always rely on their physical body's ability to pass as white. See Baker, "Chromatic Ambivalence," 150; and Moynihan, *Passing into the Present*, 22, 28.

do not have to face their whiteness; they are not orientated 'towards' it."[dxlix] The narrator's awareness of his passing–and his fragile status–therefore marks him as transgressive.

Accordingly, his whiteness must constantly be performed, his blackness continually hidden and effaced. As Samira Kawash remarks in her examination of *The Autobiography of An Ex-Colored Man*, which details the journey of a light-skinned white-passing biracial man throughout the United States, "passing is the continual motion of crossing the color line."[dl] The narrator therefore also abandons his old way of speaking, commenting that "Ma langue disparaît comme apparaît l'argent," as he adopts standard French, a language he critiques for being heavy with prejudices and for fearing both modernity and the languages invented "à sa périphérie," languages that might include both argot and creoles.[dli]

In other words, in abandoning his family, hiding his blackness, learning the ways of the business world, and adopting a new language, the narrator learns to *perform* whiteness, fully adopting the trappings of the monk. Thus, in spite of his insistence on the internal blackness of his narrator, Bedel nonetheless marks whiteness and gives it shape, just as the racial verdict marks blackness and arabness in turn. The narrator's passage into this world of wealth and privilege moreover marks a transgression of the social barriers that divide whiteness and blackness. This transgression raises the question, if one can fully enjoy the privileges of whiteness due to skin color, access to wealth, language and culture, at what point does one truly become white, at what point does the act become reality? If Bedel's protagonist is accepted as a white man, then whiteness itself can be read as a class-based performance, in spite of its continued insistence on phenotype.

Indeed, Twine's work with mixed race middle class women in the United States suggests exactly this. She interviewed multiracial afro-descendent women who identified with white culture, all of whom were raised within white-dominant cultures and as middle class; central to *all* of the interviewees experience was an upbringing that was unmarked in racial terms.[dlii] In other words, they were "raised white" because their families had the privilege of ignoring race, and because they had little exposure to minority groups or working class whites.[dliii] Instead, they maintained a

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white identity until they were "placed in an environment with a significant number of politicized people of color (African Americans/blacks, Mexican Americans/Chicanos)," generally while attending college.[dliv] Consequently, so long as Bedel's narrator can forget his own blackness and see himself as unmarked, just as those around him, he is able to maintain a white identity. Significantly, these women also argued that they had been white, "because they had the same *material* privileges and socioeconomic-economic advantages as their suburban peers. Hence, white identity was inextricably linked to a middle-class economic position."[dlv] Moreover, the women did not consider lower class whites to be "white."[dlvi] In rising to wealth then, Bedel's narrator does become white.

Performing Whiteness: Behind the Mask

However, his whiteness is defined by a sensation of emptiness and lack. I argue that this is because, unlike Twine's interviewees who were raised in innocence of their difference, he has always known how he differs. Therefore his movement is the inverse, from black to white, rather than from white to black or brown or multiethnic. As Twine notes, "It is the shift to seeing whites as *racially* other that signals the beginning of the loss of white identity."[dlvii] As a result, having always known whites as being racially different, the narrator's white identity is fragile. Though the narrator immediately succeeds at the bank, eventually rising to replace Monsieur, he feels empty: "Je bâille pour emmener ma tête ailleurs, l'âme vide. Le vide des autres costards qui résonne autour de moi."[dlviii] This emptiness at once reflects the nature of his work–the bank deals in stocks and all client interactions take place over the phone–but also underlines the fact that he sees his existence as a white man as being a fiction. In other words, Bedel makes it clear that the racial category of whiteness, from which the racial verdict stems, is predicated on an empty construct. His narrator therefore comments, "Beaucoup d'argent et des pourcentages de rien sur des sommes à faire vivre des villes pour longtemps. Mentir. S'informer et se trouver au bon endroit avant l'autre, les autres."[dlix] He even voluntarily adopts an atonal outward persona, but remarks that he is perpetually cold all over.[dlx]

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For the narrator then, to experience the world as white and as wealthy requires denying a part of his own humanity: he must hide his blackness in order to pass. At the same time, in positioning the wealth that surrounds him as built on lies, the narrator also implicitly critiques its standing as something of value. This is to say, just as the stocks he deals in are empty lies, invisible figures, so too is the corporate world of banking, of riches, of white men in suits. Though one could certainly read a critique of capitalism here, I argue that Bedel's primary point is that both class status and whiteness are built on illusions, the former the faith in the monetary system and class trappings, the latter the illusion that racial categories denote truths. As we have seen, whiteness can only exist in opposition to non-whiteness. But if whiteness is itself an illusion, then so too are the racial categories opposed to it. Bedel thus shows that the racial verdict is not wrong simply because it incorrectly categorizes people or stigmatizes them, but instead because it is constructed on a façade. In other words, the racial verdict has meaning only so long as the supremacy and existence of whiteness is accepted as truth.

Importantly, there is a strong counterpoint to the narrator's emptiness and lack of emotion as he passes through a white world: at times the narrator is filled with a white-hot violence–primarily a desire for violent sex–that he openly associates with what he sees as his interior blackness. Yet, in a particularly significant moment, he encounters a black African woman and takes her to bed. His experience with her is framed as a nearly mythical rediscovery of his own blackness, wherein the woman becomes a stand in for an unspoiled maternal Africa, a pure blackness unsullied by cruelty and whiteness. Even her home is decorated as a sort of African paradise, and she tells him of her country "en princesse de ses terres, que le temps n'a pas marquée, pas comme les blancs."[dlxi] Indeed, her purity is precisely her freedom from whiteness: "La première noire que je rencontre née sur le sol de son sang qu'un ancestral exil n'a pas maquillée d'une identité d'emprunt, d'une langue par défaut, d'un passeport accordé par le temps [...] elle a gagné la certitude de ne jamais souffrir du complexe blanc."[dlxii] Thus though these passages rehabilitate blackness, they also function as a critique of whiteness.

Here, the narrator even becomes uncomfortable in his whiteness, the very thing he relies upon to succeed in life, the very thing he normally strives to embrace: "Elle s'absente et se glisse dans un pagne et je me sens gauche dans ma tenue de blanc comme je serai trop blanc dans le boubou qu'elle me propose. Que j'accepte."[dlxiii] In order to make love with her–as opposed to his normal method of non-intimate sex–he must abandon his outer trappings that mark him as white. The end result is that he for once forgets that he is white, and allows himself to be known as black during his sexual discovery: "Je voyage sur son corps, j'oublie un peu de moi, j'oublie mon narcissisme, ma cruauté de blanc et la peur de la femme, j'oublie l'enfant en moi, capricieux et brutal. J'oublie que je suis blanc. J'oublie que je suis blanc et elle me dit, toi tu connais les noirs, je ne crois pas que tu sois blanc."[dlxiv] He cries for a long while in her arms as she calls him "pauvre petit négrillon," before finally making love to her as a generous man, in stark contrast to later passages wherein he will insist on his desire for sex as a way to enact his internal violence and simultaneous hatred of his whiteness and blackness.[dlxv] He writes, **"Je me sens nègre et libre, heureux de lui donner ma vie et mon plaisir, défait de toute honte, absous de ma couleur retrouvée dans mon corps,"** and "Je suis un homme, un nègre. Nous jouissons."[dlxvi] This time he is not a "sale nègre" or even albino. Rather, he is black, *noir*, and a *man*.

This triple embrace of his masculinity, gentleness and blackness is particularly significant. The power of whiteness is deeply tied to a heterosexual masculinity,[dlxvii] while as we have seen, the black man is regarded both as sexually aggressive, a potential predator of the white woman, and as a child, not a man. In claiming manhood, gentility and blackness simultaneously then, the narrator ties the trappings of the white male to his own interior blackness. In a further ironic reversal, Bedel instead positions his protagonist as being most violent when he denies his blackness in favor of his whiteness. In this way, Bedel racializes whiteness with the same trappings of stigma normally reserved for blackness: whiteness becomes color.

This scene also subverts the binary that places the albino apart. As Baker argues, "In terms of the albino individual though, the denial of identity is not only that of the colonized denied individuality by the colonizer, but also that of the black denied blackness and the whitened black

denied access to the white world."[dlxviii] Just as his entry into the world of whiteness is subversive

through its troubling of who is white, the narrator's embrace of his blackness also undermines that

binary, destabilizing the foundations of both categories. He is both white and black, and can move

between each world. Whiteness is no longer impenetrable. Moreover, Baker also ties this

subversiveness to an undermining of the *mission civilisatrice*, which would seek to "whiten" the

non-white person through acculturation and assimilation.[dlxix] By celebrating his negritude with a

woman who embodies Africa,[58] and by critiquing whiteness' desire to impose identity and culture,

Bedel's protagonist refuses that civilizing mission.

