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**Representations of cultural identities in Québécois literature from 1980:
the rise of migrant voices.**

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ABSTRACT

Migrant literature in Québec has always existed. However, in the late 1970s and the early 1980s, a change occurred in the attitude of migrant authors. Instead of blending into Québécois society and literature by adopting similar lifestyles and topics, they started retaining their cultural differences, and used their personal experience of displacement as material for their fictional literary work. During the 1990s particularly, the concept of transculture – based on topics associated with migration such as dislocation and hybridity – developed and began to challenge - within literary work at least - the existing cultural and geographical borders.

In this thesis, we will explore the work of four selected groups of migrant authors – namely French, Middle Eastern, Haitian and Jewish authors - and highlight the topics specific to each group. Coming from very different backgrounds, their reasons for migrating and their expectations about Québec vary greatly. The French show characters who feel out of place in France because they are unable to accept the changes within their own society. They idealise Québec and see it mainly as a bastion of traditional French values, which is bound to lead them to disillusion. Middle Eastern authors, mainly female, present characters originally migrating to Québec in hope of a better material life, but who also found an unexpected liberation. In Middle Eastern novels, women are the true beneficiaries of migration because they discover independence through feminist theories and the support of laws that guarantee personal freedom. As for Haitian writers, they focus mainly on the topic of memory and attempt to hold on to the past through literary creation. Their work also questions the process of becoming a migrant and dealing with Otherness in an adoptive culture. Contrary to Haitians, Jewish writers express a fragmented sense of identity due to gaps in their personal and collective memories, an overlap between their national and Jewish identities, and their migration to a new country.

Despite their different origins, the four groups of authors have topics in common. Some novels depict the different steps to becoming a migrant and how individuals become disconnected from their cultures and lands of origin. Another part of migrant authors' work shows the identity crisis that ensues from living in a foreign country and features some of the mechanisms that migrants adopt in order to cope with the new elements of their adoptive country and to retain their sense of cultural identity. Learning to compromise, they recreate a 'home' in their adoptive country, but they also reinvent the borders between cultures and countries by combining elements from both worlds. Migrant authors show that dislocation renders individuals less dependent on national identity, and allows them a greater freedom and an increased role in the concept and composition of cultural identities.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Agnant, Marie-Célie:	
<i>Alexis d'Haïti.</i>	<i>AH</i>
<i>Alexis, le fils de Raphaël.</i>	<i>AFR</i>
<i>Le Livre d'Emma.</i>	<i>LE</i>
Blondeau, Dominique:	
<i>Les Feux de l'exil</i>	<i>LFDE</i>
Bossus, Francis:	
<i>La Tentation du destin.</i>	<i>TD</i>
Étienne, Gérard:	
<i>La Romance en do mineur de Maître Clo.</i>	<i>LRDMC</i>
Ghalem, Nadia:	
<i>Les Jardins de cristal.</i>	<i>JDC</i>
<i>La Rose des sables.</i>	<i>RDS</i>
Kattan, Naïm:	
<i>Farida.</i>	<i>Fda</i>
<i>La Fiancée promise.</i>	<i>FP</i>
<i>La Reprise.</i>	<i>LaR</i>
<i>Le Rivage.</i>	<i>LeR</i>
<i>Le Sable de l'île.</i>	<i>LSI</i>
<i>Le Silence des Adieux.</i>	<i>LSA</i>
Laferrière, Dany:	
<i>La Chair du maître.</i>	<i>LCDM</i>
<i>Le Charme des après-midi sans fin.</i>	<i>CAMSF</i>
<i>Eroshima.</i>	<i>Ea</i>
<i>Pays sans Chapeau.</i>	<i>PSC</i>
<i>Comment faire l'amour avec un nègre sans se fatiguer.</i>	<i>CFA</i>
<i>Le Cri des oiseaux fous.</i>	<i>COF</i>
<i>L'Odeur du café.</i>	<i>ODC</i>
Latif-Ghattas, Mona:	
<i>Le Double Conte de l'exil.</i>	<i>DCDE</i>
<i>Les Lunes de miel.</i>	<i>LDM</i>
Marois, André:	
<i>Accidents de Parcours</i>	<i>AP</i>
Navarre, Yves:	
<i>La Terrasse des audiences au moment de l'adieu.</i>	<i>TAMA</i>
<i>Ce sont amis que vent emporte.</i>	<i>CSA</i>
<i>La Dame au fond de la cour.</i>	<i>DAF</i>

Ollivier, Émile:	
<i>La Discorde aux cent voix.</i>	<i>DACV</i>
<i>Les Urnes Scellées.</i>	<i>US</i>
<i>Mère Solitude.</i>	<i>MS</i>
<i>Mille Eaux.</i>	<i>ME</i>
Péan, Stanley:	
<i>L'Emprise de la nuit.</i>	<i>EDN</i>
<i>La Mémoire ensanglantée.</i>	<i>ME_{ns}</i>
<i>Treize pas vers l'inconnu.</i>	<i>TPVI</i>
<i>L'Appel des loups.</i>	<i>ADL</i>
<i>Quand la bête est humaine.</i>	<i>QBH</i>
<i>Le Temps s'enfuit.</i>	<i>LTE</i>
<i>Zombi blues.</i>	<i>ZB</i>
Petrowsky, Nathalie:	
<i>Il restera toujours le Nebraska.</i>	<i>IRTLN</i>
<i>Maman last call.</i>	<i>MLC</i>
Robin, Régine:	
<i>La Québécoite.</i>	<i>LQ</i>
<i>L'Immense fatigue des pierres – Biofictions.</i>	<i>IFDP</i>
Sénéchal, Xavière:	
<i>Le Pays d'ailleurs.</i>	<i>LPA</i>