Yet this celebration of his roots also reminds the reader that his whiteness is a

performance, an outward mask. This duality defines the narrator, and will ultimately lead to his

demise, as he is unable to reconcile his status as both white and black. In other words, though his

very existence and movement through society undermines those classifications, he cannot wholly

escape them, just as Joseph succumbs to the internal verdict. Instead, the narrator undergoes a

crisis of identity following his encounter with the African woman. He turns to repeated one-night

stands, at times with prostitutes, but also with young women of barely adult age, many the white

daughters of clients, all the while filled with shame and cursing his "statut social de merde acquis

sans mérite."[dlxx] He thus performs his masculinity alongside his whiteness, embodying the social

ideal of the virile male who has access to class and money.[59] The varied levels of his

performativity in turn destabilize the structures that give rise to these identities. As Ginsberg

explains, "allowing the possibility that "maleness" or "whiteness" or ethnicity can be performed or

enacted, donned or discarded, exposes the anxieties about status and hierarchy created by the

potential of boundary trespassing."[dlxxi]

Accordingly, the narrator's acts of performance do nothing to assuage the emptiness he

feels inside. In a long, violent, stream-of-consciousness rant, with a sentence that runs for an

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[58] Though this scene could also be critiqued for its use of caricatural and stereotypical images, I
would argue that it functions primarily as metaphor and pays homage to the poetry of Négritude.
[59] See Javaid for an analysis of the intersection between masculinity, sex and performance; social
codes reinforce the image of a strong male as being sexually active, preferably with "as many
casual partners as possible." "Male rape, masculinities, and sexualities," 202.

entire page (in contrast to the generally staccato writing of the rest of the text), he rails against the colonizing of his identity and the dirtiness of his whiteness. He wants to "fuck" a woman to cause pain, to penetrate her until she bleeds, and to finally "jouir comme un sauvage, hurler à perdre voix, hurler que je n'aime pas, hurler que je m'aime pas, qu'on peut pas être blanc sorti d'une bite de noir, mangé par une ovule de la même couleur et sortir blanc, blanc sale, blanc du sang d'un colon au droit ancillaire sur des gamines honteuses."[dlxxii] He moreover identifies his whiteness as shame–"je suis blanc comme la honte, la honte de ma race de n'avoir pas su faire"–and as violence–calling himself a "vilain petit canard aux yeux clairs de l'outrage, la peau blanche tortionnaire."[dlxxiii] In a reversal of the classic dichotomy, wherein whiteness is purity and blackness dirtiness, here whiteness is what makes one impure. Whiteness sullies the narrator, as it recalls the oppression of his people. Against his will then, his skin represents the very thing that has led to his family's oppression, and his own turmoil. Bedel's text thus follows the tradition of literature on albinos; indeed, the francophone texts studied by Baker also "tend towards definition of the albino in terms of a blackness that has been sullied, corrupted or even lost, bringing to mind the insistent literary portrayal of mixed-race individuals as impure; inhabiting the boundary between black and white, and threatening the purity of both."[dlxxiv]

The narrator nonetheless continues his ascent, even marrying the white daughter of a wealthy client. He wants to confess his blackness to her, and beg her forgiveness, in so doing freeing himself from his façade: "Pardon de vivre, de l'avoir rencontrée, d'être aussi faible et lâche, nègre honteux, ambitieux et soumis, brutal et pleutre, fossoyeur de sourires. Je voudrais lui donner ça, offrir mes mensonges aux siens, oublier ma terreur dans ses craintes et libérer mon corps, affranchir mon âme des chaînes qui m'étreignent."[dlxxv] As the narrator continues, it becomes clear once again that his shame is his hidden blackness, a counterpoint to his earlier characterization of his whiteness as shame. Moreover, he lives in constant fear of his passing being discovered: each instant he swallows cries of anguish that cover "la peur de l'uniforme, du passé qui rattrape, la peur quand dans la rue je suis seul à marcher, où je crois qu'on m'observe, qu'on m'y voit ventre nu et gonflé de famine, qu'on m'y pointe les chaussures qu'il me reste à

cirer, attendant d'un sourire l'obole qu'on me tendrait en m'éloignant d'un geste."[dlxxvi] If he is discovered as albino, and therefore as a "fraudulent" white man, he will lose his newfound class status and be forcibly returned to a life of oppression and poverty, fearful of the police, reduced to menial labor. Recall that whiteness after all is also class.

Upon learning his wife is pregnant, he first responds with the thought "Salope," effectively projecting his secret shame onto her and once again asserting his (white) masculinity. Yet this response is also provoked by fear, the fear of the child revealing his roots. She is his "honte merdeuse," his "petit bouton noir."[dlxxvii] Still, in warning the family before the birth of an "ascendance au Sud, un grand-père voyageur, une grand-mère volage," he is able to hold onto his own whiteness.[dlxxviii] Luckily, the child is born with tan skin and curly hair, but just enough that she can also pass as white.[dlxxix] In this way Bedel plays not just on fears of whiteness being invaded and made impure by those passing as white, but also on fears of racial mixing. In this case, the narrator's actions are doubly subversive, as it is his outward whiteness that allows him to have a mixed child. The easy acceptance of the story of a "southern" descent also serves to muddy the waters; how many people who are tan but accepted as white might also have similar roots? Bedel thereby further undermines the racial verdict's reliance on skin color and outward appearance.

Denouement

At this moment, the narrator reaches the apex of his journey. He proclaims, "Je sais que je peux tout être, noir et blanc. Et je refuse."[dlxxx] Rather, he is torn asunder between his "tête de nègre" and his "gueule de petit blanc que je ne veux plus voir," "Blanc ou noir. Blanc et noir."[dlxxxi] In essence, though the narrator might find freedom, fully passing as white with a life of comfort and ease, he remains constrained by the binary options presented to him by society. White or black, white and black, but always separate. In order to pass as white, he must deny his blackness. And yet, he can never truly be "black" with his white face. In the end, for Bedel's narrator, passing is not liberating, and whiteness is a prison of its own form. As Cutter explains regarding Nella Larsen's mixed heroines, who all want to pass in white-dominant societies, "Only

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when "passing" becomes a subversive strategy for *avoiding* the enclosures of a racist, classist, and sexist society does it become truly liberating."[dlxxxii] In passing into the white world but denying his blackness, cutting off his family, adopting a new culture and language, and in shaving his hair, the narrator has performed what for many is an irrevocable act. Like Larsen however, Bedel subverts this trope; rather than have the narrator follow the easier path and accept his new life, he refuses to abandon his roots, instead straddling the color line.[60]

In fact, his roots find him, in the form of his drug-addicted brother, who appears at the office and blackmails the narrator: silence in exchange for drug money.[dlxxxiii] Significantly, in considering his brother the narrator embraces racist discourse, in stark contrast to his earlier valorization of the enigmatic African woman: "Putain de sale nègre. C'est ça que je me dis. Saloperie de négro au pif plat. Saloperie de moi qui coule dans ses veines. Lui dans les miennes."[dlxxxiv] His brother represents the life he has left behind, but also the blackness hidden by his own white skin, a blackness that is wholly devalorized by society. He therefore remarks, "On n'aime de noir que les chevaux, les labradors et le bitume, le cul sur les premiers et les seconds en laisse, on piétine la chaussée. Sale nègre. "[dlxxxv]

In spite of his hatred, the narrator nonetheless joins his brother in a cocaine-fueled night of debauchery, hiring black prostitutes and snorting line after line of cocaine. Yet, he considers himself to now be above such behavior: not only is he too old, he claims "je suis trop blanc pour ces conneries."[dlxxxvi] Moreover, Adi is marked as black not just by his skin but by his speech: "à la différence de moi, il est noir et parle comme un noir, palabre comme un tox, fait des films d'espoir pour miséreux."[dlxxxvii] Bedel's narrator thus racializes his own brother as black, and most importantly as dirty in his blackness, in contrast to his own whiteness, which he now valorizes as the purer of the two. In so doing, he therefore also reasserts whiteness as the dominant pole of society; the price is merely having sold his skin–his family, his identity, his blackness–"pour m'en

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[60] Cutter explains that the protagonist of Larsen's 1929 novel, *Passing*, refuses to be pinned by race, sexuality or gender, moving instead between significations, and always building her identity as a performance or mask. Her freedom comes precisely from her open acknowledgement of the instability of categories and her ability to play multiple roles. See "Sliding Significations," 93.

voir une plus belle."[dlxxxviii] As Baker notes, whiteness must exist in opposition to a minority in order to maintain its invisibility and "normalcy," and that "the constructs of 'race' and 'culture' continually 'unmark' white people whilst marking, or racializing, others."[dlxxxix] In this scene Bedel accordingly shows the reader that whiteness is predicated on psychological violence, and thus, like Biyaoula, he reveals the way in which the racial verdict can damage the psyche.

However, Bedel continually undermines the foundations of that verdict. Paradoxically, in forcing the narrator to assert his whiteness in face of his black brother, Adi inadvertently marks him as colored in turn. The narrator recognizes this, and unable to stand seeing the face of his father and his own blackness in the figure of his brother, murders Adi in a fit of rage.[dxc] Immediately after, the narrator expresses a desire to be sodomized–thereby sacrificing his masculinity, and obliquely his status as a dominant white man–before raging again, calling his brother "sale nègre" twice more, and racializing a black beggar, to whom he gives money "pour pouvoir penser qu'il pue" and whom he also calls "sale nègre"[dxci] In other words, the narrator asserts his whiteness one final time, projecting his own pain and self-hatred onto those who cannot pass as white as he can, those who remind him of his unsteady status. Furthermore, through these passages Bedel reminds the reader of the link between class, economic prosperity and race, while also positioning whiteness on the side of violence and cruelty rather than benevolence.

The novel culminates with the narrator's confession of his fratricide and his imprisonment. As a result, his interior blackness is discovered and made public to his in-laws and the community at large, leading to the loss of both his wife and child. Though the child will be raised in wealth and in a white community, she too is now sullied by what is known of her blood. No longer simply the product of that "southern descent," she is now a "négrillon" who will forever tarnish their line: "ils craignent le moricaud dans leur famille comme la peste et il y a de l'acajou dans le sang de ma fille. Quoi qu'ils fassent, parmi les enfants de ma fille, il y aura du négrillon, du risque de négrillon à particule, de nuit sur leur devise et d'ombre sur leur nom."[dxcii] Bedel re-emphasizes that whiteness is also culture however: the narrator later comments that his daughter will be

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hidden from him, "parce qu'il y a encore l'espoir des blancs d'éduquer la négresse, qu'elle ignore

le sang cacao dans ses veines, qu'elle regarde les beurs comme d'éternels pauvres et les nègres

commes des singes non domesticables."[dxciii] In other words, if the child can be raised to believe in

the structures that uphold whiteness as supreme, and in ignorance of her father's blood, then she

can carry on the mantle of whiteness, ignorant of her own fraudulent nature. Bedel does more

than simply damn the family as racist with this arc however; he also intimates that even the

families considered most "pure"–the old white moneyed families who strive for racial purity–have

built their whiteness on lies and buried truths. In so doing he drives at the heart of cultural

anxieties surrounding whiteness, anxieties that I would argue are predicated on its constructed

status.

The narrator loses his access to the white world with the loss of his job and family, but

more than this, he is repeatedly raped while in prison, to the point that he feels he loses his

subject-hood. For the two white men who share his cell, he is "un nègre," while for the "Arab" he

killed his brother, and for all three he has murdered his own blood.[dxciv] I would argue that their

rape is about more than punishing him for fratricide however; it also emasculates the narrator,

fully shutting him out of the (white and male) world of power from whence he came. Accordingly,

rather than resist, he passively submits, asking himself, "pourquoi j'ai cessé d'être sujet."[dxcv]

When read in the context of the novel's larger rumination on whiteness and its ties to power and

privilege, it is significant that in these instances he loses his masculinity at the same time he is

marked as black. As a rape victim, he then falls to the bottom of the gender hierarchy, no longer a

"real" man.[dxcvi] No longer able to enact his own virility, either as a white man or a black man, the

narrator must accept the violence of other men, at the same time that they repeatedly mark him

as black, calling him "blanche neige" and reminding him of the ironic and inescapable whiteness

of his skin.[dxcvii] Whiteness then is also about control and power; the narrator's whiteness is

stripped away as he loses control and agency over his own body,

Yet, he ironically remains trapped within the whiteness of his skin. His skin is white as

snow, even as "Blanche neige" is used as a racial slur. This is his greatest punishment: caught

within a binary, marked as white but simultaneously shut out from the world of whiteness. The narrator writes, "Je me punis d'être les deux, lacérer ma peau de la couleur qui lui manque. Je ne sais pas me réconcilier, pas me faire le cœur chocolat [...] je me sens blanc quand ils baisent le noir, noir pour le blanc."[dxcviii] Black and white, black but white, both and neither.

This is also Bedel's strongest commentary on whiteness and the social constructs that would make race fixed, or racialize people according to static identities. As Kawash argues, "the passing narrative is not about the *representation* of blackness or whiteness; rather, it is about the *failure* of blackness or whiteness to provide the grounds for a stable, coherent identity."[dxcix] By continually playing with the line between blackness and whiteness, texts such as Bedel's therefore "[expose] racial difference as a continually emerging distinction empty of any essential content."[dc] This means that whiteness is also empty, its status built on a false reality. I would argue furthermore that in giving voice to an albino narrator who ascends to whiteness, and whose skin always holds him as at least partially white, that Bedel also marks whiteness under the sign of color. In so doing he fundamentally undermines its power to issue racial verdicts.

Bessora: Whiteness Parodied

Bessora's novel, *53 cm*, takes a very different tone to Bedel's text. Compared to Voltaire, Queneau, Jarry and Sarraute by critics, Bessora's works are absurd, satirical and filled with language play.[dci] Accordingly, *53 cm* employs parody and absurdist humor to dismantle the French immigration system, racial classifications, nationality, the link between desired social status and identity, and scientific racism. Born in Belgium and raised in Switzerland, Gabon and the United States, with a Gabonese diplomat father and Swiss mother, and as an immigrant to France, Bessora could easily be classed within the category of "francophone" alongside writers such as Rahmani and Sebbar and studied through an autobiographical lens.[dcii] Indeed, some critics have referred to her as an African woman author or as a Gabonese author, seeing her father's heritage and her time living in Gabon as the primary lens through which to read her work.[dciii] Though *53 cm* does indeed contain autobiographical elements referencing her father's

upbringing in a French colony and closely parallels her own experience as a student in France, in this analysis I choose not to focus on this angle.[dciv]

I would argue moreover that a purely autobiographical reading of this text risks undermining the very thing it parodies: a societal obsession with classifying people according to their origins, ethnicities, nationalities, or races that effaces the universal and reduces people to singular elements. Graham Huggan and Sinéad Moynihan both tackle this problem as it relates to "ethnic autobiographies" and texts written by African-American and other ethnic minority authors. As they remark, the works of writers who come from or who are *perceived* as coming from ethnic minority backgrounds are relentlessly marketed as autobiographical, testimonial or intrinsically tied to their lived experiences.[dcv] Thus even when they produce literary works such as novels, ethnic minority writers are commodified according to an exoticized ideal of a raced body, and are read through that lens.[dcvi] Moreover, Moynihan notes that this standard is generally not applied to "major" white male writers, whose use of autobiographical elements "does not preclude their work from being considered 'literary' or their themes universal".[dcvii]

In France, the expectations do not differ. Rather, Susan Ireland comments that authors of immigrant origin writing in France "have traditionally been 'expected' by the reading public and by many publishing houses - to produce texts with a significant autobiographical or sociological dimension."[dcviii] She argues in turn that Bessora's satirical and ludic style allows her to deconstruct that expectation by tackling the same themes expected of an "immigrant" and "francophone" author–immigration, racialization, gender–but through a subversively comic lens.[dcix] Therefore, drawing on Bessora's use of satire, rewriting of history and open critiques of whiteness, I argue that–its autobiographical dimension notwithstanding–*53 cm* can be read as a universalizing critique of whiteness and its blind obsession with color that exists both within and outside of France.

Unlike *Sale nègre*, *53 cm* has been thoroughly studied by critics, who have studied its anthropological angle (Jensen, Moji, Moudileno and Yoshioka-Maxwell), its satire as an example of surrealism (Westmoreland), and above all its focus on identity, immigration, race and

nationality (Bouchard, Cazenave and Célérier, Ireland, Jensen, King, Moji, Nimis, and Westmoreland).[dcx] Cazenave and Célérier, Ireland, Jensen and Nimis in particular focus on how *53 cm* challenges or undermines racial stereotypes by reversing the colonial gaze back on French society, while Moji and Moudileno consider the case of Sarah Baartman, Bessora's parody of 19th century scientific practice and its ramifications for notions of Frenchness and nationality.[dcxi] In also examining this novel through a racial lens I therefore work alongside their studies. However, prior critics writing on the racial aspect of the text have either focused primarily on how this pertains to Frenchness and nationality, or how it is an embodiment of the creation of the Other. Ireland for example argues that "Bessora highlights the ways in which the body of the black Other was textualized during the colonial period," and while Nimis does thoroughly examine racialization in the novel, even touching on Bessora's marking of whiteness, his main focus is on how Bessora's emphasis on hybridity and mixing disrupts French identity.[dcxii] Thus even when considering Bessora's treatment of racial categories, critics frame it through a colonial lens or through the frame of mixed race, blackness, immigration or the nation.

In turn, I would like to invert this gaze and examine how Bessora's marking of all racial categories deconstructs not just Otherness or French identity, but also the pole from which Otherness is created: whiteness itself. In this reading, Bessora marks whiteness as a semi-universal construct that is not limited to the French nation, but rather informs identities and race-making across the West. I argue that she does this first by parodying the impulse to categorize, in so doing claiming the power to mark individuals according to skin tone and perceived ethnicity. This is to say, she claims the primary power of whiteness–without which there is no opposition to prove its superiority-in order to subvert it. I argue moreover that Bessora's subversion of the anthropological gaze serves this same purpose: she ironically dissects the very tools that allowed for the production and reproduction of racial categories, whilst also denouncing their very real violence.