Introduction

Migrant writing in Québec is far from being a new phenomenon, as Québec - and more generally Canada – is a country of immigration. The most famous example of it is probably Louis Hémon's *Maria Chapdelaine*, published in 1914, and contributing to the presentation of Québec as a bastion of Francophone culture and values. The migrant contribution to national literature, however, has changed throughout the years. Clément Moisan and Renate Hildebrand, who have retraced the history of migrant writing since 1937 in *Ces Étrangers du dedans*,¹ show that its goals and aims have varied in conjunction with migratory flows. Up until the late 1950s, migrants were predominantly of European extraction. Their views about culture and society were fairly similar to those of the Québécois, and therefore, the literature produced by those migrant authors was in harmony with that of francophone local authors. They praise the hard-working men, fighting a somewhat hostile nature, and the virtues of women who bring up children in the ancestral traditions and catholic faith of the early French settlers. But, from the 1960s, migrants from other parts of the world started to arrive in larger number in Québec. Coming from Asia, Africa, the Middle East or even the Caribbean, this new wave of migrants did not share the same Eurocentric cultural background, and often was (or saw itself as) the victim of colonialism. If, in most cases, they were themselves Francophones, they had not migrated to Québec with a view to perpetuate francophone values, but rather to break free from oppressive regimes and make a better material life for themselves. As Régine Robin points out in her postface to a re-issue of *La Québécoise* (1983),² migrants move to Canada, not Québec specifically, and, despite realising that Québec is different from other Canadian provinces, they still want to benefit from the opportunities offered by a rapidly developing country and achieve their 'American dream'. Whereas previous migrants had not stood out, this new generation of migrants began to define its difference from the dominant Québécois culture.

The first 'dissonant' migrant voices were published in the 1970s, with the publication of works by authors such as of Émile Ollivier or Gérard Étienne. Their positions were eclipsed mainly by the proponents of the Québécois movement for independence (some of whom had, in the 1960s, resorted to violence resulting in the crisis of October 1970), and by the political claims of the Québécois people to have more power

¹ Clément Moisan et Renate Hildebrand. *Ces Étrangers du dedans – Une histoire de l'écriture migrante au Québec (1937-1997)*. Québec: Éditions Nota Bene. 2001.

² Régine Robin. *La Québécoise*. Montréal: Éditions Typo. 1993. p.207-224

over their Province regarding matters such as, for example, language and education. These claims resulted, among other things, in the *Loi 101* in 1977, by which French became the official language of Québec, then later, in the 1980 referendum, giving the people the opportunity to vote for independence. In the troubled climate of the 1970s, the focus was on the definition of francophone Québécois identity and its opposition to anglophone Canadian domination. There was little room for migrant claims. In the aftermath of the referendum, in which 59.56% of Québécois inhabitants voted 'no' to independence, Québec had to rethink its political and cultural direction, its attitude towards Anglophones and Allophones in the Province, as well as its position within the Canadian federation. It was in this climate of defeat and cultural reinvention that migrant voices truly emerged. It is Régine Robin's *La Québécoise*, published in 1983, which best represents the emergence of migrant voices.³ Going against the tradition of describing the struggle of immigrants leaving their country of origin and settling in their country of adoption, Robin's novel instead explores the effect of migration on one's identity, the gaps in knowledge, the triviality of details that make one feel 'rooted', and the realisation of one's own otherness. These themes describe the feelings of immigrants, but they also appeal to people living in the fast-changing world of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

In this thesis, we have selected three groups of authors among the largest groups of migrants (to judge by their country of origin and their language of expression) who have published more than one novel or collection of short stories in Québec after 1980, the year of the referendum. All selected migrant authors are francophone and have produced their work in French, as we feel that translation could be seen as an interpretation, an adaptation or even a reflection of the author's original work. In order to identify migrant authors, we have used principally the work of Denise Helly and Anne Vassal, *Romanciers immigrés: biographies et œuvres publiées au Québec entre 1970 et 1990*,⁴ and an article by Lucie Lequin and Maïr Verthuy entitled 'Répertoire de l'écriture des femmes migrantes au

³ Clément Moisan and Renate Hildebrand stress the difference between the terms 'immigrant' and 'migrant'. For them, the term 'immigrant' refers to narratives of geographical displacement, and people dealing with the pain and difficulties associated with their immigration. The term 'migrant' refers to a underlying narrative theory of dislocation (of cultures and borders, for example). Whereas immigrant writing is anchored into the geographical binary opposition of here/there, migrant writing is characterised by its lack of material territoriality: authors and their characters live in an *entre-deux* or intermediacy, an imaginary country, which constantly evolves and combines several cultural codes. Moisan and Hildebrand point out that the preference for the term 'migrant' rather than 'immigrant' coincides with the evolution of migrant literature itself and the realisation that its topics challenge the concepts of culture and origin as they have been traditionally envisaged. We will show that these tendencies are found throughout the selected novels.

⁴ Denise Helly et Anne Vassal. *Romanciers immigrés: biographies et œuvres publiées au Québec entre 1970 et 1990*. Montréal: Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture. 1993.

Québec 1960-1991'.⁵ In both studies, the criterion for authors to be included was for authors to have lived and published at least one piece of work in Québec. To complete our list for the 1990s, we have contacted publishers in order to obtain the names, biographies and bibliographies of authors whose work was only published after 1990 and was therefore not included in the previous studies. Our list is not exhaustive, but includes well-known authors who have published work for several years in Québec, and have been integrated in its national literature.

The first group we selected was that of French authors. As one of the founding peoples of Québec, it is interesting to study how the input of the new generation of French migrants fits in with Québécois society and literature. The second group is Haitian writers, whose migration to Québec started in the late 1950s in conjunction with the beginning of the Duvalier dictatorship and has been constant since.⁶ With reference to this group, we want to examine issues such as race, politics and economic under-development and their influence on authors' views about their country of adoption. The third group chosen here is writers from the Middle East (Egypt, North Africa and Iraq). These were selected because they all come from countries with similar totalitarian regimes at their time of migration. They share the experience of living in a minority (be it on religious, ethnic or gender-related grounds) within their own country prior moving to Québec; and all have chosen to write in French, which is not their native tongue.⁷ It is important to mention that nationality was not the only criterion determining inclusion within a given group. Dominique Blondeau, for example, was born in France but was raised from the age of fifteen in Morocco, where she worked before emigrating to Québec. Her experience and the theme that she develops in her work led us to include her in the group of Middle Eastern writers rather than the French one. We also felt that a fourth group should be created to reflect the Jewish identity, expressed by authors of various nationalities.

The arrival of migrants always raises questions for the host country such as: what place should be allocated to migrants in the society of adoption? Should they be integrated

⁵ Lucie Lequin et Maïr Verthuy. Répertoire de l'écriture des femmes migrantes au Québec 1960-1991, *Documentation sur la recherche féministe*. 21, N°. 3-4 (1992), p.86-94.

⁶ François Duvalier came to power in 1957. His son, Jean-Claude, succeeded him in 1971. Their dictatorships were particularly violent, sustained by a security force, the Macoutes, who carried out arrests, tortures, assassinations, etc. and terrorised the population. Duvalier *fil*s was overthrown and escaped into exile in 1986. For more information on the Duvalier regime, there are various websites that collect evidence and testimonies of witnesses and victims. See for example: <http://haitiechange.ifrance.com>; <http://www.haiti-progres.com>.

⁷ The website <http://www.ercomer.org/metropolis/proceedings/Montreal.html> provides an extensive overview of the distribution of migrants in Québec, according to nationality, settlement and time of migration.

or, on the contrary, able to retain their difference? How is their presence going to affect the society of adoption? For migrants, similar questions arise. What will be their place in the society of adoption? Will they be able to retain their cultural identity and remain in touch with their culture of origin? Will they be allowed to take a full part in the future of the country to which they are emigrating? If the questions raised are fairly similar, the answers and expectations are very different. From the 1970s onwards, Québec's policy is to encourage the immigration of francophone migrants (and migrants who speak one of the Romance languages) to boost the number of French-speakers in Québec. Many of these migrants come from countries that were previously under colonial occupation and have fought it. Their attitude towards adopting and integrating another cultural model is therefore entirely different from the previous generations of migrants who readily consented to shed their differences. This new wave of migrants wishes to retain their cultural identities, while benefiting from the economic advantages that Québec offers. In migrant literature, as we will see, this translates into the introduction of new linguistic elements, new references – be they literary, religious or just trivial –, but also new themes such as exile, uprooting, and the experience of foreignness. There are also migrant critical publications such as *Vice Versa* or *La Parole métèque*, which analyse the new phenomenon of the migrant voice, i.e. one that claims its difference from the mainstream culture. Between the referendums, published critical work on migrant literature tended to confine it to the margin of Québécois society. One thinks, for example, of François Paré's *Les Littératures de l'exiguïté* or Simon Harel's *L'Étranger dans tous ses états – Enjeux culturels et littéraires*.⁸ It seemed that migrant work was that of a minority, localised and contained. The critics of those years focus on the intercultural aspect of migrant work and what the Québécois may learn from it. During that period, the theory of 'interculturalism' was predominant. Within our chosen corpus, these tendencies are reflected by the importance given to autobiographically-inspired novels, or novels that focus on the process of adaptation to the new lifestyle in the country of adoption and from which Québécois people are entirely absent.