In co-opting the tools that allow whiteness to frame the Other as different (and lesser), Bessora ultimately creates a new (ironic) vision of whiteness as a counterpoint to its vision of

non-white Others. Accordingly, she mocks white colonial mythologies, and marks white skin as colored and colored skin as white through the characters of Keita and Hermenondine. In fact it is only after thoroughly marking whiteness throughout the course of the novel that Bessora openly denounces its blindness. In so doing, she refracts and dismantles whiteness, first by revealing it, second by ridiculing it, and finally by critiquing its real effects. It is in this way, I argue, that she most effectively undoes the racialization that defines modern French society.[61] Not by considering the problematic nature of color categories, but by–like Bedel–destabilizing the very foundations that bring them into existence.

Deconstructing Whiteness' Power

The novel opens with a well-studied confrontation in a gym, during which the narrator Zara meets Keita, a self-proclaimed "Bambara de Neuilly" who alters his appearance with colored contacts and wigs, and finds herself classified according to her body type, or rather according to the size of her buttocks.[dcxiii] As Moudileno and Westmoreland note, this scene enacts the division between the French nation and the immigrant body, which must be viewed with suspicion, or as impure or imperfect.[dcxiv] As a mixed race woman whose buttocks size marks her as neither European or African, Zara thus straddles this border.[dcxv] This scene also portrays the French obsession with categorization and racial purity, taking it to an absurd extreme with a phone conversation in which an "Arabe gris cendré" attempts to buy a Singapora cat, the purest of pure-blood cat breeds, ironically discovered by Americans in the sewers of Singapore.[dcxvi] From the outset then, Bessora links the desire for racial purity with both illusion and performance, and less flatteringly, with excrement.

Yet, in response, Zara utilizes her own gaze to classify those surrounding her according to skin type: "un Blanc, gris cendré comme l'Arabe…Face à lui, une demoiselle olivâtre…Plus loin, un Tamoul chocolat…Plus loin encore, un Blanc laiteux crache son stress en poussant un râle."[dcxvii] She comments moreover, "Un autre…encore un autre…toujours un autre…toujours

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[61] Bessora has stated that she considers the French to "think in terms of racial categories." See King, "Bessora," 61.

l'altérité."[dcxviii] No one hears Zara, leading her to leave in defeat, but she nonetheless continues to mark others according to racial categories for the entirety of the novel, even as she is simultaneously repeatedly racialized, often to comic effect.[dcxix] To give just a few examples, in the metro Zara sits next to a "belle femme noire, scarifiée," and at the immigration office she marks her officer as an "Antillaise chocolatée," with a "figure chocolat au lait," while another officer is a "noir comme une biscotte grillée." This officer's petitioner is in turn "blanc comme une biscotte grillée," while another petitioner, a "Belge de la tribue wallonne," is "noir comme une griotte."[dcxx] In making the gatekeepers of immigration dark-skinned, and in drawing attention to variations in skin color everywhere her narrator travels, Bessora thus marks France as multicolored and multicultural, the land of alterity and Otherness, in stark contrast to its mythology as a white country. More than this, she also draws attention to the link between skin color and racialization, effectively marking whiteness under the same terminology as blackness and other colors; indeed, the white petitioner is a "biscotte grillée" just the same as his black officer.

Marking skin color according to nuanced tones requires observation, and Zara's inversion of the anthropological gaze is key to her ability to produce race.[62] As Haritaworn explains in reference to Fanon's infamous encounter on the train, wherein he discovers his own blackness, race is produced and reproduced in the very encounter between individuals, wherein one racializes the other.[dcxxi] She writes moreover, "This scopophilic process of knowledge production is a skewed one: the subject of dissection is white, its object, who is fixed, caught in the gaze and arrested thereby in its agency, is black. The encounter thus reproduces unequal relations of looking and recognising, which entitle some to gaze at, touch, reach into and define others."[dcxxii] Therefore, when Zara uses colonial anthropological methods to mark those around her as Other, she is taking on the traditional role of the white observer. As Jensen argues, "in her role as 'gaulologue' she lends a great deal of narratorial authority. As an ethnographer, she is the interpreter of events with the power to impose meaning. She uses this power to reverse racial

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[62] As Ireland notes, Zara frequently refers to well-known ethnographic texts and methods, from Cuvier to Levi-Strauss. See Ireland, "Deviant Bodies," 48.

and gendered power dynamics."[dcxxiii] Yet, I would argue that in this way Zara also *produces* race

in order to issue racial verdicts of her own, thereby co-opting the strategy through which

whiteness maintains its own power.

Furthermore, where Ireland observes that Zara's repetitions of stereotypes do "so with a

difference," thereby "challenging it rather than endorsing it," I would argue instead that when Zara

then reproduces such discourse, she participates in race-making from the position of

supremacy.[dcxxiv] However, though this might work to reaffirm the power of whiteness within the

level of the text, the difference ultimately arises on the meta-literary level of the text, where the

reader is invited to see Zara both as a bad observer of French society through her various gaffes,

but also as someone who reproduces race from the position of the object, thereby undermining its

power. Take for example her encounter with Bienvenu, a friend of Keita, during which she asks to

touch his hair, and does so without waiting for a response, before attempting to place him in a

neat racial box: "C'est stupéfiant ce teint brun. Y aurait-il une race brune ? Es-tu câpre, mulâtre,

chabin, octavon, quarteron, cafre, bamboula, banania ? Mais qu'es-tu donc."[dcxxv] On a meta-

literary level this scene parodies racist discourse, but within the narrative it serves to highlight

how whiteness requires an Other on which to assert its gaze.[63] Given Zara's status as both

immigrant and mixed race, her actions are of course highly subversive–as a mixed woman she

should not be able to claim the power of whiteness, but she does. Like Bedel's narrator then, she

transgresses racial boundaries, revealing their porousness.

Additionally, other characters regularly employ racial categories and pronounce racist

views, thereby making it clear that race does define life in France, and that whiteness still sits at

the top of the pyramid. As a mixed race man, Bienvenu is mistaken for a black horse, a white

donkey, a black donkey, a zebra, a camel, and a white horse.[dcxxvi] Meanwhile, in an early visit to

the market, Zara witnesses an older white man parody what he imagines to be an African accent,

only to draw the ire of a few "Négros" and "Arabes," who as minority subjects in a white dominant

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[63] See Nimis for an analysis of how the scene in which Zara interrogates her cherries, accusing
them of faking their heritage and nationality, also deconstructs racial classifications through
ridicule. In Bessora, *53 cm*, 18-21; and Nimis, "*Corps sans titre*," 52.

society "comprennent trop bien."[dcxxvii] Nimis reads this as a "strategy that responds to a resistance in (white) French culture to talking explicitly about race."[dcxxviii] Whilst I agree with this assessment, I would also argue that in presenting comic and racial categories that are revealed as meaningless, Bessora undermines whiteness itself, whose continued existence as the pole of power relies on its unquestioned production of the Other.

<u>Refracting Whiteness into Color</u>

More than the parodying of how non-white Others are marked, it is Bessora's deliberate marking of whiteness that constitutes her most powerful critique of racial categories. I argue that she does this by first by tying whiteness to histories and myths normally associated with blackness as proof of the latter's inferiority. Second, she marks black bodies as white and white bodies as black, ironically twisting the color line. Thus the black body of Keita is redeemed as desirable when Zara recognizes his French nationality, and the white Hermenondine becomes a new "Venus Hottentot."[dcxxix] Finally, in her strongest critique yet, Bessora openly denounces whiteness and its refusal to see itself.

As part of her ethnographic quest, Zara regularly makes pronouncements on the people of "Gaul" and their customs. As has been established, this functions as a parody of old methods of ethnography and their historical ties to racialization.[dcxxx] Nonetheless, because pronouncements about various ethnic groups were used to mark their inferiority to the white culture of France, Zara's reversal of this gaze serves to denigrate whiteness in turn. Accordingly, French is a "créole extrêmement vivace," and Zara's knowledge of Gaul comes from a course entitled, "*la Gaule, presqu'île des Antilles*" where she learned that the ancestors of the Gauls were Carib Indians.[dcxxxi] This first implies that French is not a pure unadulterated language, and second posits that the ancestors of the modern French people were not white. Whiteness therefore becomes suspect of corruption, much as the child of Bedel's narrator will forever be seen as sullying her bloodline.

Indeed, Zara proclaims, "Que font ces haricots blancs et amérindiens comme du manioc dans votre cassoulet rose et gaulois? [...] Pour être blanc, le plus blanc des Gaulois n'en est pas

moins bâtard, pur ou impur."[dcxxxii] If even the most white Gaul is impure, the ideal of a pure

Frenchness, with its strong links to whiteness, also becomes tainted by association. Rather,

Bessora intimates that France has long been multicultural and multiethnic, in spite of

protestations to the contrary. While observing rowers in the Seine, she also links whiteness to

negative traits typically associated with blackness–"on sait combien les races gauloises sont

paresseuses"–and ironically suggests that whites might be enslaved: "Il est juste qu'elles soient

réduites en esclavage par les mariniers; sinon, comment avanceraient les galères? Qui cultiverait

la canne à sucre antillaise?"[dcxxxiii] Though this commentary is a clear parody of arguments used to

justify slavery, made absurd by her assumption that the rowers are not there by choice, it also

serves to subvert the normal hierarchy between whiteness and blackness, throwing the dominant

gaze back on itself.

To add to this, during a conversation in which Keita laments the curse of Cham that has

condemned all descendents of black Africa (he has a head cold), Zara points out that Jews–

descendents of Sem–are also related to Cham, who is their great-great uncle.[dcxxxiv] Ironically,

Hermenondine–whom we shall learn is both afro-descendent and Jewish–uses this occasion to

proclaim racist and anti-Semitic views: "Les Juifs et les Noirs sont cousins germains, intervient

Hermenondine. Les étalons noirs sont une menace biologique et les banquiers juifs une menace

sociale. Et je ne parle pas des Arabes.[dcxxxv] Yet, according to this logic, whites are also

descendents of Cham, as he is their great-great-uncle too. I would argue furthermore that there is

a textual precedent for this reading, as evidenced by the above critiques of whiteness and Gauls

as impure and inferior.

Finally, while rehabilitating the memory of Sarah Baartman, Bessora also manages to

once again paint whiteness with its own brush.[64] While Keita pronounces racist and sexist

discourse, co-opting the words of Hegel and Cuvier to argue that black Africans are animals

(monkeys) and that Baartman has no history or humanity, Zara argues back, using Baartman's

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[64] See Moudileno, "Returning Remains," for a thorough analysis of Baartman's role in the popular imagination and Bessora's rehabilitation of her memory.

case as proof of the alterity of white Europeans and tricking Keita into subverting his own racist views.[dcxxxvi] Thus, when Keita argues that the discovery of a pre-modern statue with large buttocks in Landais proves that early Europeans were black–leading Gwen to proclaim "Puisque l'homme blanc a été primitif, il a bien fallu qu'il ait été noir"–Zara instead asks "Est-ce que les Hottentots ont découvert la race européenne des culs plats?.[dcxxxvii]" Keita responds that only monkeys have flat buttocks, ironically and unwittingly suggesting that white Europeans–whose buttocks are repeatedly suggested to be small–are also related to monkeys.[dcxxxviii]

This is of course not his intention, but the scene highlights the instability of Keita's views, which simultaneously seek to prove African superiority and inferiority in relation to whiteness. Additionally, this once again highlights how whiteness gleans its existence from its classificatory impulse. Hence, when Zara's own measurement fails to situate her as a member of any race, in answer to Gwen's question, "la fesse fait la race, non?", she retorts: "Et la race fait l'homme blanc." In other words, whiteness exists relationally. In showing how racial categories are unstable and ultimately built on imagination–Zara even points out that the Landais statue might be a *figurative* representation rather than based on a physical reality–Bessora therefore undoes whiteness, denying its power.[dcxxxix] By extension, the racial hierarchy falls apart, and with it the racial verdict.

Whiteness is not a French construct alone though. Even as Bessora rewrites and colors the mythology of France, she first critiques and undoes the Disney version of the Pocahontas story, which is notable for its romanticization of colonialism. John Smith becomes a "chasseur de Peaux-Rouges pédophile," while Pocahontas is linked to Sarah Baartman, her body also put on display as a "bête de foire" until her death at the age of twenty-two.[dcxl] One day perhaps, the narrator imagines, Disney will also rewrite the story of Judaism with a cartoon about Anne Frank, "l'histoire d'une Juive de couleur blanche amoureuse d'un nazi de couleur moustachue, Hitler. Il y aura beaucoup de gentils chasseurs de Peaux-Juives et un jour, Anne sera razziée et déportée dans un camp de concentration, où elle réfléchira beaucoup, en lisant *Pol Pot et Milosevic à Hutuland*, une bande dessinée rwandaise."[dcxli] This is at once a sweeping reference to global

colonialism, and a critique of whitewashed children's representations of that history such as found in *Tintin* comics and Disney films. The narrator later suggests a Disney film of a romance between Toussaint L'Ouverture and a beautiful white Creole, and another about Saartjie, "femme-singe amoureuse du vétérinaire humaniste."[dcxlii] I would argue that these satirical children's stories also point to the global reach of white history making and the way in which human history in general is founded upon mythologies and subjective interpretations.

Indeed, in an ironic reversal, Pocahontas herself later arrives in person, and argues to a white vagabond, Théophile, that "Chacun sait que la Gaule n'est entrée dans l'Histoire que le jour où de braves marins américains la découvrirent, en juin 1944. Ton obstination à prétendre qu'il y eut, en Gaule, une histoire précoloniale n'est que le symptôme de ton aliénation intellectuelle: tu souffres du complexe du colonisé mon garçon."[dcxliii] Bessora thus rewrites French history, once again making France the object of the ethnographic gaze, and refusing speech to the newly colonized (white) "Other" Théophile. The reader's understanding of the wrongness of Pocahontas' narrative also serves to destabilize assumptions that historical accounts of the colonized Other, used as the base justification for racial hierarchies, are accurate.

Significantly, lest the reader forget France's part in race-making, soon after Bessora recounts the history of Pétain's "*ca't d'identité*" and its role in the Holocaust. This *ca't*, the reader learns, was born of the "*ca't d'identité pou' ét'angers*," "destinée à la surveillance des barbares indignes de la République" who from October 2, 1888, were required to submit to anthropometric exams of their nose, forehead, ears, eyes, skin, hair, head shape, skull size, eyelids and other "stigmates physiques."[dcxliv] Bessora here undermines France's claim to colorblindness while also tying its classification system to a dark history of eugenics based in fiction-making.[65]

In her final subversion of whiteness, Bessora rethinks the link between the physical body and white social standing, in a sense paralleling Bedel's treatment of the albino body. Keita's blackness is repeatedly established throughout the novel, and it leads Zara to discount him as a

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[65] As Ireland notes, the juxtaposition between the dialogue about Baartman, with its citation of Cuvier's own words, and the Disney fantasy "highlights the theme of fabulation, thus encouraging the reader to view the Cuvier text too as pure fantasy." See "Deviant Bodies," 49.

potential husband, as she assumes that he is not a French citizen (Frenchness is after all intimately tied to whiteness) and she needs a French husband to stay in the country. Instead she hunts for suitors at bars, where she is repeatedly racialized in turn as "tribal", South American and South Asian.[dcxlv] She even tells a white man that he is mistaken when he states that he is not French, thereby explicitly linking Frenchness and whiteness.[dcxlvi]

However, Bessora shows Zara to be partially mistaken in her assumptions. When she buys into the mythology of a white France, she inadvertently ruins her chances of staying. Much later in the novel, Hermenondine declares, "Keita n'est plus noir: la république l'a décrotté; il est un modèle d'intégration."[dcxlvii] She here links whiteness and purity with belonging to the French nation-state, recalling Sebbar and Rahmani's texts, while also intimating that whiteness is not necessarily tied to skin color. After all, Keita's skin is dark. Still, Keita retorts "je n'ai jamais été...*noir*. Je te rappelle que je suis noble mandingue par ma mère. Car mon père, le paysan païen et bambara crotté, je m'en fous; c'est lui le *Noir*: il a été expulsé de France quand je n'avais pas encore trois ans; il n'avait pas, contrairement à ma mère, renoncé à ses origines pour devenir français. C'est donc bien que le sang bambara n'est que souillure."[dcxlviii] He is instead "Black," purified by his noble Malinke blood, blood that is also legally tied to his status as a French citizen. Non-belonging to France, or immigrant origin, thus marks one as colored and associated with the negative stigmas of the minority other, while French citizenship figuratively whitens and purifies the body. Citizenship might therefore become a means of escaping verdict to a degree, just as Joseph attempts to mask his skin with clothes, mannerisms, and skin-whitening.

Indeed, Keita argues, "De plus, mon nez est cartilagineux, et ma bouche fine: sans ma couleur, j'eusse été de la plus belle espèce caucasienne."[dcxlix] Zara is furious upon learning of Keita's true nationality, and immediately proposes marriage. It is too late; Keita has long since moved on and fallen for Hermenondine.[dcl] Recalling the many characters who are French citizens but are marked as racially mixed or non-white, Bessora therefore marks France as colored, even as it imagines that its citizens are white. Nonetheless, as Keita's case reveals, this whiteness is merely figurative; like Joseph in *L'Impasse* and Bedel's narrator in *Sale nègre*, he modifies his

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body to mask his skin–wearing wigs and contacts–but cannot fully escape his blackness. Though Bessora destabilizes whiteness repeatedly, tying it to the imagination rather than a concrete reality, she also underlines here how it gains its power through a societal acceptance of its being. This is to say, even as Bessora reminds the reader that whiteness is imagined, she shows that society has accepted and internalized it as the pole of power. In this way, the racial verdict can continue even once it is revealed.