After 1995, there is a new wave in critical publications about migrant writing in Québec. It seems that difference is accepted when it comes to migrant writing, but the focus changes slightly to how difference and the presence of foreignness affects the

⁸ François Paré. *Les Littératures de l'exiguïté*. Québec: Les Éditions du Nordir, collection Essai. 1992. Simon Harel (ed.). *L'Étranger dans tous ses états – Enjeux culturels et littéraires*. Montréal: XYZ Éditeur. 1992.

cultural identity of Québec. The concept of interculturalism turns into that of hybridity and transculture. Studies try to track the effects of cultural mobility. Migrants are seen as free agents that mingle codes and are not tied down to one space, time or interpretation. They have a challenging effect on established cultural identities and behaviour that is seen as factor of change and regeneration in Québécois society. Here one thinks of Simon Langlois's *Identité et cultures nationales – L'Amérique française en mutation*, or Michel Venne's *Penser la nation québécoise*.⁹ But there is also an underlying worry regarding possible 'contamination' or infiltration of national Québécois identity by the néo-Québécois, as the concept of hybridity suggests that the idea of otherness has infiltrated all areas of society. There is a need to trace otherness and migrant influence (as in Geneviève Mathieu's *Qui est Québécois?*) or to justify it as being a historical factor, as in Clément Moisan and Renate Hildebrand's *Ces Étrangers du dedans – Une histoire de l'écriture migrante au Québec (1937-1997)*.¹⁰ In our chosen groups of authors, we see a parallel evolution in the topics developed in the novels. Authors are bolder in their challenge of Québécois culture, they expand their imaginary territories beyond their own country of origin or their migrant neighbourhood: they take on the whole city of Montréal and beyond. Migrant authors, such as Émile Ollivier or Naïm Kattan, even represent the face of national Québécois literature in literary events (in the Salon du Livre, for example), on television programmes and in magazines.¹¹

In the first four chapters of our study, we propose to look at the different ways that migrant authors have chosen to express their difference, and at the representations of their cultural group in their work. Each chapter will be devoted to one group with a view to analysing the cultural patterns and development of themess, unique to each group. In a further chapter, we will highlight the causes of their emigration and analyse their impact on the capacity of migrants to cope with the process of migration. We will show how migrant work documents the process of acculturation, provides evidence of its consequences for individuals, and proposes coping mechanisms for one to retain one's cultural identity whilst coping with one's present life. We will also analyse how migrant writing challenges its culture of adoption and what are its contentious issues. Finally, we will demonstrate that migrant writing in Québec proposes a new form and concept of cultural identity that not

⁹ Simon Langlois (ed.). *Identité et cultures nationales – L'Amérique française en mutation*. Sainte-Foy: Presses de l'Université de Laval. 1995.

Michel Venne (ed.). *Penser la nation québécoise....* Montréal: Éditions Québec Amérique. 2000.

¹⁰ Geneviève Mathieu. *Qui est Québécois?* Montréal: VLB Éditeur. 2001.

¹¹ *Lettres québécoises*, for example, regularly features néo-québécois authors in its issues.

only challenge the traditional views of national identity, but also redefine the concept of self-identity.

Chapter 1: Writers of French origin: Migration as an escape to the present.

Introduction

In this chapter, we will look at the first group of migrant authors, originally from France. Some of them were well-known writers there before they decided to emigrate; others published all their work in Québec. These authors have also moved at different stages of their lives too. Nathalie Petrowsky was born in France, but her family moved to Québec when she was only an infant. She was educated in the province of Québec and now works as journalist in Montréal. Of all the authors in this group, she is the least 'French', and her origin does not seem to influence her work greatly. Her novels *Il restera toujours le Nebraska* (1990)¹² and *Maman last call* (1995)¹³ mainly address modern women's issues, but mention nothing about migration and the transformations that occur for migrants. Her books 'speak' Québécois to a Québécois readership: cultural references, language, geography, everything has a feel of 'Québécois pure laine'.¹⁴ Régine Robin already had an academic career when she left France, but her first novel - *La Québécoise* (1993) - and subsequent works of fiction were published in Québec. Xavière Sénéchal and André Marois also started their literary career in Québec, but their work - mainly France-orientated - seems little affected by their migration. Francis Bossus - like Naïm Kattan and Émile Ollivier - moved to Québec in the late 1950s, but only became a full-time writer when he retired in the 1990s. Even though he has lived most of his life in Québec, his work remains anchored in his French experience; *La Tentation du destin* (1996)¹⁵ shows the influence of Bossus's origins on his work. Finally, Yves Navarre only settled in Québec for a relatively short time - just three years - after which he returned to France in 1991. His first book published in Québec, *La Terrasse des audiences au moment de l'adieu* (1990),¹⁶ is a sort of diary of his last months in France and first weeks in Québec. He explains his reason for migrating as a craving, a need for a new energy, which - in his view at least - France has lost.

Migration does not seem to have affected the cultural identity of French writers in Québec and of the characters they create. We will see that their voluntary displacement has

¹² Hereafter *IRTLN*.

¹³ Hereafter *MLC*.

¹⁴ This expression has often been used - since the 1970s - to distinguish the Francophone Québécois whose ancestors were French and arrived in the seventeenth century, from the 'Néo-Québécois', also Francophone, whose arrival in Québec is fairly recent.

¹⁵ Hereafter *LTD*.

¹⁶ Hereafter *TDA*.

more to do with personal dissatisfaction with their life in France, than a necessity. France seems to remain the main object of preoccupations for most of the French authors and life in Québec often appears as substitute for the life they wished for in France.

Migration and French identity

Apart maybe from Nathalie Petrowsky, these writers migrated for various reasons, which mainly derive from personal choice and aspirations. In this respect, they form a different kind of migrants to the other selected authors. Unlike Haitian or Middle Eastern authors (and indeed their characters), who were forced to leave their country by external economic or political pressures, French authors take a conscious and independent decision to leave their native country motivated by factors quite distinct to those influencing Third World writers. Their motives for migrating do not stem from a need to improve their lifestyle materially or, in extreme cases, to protect their own lives: they already live in a rich, developed and free country. They do have the luxury of thinking the migration process through; they can plan their resettlement, and, undoubtedly, have the means to carry out their project.¹⁷ The conditions of their migration are prepared well in advance and do not seem to be traumatic to them; this gives them a rather different perspective on migration from that of the other writers, so much so that it is a theme that they hardly develop. Instead, they address other topics like racial discrimination or globalisation.