Hermenondine in turn is revealed as being white, black and Jewish, though she passes as fully white in mainstream society. From the outset though, Zara racializes her according to standard caricatures of blackness: she is a "Blanche vanillée, nez écrasé, cheveux roux crépus, bouche rose cerise, en forme de banane."[dcli] The reader quickly learns that she is the descendent of Alexandre Dumas through her paternal line, and therefore is in fact afro-descendent.[dclii] Moreover, the reader learns following Hermenondine's racist portrayal of Jews and black Africans that she is both Jewish and afro-descendent through her maternal line: her maternal ancestor was a Jewish slave-trader who impregnated an albino slave at Gorée Island, and her family was later deported to Auschwitz.[dcliii] Keita exclaims upon discovery of this heritage, "Ma douce, tu es donc nègre comme moi!," only to be rebuffed by Hermenondine, who states, "Moi, on me prend pour une Blanche, et j'y tiens."[dcliv] Her prior racist proclamation, which denigrates her own heritage, can thus be read as a means of positioning herself firmly in the category of whiteness. Able to pass as white, she claims its power to racialize others and in so doing ensures her own social status.

Ironically however, Hermenondine is revealed as "stéatopyge," in a scene wherein she is venerated as a modern and white "Hottentot Venus."[dclv] Moji reads Hermenondine solely as a white woman, who in this instant erases the brown woman Zara, the echo of Sarah Baartman.[dclvi] Though Zara is certainly erased in this scene, and though the veneration of the outwardly white Hermenondine does indeed suggest the fetishization of the "black" body as sexually desirable, I would nonetheless argue that Hermenondine's African heritage–which has already been revealed–cannot be discounted here. Rather, as a white-*passing* woman who uses "stéatopyge"

cream to grow buttocks that could lead her to be classed as black, Hermenondine highlights the fragility of whiteness. Just as Bedel's albino raises the anxiety of a "fraudulent" whiteness, Hermenondine reveals whiteness itself as engaging in fraud in order to gain a desirable attribute of blackness. Hermenondine's duality thus marks whiteness both as colored and as desiring what is colored, even as it denies value to or effaces those it stigmatizes, like Zara. Even so, this scene also highlights the privilege of whiteness: it is only because she passes as white that Hermenondine can afford to modify her body to gain a selective attribute of blackness.

Bessora's critique of whiteness culminates near the end of the novel. As Zara petitions her case in the offices of SOS-racisme, she learns "avec effarement, la classification raisonnée des animaux, le racisme biologique et social."[dclvii] Here, her interlocutor explains the mystery of the Universal Man and the white man: "l'*Homme universel* est un mâle mélanisé qui s'est nommé *Blanc* car il se croyait immaculé comme un drap lavé avec la lessive Le Chat Machine qui donne une *propreté absolu*."[dclviii] Bessora therefore reveals that whiteness has named itself–it does not exist a priori–and is founded only in belief, rather than concrete reality. Furthermore, she makes the opposition between whiteness and blackness explicit: "le blanc ne se pose qu'en s'opposant au noir; de même qu'il ne s'identifie qu'en s'identifiant au noir. La propreté absolue du blanc dépollué exige la saleté absolue du noir polluant."[dclix] Whiteness' existence is contingent on that of the Other.

But white is also a color. In fact, the white man is "un Noir qui a peur de foncer," a man of "couleur blanche**,**" who so fears his own color that he becomes allergic to it, accusing others of being the very thing he fears in himself: colored.[dclx] White thus designates "toute personne de couleur allergique à la couleur, à commencer par la sienne," while in turn some blacks have white skin, and some whites have black skin.[dclxi] No longer invisible, whiteness is now refracted, revealed to contain even blackness within its spectrum of colors.

In the end, like Bedel's narrator, Zara fails in her quest: she is arrested as a clandestine immigrant, and thereby denied a chance at French nationality with all its carefully established connotations of whiteness.[dclxii] In a way, her failure comes back to her embrace of the impulse to

classify. In operating from the stance of whiteness, which insists on skin color first and foremost as a marker of a person, she reads Keita as unworthy, and as an immigrant. To her eyes, his "whiteness"–his Frenchness–is wholly masked by his skin color. Hence, in failing to properly "read" Keita, Zara reveals the weakness of the very gaze that gives whiteness existence: the ability to mark others as outsiders.

As Moudileno argues, "the systematic and hyperbolic insistence on order, species, taxonomy and difference not only challenges categorisation, but ultimately deflates/exhausts the operational power of categories such as 'Frenchness' and 'race'."[dclxiii] Indeed, Bessora's multifaceted exposure of the ways in which whiteness operates reveals its fundamental emptiness, turning the light to bear on the figure behind the shadow curtain. She thus undoes race in all its forms, from the bottom to the top. At the same time, Zara's failure to gain entry to France might also be read as evidence of the enduring strength of whiteness, which even after it is exposed, and even when it is known and denounced by those marked as "*hommes de couleur*," continues to deny its own existence and its hand in structuring society. After all, for society to function as verdict, it must reproduce stigma continually on both the external and internal level, yet stigma is most easily maintained when its effects can be legitimized or hidden. In the case of the racial verdict, this is contingent on the continual reproduction of race through the marking of non-white Others, a marking that can only take place if the truth of whiteness remains hidden. Zara must therefore be deported in the end, lest she destabilize the nation and society with her ethnographer's gaze, just as the mixed race child in *Sale nègre* must be raised in ignorance of her blackness, for the sake of continuing the fiction of racial purity.

Twenty years after the publication of these novels, the visibility of whiteness and race in French society has shifted. Their lessons about whiteness and its structuring of society still stand however. As bell hooks writes, "In contemporary society, white and black people alike believe that racism no longer exists. This erasure, however mythic, diffuses the representation of whiteness as terror in the black imagination. It allows for assimilation and forgetfulness."[dclxiv] And yet, as the prior chapters showed, racism does still exist and has very real psychological and legal impacts.

The erasure of race in France thus acts to cement the power of the racial verdict. If race cannot be named, and if the existence of racial hierarchies is effaced, then those who suffer racialization and marginalization are denied the power to name what is wrong. For this reason whiteness in particular must remain hidden, for in this way it conserves the power to name and to marginalize non-white Others while denying its own status as a racial category.

To then *name* whiteness and reveal it as both a "race" and as a fiction is to engage in a radical act that wholly deconstructs the racial verdict. In writing two different narratives of whiteness and its multifaceted-and often harmful–imprint upon society and individuals, Bedel and Bessora thus push back against forgetting and erasure. More than this, they reveal society's verdict as being not simply wrong, but empty and hollow. Though this revelation may not free the stigmatized individual, as Bedel's text reminds us, it nonetheless opens a new avenue for dialogue by naming the oppressor and not just the oppressed. These texts therefore differ from those studied in chapters two and three, wherein the authorial strategies focused foremost on revealing verdict's harm and its obsession with categorization, as a means of then criticizing society and the state. Yet, this tactic keeps the focus turned towards the stigmatized. Bedel and Bessora instead reverse that gaze to reflect the racial verdict back onto its source, so that whiteness must at last be exposed.

[dx] "Colours of light," https://www.sciencelearn.org.nz/resources/47-colours-of-light

[dxi] Ibid.

[dxii] Moynihan, *Passing into the Present*, 12.

[dxiii] Cervulle, "Politique de l'image," 2-3.

[dxiv] Frankenburg, Introduction to *Displacing Whiteness*, 6.

[dxv] Ibid.

[dxvi] Cretton, "Performing whiteness," 843.

[dxvii] Frankenburg, Introduction to *Displacing Whiteness*, 9.

[dxviii] Moynihan, *Passing into the Present*, 12.

[dxix] Frankenburg, Introduction to *Displacing Whiteness*, 6.

[dxx] Hughey, "The sociology of whiteness," 217.

[dxxi] Ibid.

[dxxii] Cervulle, "Politique de l'image," 4; Cretton, "Performing whiteness," 848, 850.

[dxxiii] Cretton, "Performing whiteness," 848.

[dxxiv] Ibid.

[dxxv] Ahmed, "A phenomenology of whiteness," 154.

[dxxvi] "Cyril Bedel," *Bibliothèque nationale de France*; http://www.edunao.com/

[dxxvii] Moynihan, *Passing into the Present*, 8.

[dxxviii] Ginsberg, Introduction to *Passing and the Fictions of Identity*, 2-3.

[dxxix] Moynihan, *Passing into the Present*, 8.

[dxxx] Ginsberg, Introduction to *Passing and the Fictions of Identity*, 2-3.

[dxxxi] Bedel, *Sale nègre*, 9.

[dxxxii] TuSmith, "The 'Inscrutable Albino'," 89.

[dxxxiii] Baker, "Chromatic Ambivalence," 143.

[dxxxiv] Bedel, *Sale nègre*, 9.