One of the main sources of inspiration for migrant writers' work is their country of origin and cultural identity. In the case of the groups that we will subsequently discuss, migration has led writers to question cultural identity (theirs and that of their characters), to recall and recognise their past as a major component of their cultural identity, and to identify changes and adjustments between 'now' and 'then', 'here' and 'there'. However, the group of French writers – apart from Régine Robin, whose work, influenced by her Jewish identity, we will see more in detail in chapter 4 –, spend little or no time discussing or questioning one's identity. In fact, French writers do not seem to feel the need to assert their own cultural identity. Could it be that they assume that France's renown has preceded them and that it is known by whoever is reading their work?¹⁸ The characters presented by

¹⁷ Yves Navarre describes the means-tested process of migrating in great detail in his autobiographical narrative *La Terrasse des audiences au moment de l'adieu* (1990). He also went several times to Québec to visit the place and arrange material details like accommodation prior to (what he thought would be) his permanent resettlement.

¹⁸ In Yves Navarre's *La Terrasse des audiences au moment de l'adieu* (1990, p.55 & 59), however, some editor's footnotes provide clarifications for a non-French readership who might not be familiar with the cited people or companies.

French writers are not always representative either of their cultural group and community: some of Bossus's main characters are from Québec, Cameroon, and Italy; Robin's narrators are Jewish from USA, Israel or France; etc. In fact, very little emphasis is given to the 'cultural' part of each character's identity, as though French authors consider that it has little influence on the psychology of the character or the development of the plot, and more emphasis is put on the individual's worth.

French narratives do not express any guilt at leaving one's country as in novels by authors from other cultural backgrounds, nor do they hesitate to criticise one's home country. In Haitian narratives, for example, any criticism of Haiti is seen as a kind of betrayal of the people left behind, and of one's own past. For Middle Eastern authors, migration is about adjusting and finding the right balance between traditions and their new way of life, but they cherish the memories of their original country. And Jewish writers tell of the pain of being snatched away from their past, a break which disorients them. But French writers - and the characters they describe - do not seem to have any kind of allegiance to their country or their cultural group. Yves Navarre admits that he tries to avoid his fellow French citizens, whom he calls imperialist and manipulative. In the following extract, he recalls his meeting with a French bookshop owner in Montréal:

La bribe de conversation que j'ai eue avec ce libraire fut consternante. Encore un colon pisse-vinaigre qui n'en a pas l'air et qui veut à tout prix vous «faire dire» ce qu'il pense de vous, le néant. Je parlais de mon journal intime. Il a biaisé tout de suite la discussion. J'osais dire que ce n'était pas un Journal pour la postérité mais un simple Journal au jour le jour. Lui aimait le composé, le fabriqué, le tripatouillé, quel mépris. Si je veux vivre ici, il ne faut pas que je rencontre «les Français». [TDA, p.283]

Being French is not something that Marois's characters feel particularly proud of either; on the contrary, they think it has been forced on them. In *Accidents de parcours* (1999), for example, Matthias, who spends his holidays in Montréal, finds himself 'celebrating' the French national day while he is there:

Bizarre de se retrouver à l'étranger le jour de la fête nationale. Un brin incongru. C'est là qu'il a compris à quel point il est français. Ou tout du moins que cette notion patriotique lui a été *inculquée de force*. Magistral matraquage idéologique. [AP, p.104, my italics]

It seems that Matthias realizes at this moment that his cultural identity is based on meaningless rituals: his patriotic attitude is not a personal feeling, but rather an emotion that he has learnt, or, rather, that he has been conditioned to express. As a result, Matthias is overcome by a feeling of having been deceived; in his eyes, his feeling of 'belonging' becomes fake and fabricated to him, when he realizes that he has been moulded into a

'citizen'. In fact, migration in French narratives seems to be an act of separating oneself from one's cultural group with which one no longer identifies; it represents ceasing an association with which one feels uncomfortable, whereas, for other migrant authors, migration acts as a catalyst in finding or reconstructing one's cultural identity, and (re-)gaining or (re-)discovering a cultural community. In novels by the selected writers of French origin, there is not any description of the French community in Montréal or elsewhere in Québec. Even the celebration of the French national day in Marois's *Accidents de Parcours* (1999) does not elaborate on the subject or lead to a quick sketch of the community. Instead, there is a description of the place with flags and music, voices speaking with French accents, but there are no faces, just a *minifoule au parler identifié* (PA, p.105). The characters neither meet nor speak to anyone, leaving the impression that the crowd is impalpable and faceless.

This admitted lack of interest in the affairs of one's native country and this dissociation from nationalism is also expressed in the first pages of *La Terrasse des audiences au moment de l'adieu* (1990), in which Navarre explains his decision to migrate:

Je veux et vais quitter la France, ma France aimée, éloquente, fascinante, admirable, désormais involutive. Elle ne fait plus la Révolution mais l'Involution. [TDA, p.9]

In Navarre's opinion, France seems to have reached the end of an era: the country has lost touch with what constituted its greatness and the source of its creative energy. It looks as though France and French citizenship no longer fulfil his personal expectations of nationalism. Proud of his cultural heritage, he starts, however, questioning his sense of belonging when he no longer agrees with the cultural choices and attitudes for which France now stands:

La France des «peut-être», des «quand même», des «mais», des chagrins fonctionnaires, la France altièrre qui a peur des élans et des paroles vraies, la France qui se croit encore maîtresse du monde et qui brade jusqu'à la francophonie, l'éternelle France colonialiste, meurtrière des provinces, dont ma Gascogne. [TDA, p.39-40]

In Navarre's view, it seems that France has lost touch with the present; its culture has not evolved at the same rate as that of the rest of the world and is held back by – even stuck in? – its imperialist past. Migration is seen as offering a broadening of horizons; it is the expression of an aspiration towards personal but individualistic development. Navarre does not appear to be interested in contributing to Québec's political or cultural life. Under the cover of compliments – Navarre often mentions how honest and wholesome the people of

Québec are -, he really hopes that Québec will give him the recognition and respect that France refused him; he wants to take and receive rather than exchange.

Portraying France

Whereas Haitian and some of the Middle Eastern writers tend to embellish their memories of their home country, French writers seem to construct a rather ambivalent image of theirs. In Francis Bossus's work too, France appears to be a somehow dishonoured country that is stuck in the past. Jules, the hero of *La Tentation du destin* (1996), accepts a position of secretary whose task is to record Mr Lougarel's adventures in France during World War II and to transpose them onto paper. Mr Lougarel, who was born in France, does not hold any nostalgic memories of his country of origin, quite the contrary. He is cynical about the attitude of French people under the German occupation: each citizen had his or her own personal theory about how to win the war, but each was too much of a coward to act upon it against the occupying enemy:

Il devait être le deux millionième à rêver de victoire. Quand je pense qu'il n'était pas fichu de se servir d'un fusil de chasse, je rigole encore comme ont rigolé tous les lièvres du coin. [LTD, p.37]

The focus here is on France's failure to react against invasion, and on a part of history which does not inspire great national pride. Mr Lougarel also describes the village in which he was raised and in which Jules decides to settle when he moves to Europe in order to pursue his literary career. This village, described by Jules fifty years later, hardly seems to have changed:

Depuis deux mois environ, je vis dans un charmant village de Normandie où je suis venu chercher la paix de l'esprit et prendre le temps de «goûter» le temps qui passe. [...] J'ai loué une petite maison de pierre au toit pointu, avec une cheminée pour seul moyen de chauffage et un puits dans le jardin. Parfois, avec ses murs épais, son plancher rugueux, ses fenêtres étroites et sa lourde porte, elle me semble avoir glissé du Moyen Âge jusqu'à notre époque. [LTD, p.205-6]

In fact, this house seems to have been forgotten by time with its lack of all modern commodities. It is a retreat away from the excitement of the rest of the world, a shelter for Jules who is disappointed with his life in Québec and, more generally, in America. In Bossus's novel, where descriptions of France in general are rare, Jules's house and village act as metonymic symbols of the country; they contribute to create the impression that the country is stuck in the past. This idea is also present in André Marois's *Accidents de parcours* (1999):¹⁹ in her description of the village in Brittany where she and her partner

¹⁹ Hereafter AP.

spend their holiday, the Quebecker Josée stresses how small the place is in comparison to Québec standards and the fact that everything seems quaint and dated:

Les maisons sont en pierres grises et usées. Les toits en ardoise. J'adore. Il y a une atmosphère de film d'époque. Ça sent le vrai vieux, pas la reconstitution trop propre. On a été accrochés par ce décor naturel. Ce qui est amusant, c'est la petitesse de leurs moyens de transport: les autos, les mobylettes, les tracteurs et les camions ont l'air conçus pour des nains. Lorsque j'ai vu une deux-chevaux surgir sur la placette, j'ai balancé un grand coup de coude à Pierre. Ça roule encore ces antiquités! Les routes sont pleines de voitures de cette époque. [AP, p.21]

Here, Josée does not admire the traditions and history of the place, she is just amused by its twee outdated atmosphere and the relatively small size of things. It looks like a deflation of certain myths of grandeur and majesty cultivated by France and perpetuated through cultural clichés.

Yves Navarre presents a very similar vision of provincial France in *Douce France* (1990).²⁰ In this novel published soon after he arrived in Québec, the author expresses the bitterness that he feels towards the hypocritical French bourgeois society. Through the eyes of the main character, Geneviève, Navarre proposes meticulous observations of the bourgeois society in provincial France, which underline its hypocrisy. The members of this society hide their true beliefs – be they religious or political – under the respectability of religion:

La France des provinces, enrichie, était encore la tenancière d'une grande partie du monde. Sitôt de retour dans ses terres d'origine, les familles conquérantes, hors du besoin, éblouies par des voyages si lointains, se terraient et géraient le bien acquis avec pour seule loi l'impératif de faire des parcours sans faute et des alliances sans faille. Même mécréants, athées, secrètement radicaux-socialistes ou francs-maçons, ils allaient à l'église pour la façade et le rappel du danger de la faute. [DF, p.28]