[dxxxv] Ibid.

[dxxxvi] Ibid., 9-11.

[dxxxvii] Ibid., 10.

[dxxxviii] Ibid., 11.

[dxxxix] Ibid.

[dxl] Ibid.

[dxli] Ibid., 12.

[dxlii] Ibid., 14-17.

[dxliii] Ibid., 14.

dxliv Ibid., 19.

dxlv Ibid.

dxlvi Ibid., 16-17.

dxlvii Ibid., 31.

dxlviii Baker, "Chromatic Ambivalence," 151.

dxlix Ahmed, "A phenomenology of whiteness," 156.

dl Kawash, "*The Autobiography*," 64.

dli Bedel, *Sale nègre*, 59.

dlii Twine, "Brown-Skinned White Girls, 218.

dliii Ibid., 219-221.

dliv Ibid., 223.

dlv Ibid., 224.

dlvi Ibid., 227.

dlvii Ibid., 230.

dlviii Bedel, *Sale nègre*, 20.

dlix Ibid., 25.

dlx Ibid., 26-27.

dlxi Ibid., 37-38.

dlxii Ibid., 38.

dlxiii Ibid.

dlxiv Ibid.

dlxv Ibid., 57.

dlxvi Ibid., 40.

dlxvii Frankenburg, Introduction to *Displacing Whiteness,* 11-12.

dlxviii Baker, "Chromatic Ambivalence," 151.

dlxix Ibid., 151-52.

dlxx Bedel, *Sale nègre*, 51.

dlxxi Ginsberg, Introduction to *Passing and the Fictions of Identity*, 4.

dlxxii Bedel, *Sale nègre*, 56.

dlxxiii Ibid., 57.

dlxxiv Baker, "Chromatic Ambivalence," 149.

dlxxv Bedel, *Sale nègre*, 61.

dlxxvi Ibid., 62.

dlxxvii Ibid., 73.

dlxxviii Ibid., 76.

[dlxxix] Ibid., 79.

[dlxxx] Ibid., 83.

[dlxxxi] Ibid., 84.

[dlxxxii] Cutter, "Sliding Significations," 75.

[dlxxxiii] Bedel, *Sale nègre*, 94-96.

[dlxxxiv] Ibid., 96.

[dlxxxv] Ibid.

[dlxxxvi] Ibid., 100.

[dlxxxvii] Ibid., 101.

[dlxxxviii] Ibid.

[dlxxxix] Baker, "Chromatic Ambivalence," 148.

[dxc] Bedel, *Sale nègre*, 103-04.

[dxci] Ibid., 107, 109.

[dxcii] Ibid., 129.

[dxciii] Ibid., 144.

[dxciv] Ibid., 119-20.

[dxcv] Ibid., 139.

[dxcvi] Javaid, "Male rape, masculinities," 200.

[dxcvii] Bedel, *Sale nègre*, 138.

[dxcviii] Ibid.

[dxcix] Kawash, *The Autobiography*," 63.

[dc] Ibid.

[dci] De Meyer, "L'afropolitanisme," 155; King, "Bessora," 61, Moudileno, "Returning Remains," 203.

[dcii] Bouchard, "Female Sexuality," 139; King, "Bessora," 60.

[dciii] Cazenave and Célérier, *Contemporary Francophone*, 118; De Meyer, L'afropolitanisme," 153; King, "Bessora," 60.

[dciv] King, "Bessora," 61.

[dcv] Huggan, *The Post-Colonial Exotic*, 155; Moynihan, *Passing into the Present*, 26, 32.

[dcvi] Huggan, *The Post-Colonial Exotic*, 155; Moynihan, *Passing into the Present*, 26.

[dcvii] Moynihan, *Passing into the Present*, 36.

[dcviii] Ireland, "Bessora's Literary Ludics," 7.

[dcix] Ibid.

[dcx] Bouchard, "Female Sexuality"; Cazenave and Célérier, *Contemporary Francophone African Writers*; Ireland, "Bessora's Literary Ludics," "Deviant Bodies"; Jensen, *Writing Race*; King, "Bessora," Moji,"Un/Known bodies"; Moudileno, "Returning Remains"; Nimis, *Corps sans titre;* Westmoreland, "Poetics of Diaspora," "Surrealism in Diaspora"; Yoshioka-Maxwell, *The Voyager in Question*.

dcxi Cazenave and Célérier, *Contemporary Francophone African Writers*; Ireland, "Bessora's Literary Ludics," "Deviant Bodies;" Jensen, *Writing Race;* Moji, "Un/Known bodies"; Moudileno, "Returning Remains"; Nimis, *Corps sans titre*.

dcxii Ireland, "Deviant Bodies," 47; Nimis, *Corps sans titre*, 49, 53, 56.

dcxiii Bessora, *53 cm*, 7-8.

dcxiv Moudileno, "Returning Remains," 205; Westmoreland, "Poetics of Diaspora," 152, "Surrealism in Diaspora," 200.

dcxv Bessora, *53 cm*, 7-8; 156-57.

dcxvi Ibid., 8.

dcxvii Ibid., 9.

dcxviii Ibid.

dcxix Ibid., 10.

dcxx Ibid., 31.

dcxxi Haritaworn, Hybrid Border-Crosser?," 121.

dcxxii Ibid.

dcxxiii Jensen, *Writing Race*, 154.

dcxxiv Ireland, "Bessora's Literary Ludics," 11.

dcxxv Bessora, *53 cm*, 89.

dcxxvi Ibid., 90.

dcxxvii Ibid., 15-16.

dcxxviii Nimis, *Corps sans titre*, 53.

dcxxix Bessora, *53 cm*, 104, 147-48.

dcxxx Ireland, "Bessora's Literary Ludics," 10; Moudileno, Moudileno, "Returning Remains," 204.

dcxxxi Bessora, *53 cm*, 31, 28.

dcxxxii Ibid., 27.

dcxxxiii Ibid., 44-45.

dcxxxiv Ibid., 101-03.

dcxxxv Ibid., 103.

dcxxxvi Ibid., 154-55.

dcxxxvii Ibid., 156.

dcxxxviii Ibid.

dcxxxix Ibid., 157.

dcxl Ibid., 21-22.

dcxli Ibid., 22.

dcxlii Ibid., 105, 155.

dcxliii Ibid., 38.

[dcxliv] Ibid., 46.

[dcxlv] Ibid., 95-97.

[dcxlvi] Ibid., 96.

[dcxlvii] Ibid., 147.

[dcxlviii] Ibid.

[dcxlix] Ibid., 148.

[dcl] Ibid.

[dcli] Ibid., 23.

[dclii] Ibid., 24.

[dcliii] Ibid., 104.

[dcliv] Ibid.

[dclv] Ibid., 109.

[dclvi] Moji, "Un/Known bodies," 192.

[dclvii] Bessora, *53 cm*, 163.

[dclviii] Ibid.

[dclix] Ibid., 164.

[dclx] Ibid.

[dclxi] Ibid.

[dclxii] Ibid., 184-85.

[dclxiii] Moudileno, "Returning Remains," 206.

[dclxiv] hooks, "Representing Whiteness," 176.

CONCLUSION

Just as memories of the colonial past resurfaced in the early 2000s with the "vague de mémoire," leading to a renewed discussion of the colonial era and its end, most notably via the events of the Algerian war, so too is the French ideal of colorblindness, where to talk about race is to risk supporting racism, increasingly fractured. The 1980s saw the rise of the *beur* movement and SOS racisme, while the 2000s gave birth to CRAN and a black identity movement that created a counterpoint to prior anti-racist movements.[dclxv] Where earlier movements argued that as a social creation race did not truly exist, the newer movements have led to a paradigm shift, where discussing the effects of racialization–and its power to trap people into racial categories regardless of personal identification–now means that the categories of *Noir* and *Arabe* can be more openly named. Moreover, whiteness itself–with its links to French identity–has come under scrutiny in recent years, in part thanks to the work of Éric Fassin but also due to demographic shifts. As he argues, whiteness is ultimately inseparable from racialization: not only is it the norm against which minority ethnicities are marked as different, but it is also a category in and of itself.[dclxvi] Without racialization and racial hierarchies, whiteness cannot exist. Thus, as conflicts over immigration and demographic change increase in fervor, France has also seen a growing tendency for working class "whites" in France to identify themselves in opposition to working class "blacks" and "Arabs," in an ostensible effort to reassert power in the face of economic uncertainty.[dclxvii] For these individuals, though it may go unspoken, Frenchness is indelibly linked to a white European identity.