The impression throughout the novel is that these rich bourgeois families are mainly driven by money and keeping up appearances, their sole aim being to maintain or increase their capital. They exert an unspoken control over social life in small French towns, and living outside the rules they have set is both unthinkable and intolerable. Navarre even goes as far as to imply that this bourgeois attitude goes against democracy in the sense that their financial power allows them to influence, if not control, political and social changes:

C'était la France du bas de laine et de l'aumône, pays de toutes les libertés, la liberté dont un extrême centre assurait le subtil dosage de promesses vaines et fausses réformes. [DF, p.186]

This kind of bourgeois mentality seems to be – at least in Navarre's view – the cause of France's inertia, not to say stagnation. Old-fashioned customs are maintained in order to control all members of the middle-class and to ensure its apparent unity. Financial or

²⁰ Hereafter *DF*.

psychological pressure enables them to crush any rebellion against the order they have imposed. People cannot even appear to think independently or be different: they either conform or are excluded. Geneviève, the main character of *Douce France* (1990), returns to her family after several years of absence; she has tried to escape this restricting environment, but found it difficult to live on the margin of provincial society and entirely cut off from her family. On her return, she has to live with her parents and agrees to some concessions in order to regain her place within society. Sylvain Lherbier, the town psychoanalyst and her cousin, who is one of the rare people she trusts, admits that he pretends to live by these tacit rules in order to avoid confrontation with and isolation from the rest of the community. In private, his lifestyle, condemned by rumour, is quite liberal: for example, he encourages his children to ask anything they wish to know; there are no restrictions, no boundaries, no secrets, and no taboos:

Des bruits couraient: les trois fils étaient éduqués librement, toutes les questions leur étaient permises; l'été, ils faisaient du naturisme au bord de l'Atlantique. [DF, p.42]

This education goes against all 'principles' of the town's middle-class people. In public, Lherbier plays a role and seems to endorse the same values as the people with whom he associates, but, away from the public eye, he sees this kind of society as a vestige of a bygone age, and, as such, studies it:

Et je fais, à mes heures perdues, un travail sur notre ville et sa tribu, ce qui se perpétue, ce qui est perpétuel, ce qui est inévitable. [...] La douce France est un fossile. Ils ont besoin de nous pour pouvoir désigner, ça leur dégourdit les doigts. [DF, p.138]

Those who do not conform become the scapegoats for this hypocritical society. As everybody seems to adopt masks, no one can be trusted, individuals feel isolated, and communication becomes impossible because speaking one's mind exposes one to exclusion. In chapter 18 of *Douce France* (1990), for example, Geneviève spends the night writing letters to friends and relatives in an attempt to communicate her feelings and thoughts to them, so as to justify her actions. However, her correspondence proves to be more a means of introspection than one of communication, as Geneviève destroys the letters before sending them. The one letter that she sends is that in which she relates nothing but facts without divulging her thoughts: it is therefore of no consequence to her. Lack or refusal of communication is an underlying theme of the book. In *Douce France* (1990), 'speaking' – i.e. the use of direct speech – is associated with control: the use of direct speech in the text only occurs when a character tries to impose an opinion on another; furthermore, some characters refuse to talk as they believe speaking to be

dangerous, giving others a chance to turn their own words against them and control them. Speaking appears to be an act of invasion of one's intimacy. Geneviève refuses to engage in conversation; in doing so, she is trying to avoid giving out her secrets and giving ground for her family to come between her and her husband.

Rumours – these half-truths and half-secrets - are also the favourite means of the bourgeois society to marginalize undesirable members. These informal or carefully composed scraps of information are manipulated to make or destroy reputations. As the Abbé Duperche remarks, people delight in the agony of others:

Je sais à quel point les échappées, les flous des familles sont nécessaires à l'idée que ces familles se font d'elles-mêmes. Elles se nourrissent de scandales qu'elles provoquent plus ou moins, et les ensevelissements du vivant de leurs victimes désignées font leur régal et leurs ragots. [DF, p.180]

Uttering words appears to be compromising even between people who genuinely care about each other. The words of Tinette – Geneviève's aunt, who was excluded from her family for her affair with a soldier when she was young, but who nevertheless remained close to Geneviève – are kind ones. However, Tinette speaks but expects no reply. She even refuses to hear Geneviève's answers to her questions. Tinette's monologues conclude in a posthumous letter to Geneviève, in which she provides explanations for her actions and reiterates her support for her niece. But obviously two-way communication is by then definitely impossible.

Navarre's depiction of provincial French bourgeois lifestyle is one of oppression and narrow-mindedness, but his hatred of what he and Régine Robin call *parisianisme* is even stronger. For Robin, *parisianisme* - which she also calls her *francité* - is an intellectual 'dialogue' with the literary world and that of political commentators. For her, *francité* consists in exercising her educated knowledge and reflecting on other writers' ideas and publications. In Navarre's case, *parisianisme* has taken over the intellectual life of the entire country: nothing seems to exist outside of Parisian views. Not only is it a centralized point of view, but it is also a self-centred one that Navarre calls '*le fascisme parisien*' (TDA, p.10). In his view, *parisianisme* - as much as the limitations of provincial bourgeoisie - is responsible for French apathy and lack of creativity. It has eclipsed France's spirit:

Le pays n'a plus de cœur dans ses foules, quelque chose s'est gommé dans les regards échangés, une suffisance, la soumission à toutes sortes de dictées et de clichés. [TDA, p.12]