In response to this tension surrounding the naming of the continued existence of race and its society-wide effects, this dissertation has shown how a society-wide racial hierarchy not only defined French colonial rule and the popular imagination, but also continues to mark non-white individuals in the contemporary era as inferior. Like the class and sexuality-based stigmas discussed by Eribon, this is a societal verdict that relies both on external verdicts in the form of racialization and structural discrimination, but also on the internalization of stigma by racialized subjects. As such it is not an easy verdict to overcome; rather as Pineau, Bedel and Biyaoula's

narrative show, knowledge of verdict's impact does not undo its power. I have argued furthermore that representations of racialization and racism in popular culture, and more specifically in the novel, can refute this racial verdict by exposing its existence and its violence, by countering its stigma with positive representations, and by deconstructing the racial categories that give it existence. The novel in particular has a particular power to combat verdict, due to its cultural weight–which lends it legitimacy–and its ability to reveal the full impact of stigma through the internal narratives of protagonists. Authors who write against the racial verdict therefore not only show how its power is built on a façade, but also issue a counter-verdict that indicts society for its participation in racialization.

Chapter one traced the invention of race and racial hierarchies as we understand them today, from the first usage of the word "race" to its subsequent development into a system of social classification. Though there are many racial categories, in this chapter I focused on the categories of "*noir*" and "*arabo-musulman*", in large part due to immigration trends and their popularity in discourse. Today, in spite of the enduring taboo of discussing race, the terms *Noir* and *Arabe* are frequently used in French discourse to mark individuals according to their perceived phenotypes, and to mark them as different from the "white" French norm. Though phenotype is the most common means by which people are racialized, certain cultural markers like Islamic faith, street fashion, and the use of slang are also used to racialize individuals. In this way race takes on multiple forms that can be divorced from skin color and are often tied to class. Yet, race is always still predicated first and foremost on phenotype. The final sections of the chapter examined the contemporary state of race relations and racialization in France. I first considered how the state acts to stigmatize its own non-white citizens through uneven policing practices that make heavy use of racial profiling. Second I argued that by celebrating diversity and critiquing marginalization, rap artists and black-focused groups like CRAN resist this long history of race-based stigmatization. Not only do they expose the many tendrils of race and critique their ill effects, they also refuse a simplistic black/white or white/Arab binary that relies on

stereotypes, instead revealing its intersections with structures of power, geography, and class. As my following chapters show, this resistance can also take the form of literature.

Chapter two examined the internalization of blackness as stigma in *L'Impasse* and *L'Exil selon Julia*. While chapter one largely focuses on how racialization operates at a society-wide level, this chapter instead focused on the individual impact of verdict. It argued that in revealing the power of racist words and anti-black stigma to wound the psyche, Biyaoula and Pineau humanize blackness, thereby refuting the socially constructed binary of whiteness and blackness, wherein blackness is tied to savagery and inhumanity. Moreover, these authors also reveal how deeply racialization and anti-black stigma is imbedded in the fabric of society, not just in France but also in the former colonies of Congo and Guadeloupe. Biyaoula's narrator suffers a mental breakdown, unable to resist the weight of racialization and stigmatization; his negative identity is forcibly imposed from the outside, both by whites and his countrymen. As I argued, this constitutes a colonization of his mind, and serves as a powerful commentary on both the violence and insidious nature of racialization. Though she also makes the pain of racism clear, I argued that Pineau in turn takes a different tactic: she shows that one can be French and a person of color, and offers a positive counterpoint to the negative view of blackness through her memoire to Man Ya, her unabashedly Creole grandmother, whose lessons on Creole culture serve as a bulwark against racial stigma.

Like chapter two, chapter three studied how the individual is impacted by the negative racialization of an entire group, but through the lens of the "arabness." This chapter accordingly examined the figure of the "arabo-musulman" in *Le chinois vert d'Afrique* and *"Musulman" Roman*, and the ways in which it is tied to fears of Islamist terrorism and a belief that Muslims cannot be fully French citizens. Unlike blackness, the category of arabness is deeply tied to terrorism in the public imaginary, and thus those marked under its sign are not only racialized as inferior Others, but also as potential threats to French society and the state. Though the "black man" is also marked as a potential sexual predator, and though the stigmas surrounding blackness also entail the refusal of full belonging to the French state, Islamist terrorism has

unique ties to the specter of the *Arabo-musulman*. This chapter consequently argued that the reaction to arabness is also marked by legal verdicts: the stripping of judicial protections and the unequal application of the rule of law on the basis of Muslim belief or suspected ties to Islamic terrorism. Whereas Pineau and Biyaoula show that verdict can be refuted through an emphasis on the violence of stigma and through a rehabilitation of the racialized subject's identity, Sebbar and Rahmani reveal "Frenchness" as both deeply multicultural and as undesirable in the face of constant discrimination. In this way they undo the category of the *arabo-musulman* more than they seek to rehabilitate it.

Similarly, chapter four showed how whiteness–the oft invisible racial category–can be challenged and deconstructed through a reading of *Sale nègre* and *53 cm*. Rather than interpret these texts solely as commentaries on blackness or immigration, I instead argued that they also expose whiteness as a racial category in and of itself, whose power is maintained only through the constant production of non-white Others. As such, by marking it with a racializing gaze and revealing it as colored, these authors deny its privileged position, even as they expose its grasp on power. Additionally, in each novel the protagonist's physical claim to whiteness troubles its presumed purity. Bedel's black albino narrator moves unquestioned into the world of wealthy whites and has a child with a white woman, "sullying" a line previously believed to be "pure." Bedel thus reveals the supreme fragility of whiteness: if a "black" man can pass as white–or even become white–due to the color of his skin and ability to culturally adapt, then the entire system of racial classification, based as it is on phenotype and "culture"–is revealed as empty and arbitrary. In turn, Bessora's mixed-race narrator defies categorization in a racially obsessed society: her skin is blended, whereas races should never mix. Just as she straddles the boundaries of society, Zara ironically reverses the racializing gaze, marking French people with neocolonial categories. Furthemore, Bessora openly critiques whiteness, thereby highlighting the degree to which the French obsession with categorization is tied to the racialization of non-white Others. As a result, Bessora's careful deconstruction of these racial categories and their ties to Frenchness undoes whiteness itself, forcing an examination of its hollowness. Rather than a positive pole or norm, it

is instead an arbitrary construction. As I argued, this is the most radical counter verdict of the three: in revealing the hollowness of whiteness itself, Bessora and Bedel mark the racial verdicts through which whiteness maintains its power as wholly illegitimate.

Naming race and racial categories forces society to reckon with its power structures. Though the audience of the novels studied in this dissertation may be limited compared to that of a film, I have argued that the written word, particularly in the form of the novel, has a particular ability to convey the trauma of experiencing racial stigma and to connect with a reader. Nonetheless, further research into the representation of racialization in French and Francophone cinema, with particular attention to the reception of the films, could prove to be a fruitful avenue of inquiry. In particular, the reception of a film that addresses racial tensions might be another indicator–alongside sociological studies–of how the social understanding of racialization in France is shifting.

This dissertation also only considered three racial axes, and in so doing ignored the racialization of peoples from former colonies in Asia or the Pacific, to say nothing of immigrants from Latin America or other regions that were not colonized by France. Moreover, my chapter on whiteness did not examine texts that portray racial anxiety from the inside the perspective of whiteness, but rather tackled it from the outside in. One might ask, how does whiteness perceive itself? There is indeed a tendency to accuse anti-racist discourse of being racist, an anti-racist (anti-white) racism, as it were, akin to claims of "reverse racism" in the United States. Are there contemporary fictional narratives with white protagonists in which minority groups are stigmatized and racialized? I would argue that Houellebecq's *Soumission* falls under this category, but further research is needed to determine whether there are other novels that might also be studied from this angle. Furthermore, how does the growing awareness of whiteness as a racial category impact perceptions of minority groups?

Finally, in my consideration of race and racialization, I only briefly touched on questions of gender and sexuality. As I have shown, men and women are racialized differently in the categories of blackness and arabness, with the male seen as a violent aggressor and the female

as submissive and yet sensual. In turn the Asian male is seen as submissive and emasculated. Thus racial categories intersect with gender roles and the power structures of patriarchal societies. As Biyaoula shows, the interplay of racial stigma and ideals of sexuality and masculinity can be particularly toxic. Further research could therefore look to the growing vocalization of a white working class heterosexual male identity in France, and the counter discourse that positions Muslim women as in need of saving from their violent male relatives and culture.

As the narratives of Biyaoula, Pineau, Sebbar, Rahmani, Bedel, and Bessora make clear, representation and naming are key to issuing and sustaining societal verdicts. So too is a systemic–even if ignorant–support of a verdict. As the notion of what it means to be French evolves, France's social verdicts will follow and shift. Yet, so long as whiteness goes unremarked and the power of racialization denied, the racial verdict will endure. Though these texts use a Francocentric lens, leaning heavily on the backdrop of French colonial history and race-making, their themes are universal. In this way, their counter-verdicts fulfill a much-needed role: they expose and name one of the axes of power and the ways in which it relies on stigmatization. In so doing, they splinter the binaries and fracture the categories, refracting the colors into a unified spectrum. Verdict's power is denied.

[dclxv] Hajjat and Mohammed, *Islamophobie*, 109; Fassin, "'Race', sexualities and the French public intellectual," 1475.

[dclxvi] Fassin, "(Sexual) whiteness," 240.

[dclxvii] Ibid.

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