Navarre invents all sorts of metonymic nicknames, which encapsulate his attitude to Parisian intellectual society. To quote but a few: *Paris-Qui-a-Perdu-Son-Sens-de-l'Amour*,

Paris-la-Pieuvre, Paris-la-Fatuité, Paris-la-Fasciste, Paris-la-Grignoteuse-d'Âmes, etc.²¹

For Navarre, *parisianisme* blinds people and stops them from recognising the talent of their national artists and the quality of their work:

En France, sous la dictée de Paris-la-Rond-de-Cuir on n'aime les artistes que lorsqu'ils sont morts. Ou alors, de leur vivant, on truque les cartes de l'âme et de l'esprit et on les piège à mort, Jean-Louis Bory, Roland Barthes, médias meurtriers, bateleurs ou rongeurs jusque dans le silence. [TDA, p.369]

Parisianisme epitomises the provincial bourgeois attitude depicted in *Douce France* (1990) as it exhibits the same characteristics, only exacerbated: once again, one has to conform or be excluded; objections are not heard, and dialogue is only a trick to lead artists to expose their weaknesses, which leads to their destruction. This stifling climate is a hindrance to creativity and self-expression. As we learn in *La Terrasse des audiences au moment de l'adieu* (1990), Navarre has badly suffered as a result of *parisianisme* and has encountered problems not only with journalists, critics and other people of Parisian intellectual society, but also with successive Parisian publishers, who have - in his view - tried to interfere with his work and have occasionally refused to publish it. In the end, Navarre decides to exclude himself from this environment and migrate to Québec.

Québec/France: Comparisons and hopes

If authors – and, by extension, their characters - have personal reasons for migrating to Québec, they also have expectations and pre-conceived ideas about it. In Marois's *Accidents de parcours* (1999), superficial differences are noted as the plot progresses. Two couples, one from Montréal and the other one from Ploërdou in Brittany (France), exchange houses for a holiday: they have a month to discover each other's lifestyle. Neither couple has ever previously visited the other's country; all they have – as they soon realize - is a caricatural knowledge of each country. At first, Josée, the Quebecker, is delighted that Ploërdou is a typical Breton village, anchored in time and traditions. (Even though, as one recalls, she soon considers the village to be twee.) She feels that 'new' territories like Québec lack character:

Sorti du Vieux qui n'a pas plus de 350 ans, le Québec ressemble au désert des Tartares. On a bien les autochtones, sauf que, côté vestiges archéologiques, ils ne se sont pas surpassés. Par contre les Celtes, c'est une autre dimension. [AP, p.39]

²¹ See the list of all these nicknames invented by Yves Navarre in *La Terrasse des audiences au moment de l'adieu* (1990, Index 1, p.391-5).

Josée is also surprised by the cultural clichés that French people believe about her fellow Quebecers. She sees herself through the eyes of foreigners for the first time:

Quelle image on projette! Des faux Français un peu Esquimaux qui sortent de l'hiver trois jours par an pour voter «non» à un référendum et boire du sirop d'érable. Les clichés ont la vie dure. [AP, p.25]

She realises that the French know as much about her country as she does about theirs, i.e. very little. But the arrival of Josée and her husband in Ploërdou succeeds in overturning some French prejudices about Quebecers too. Fernand, their neighbour during the holiday, understands his misconceptions and rectifies them in order to avoid further cultural *faux pas*:

Je ne dis plus le Canadien, car j'ai compris que ce mot était *persona non grata* dans la conversation. C'est simple, ils ne l'utilisent pas. Quand je l'ai prononcé la première fois, ils ont tous les deux sursauté. Comme si je les injuriais. Ah! les susceptibilités culturelles sont tenaces. Moi itou, je me suis longtemps défini comme Breton de sang et Français par raison. Mais ma fibre nationaliste s'est émoussée lentement. [AP, p.35]

For Fernand, cultural differences, which he actively defended when younger, have faded with age, but he can relate with the Quebecers' strong sense of identity.

Even though characters remark on other small cultural differences like eating habits, means of transport or behaviour, the emphasis is placed on language. As we will develop in chapter 4, Régine Robin expresses her alienation within a language that sounds like hers, but, nevertheless, carries major cultural differences that are a constant reminder that she does not belong. On the other hand, Marois and Navarre - who sees Québec as a "bastion de ma langue" [TDA, p.27] - do not seem to see any major differences between 'French from France' and 'French from francophone countries'. For them, the language spoken in France and Québec is obviously the same and the absence of foreignness induces characters to feel at home in a foreign country. Josée, for example, notes:

Je n'imaginai pas me retrouver si loin et me sentir presque chez moi. C'est une drôle de sensation. [AP, p.24]

Despite this familiarity, characters cannot resist noticing the small differences that characterize the French of each respective country. Fernand in *Accidents de parcours* (1999) is amused by the Quebecers' accent and believes that it will be a barrier to conversation, as though Quebecers did not speak the same language:

Je suis pressé d'écouter l'accent des deux touristes, fort et amusant, comme celui de Robert Charlebois. On ne comprendra rien et probablement qu'eux non plus. [AP, p.10]

As for Josée, she also notices the difference of accent between French and Quebecker, but considers it superficial and easy to overcome:

Ils [les Bretons] ont un accent prononcé, mais certains mots sont aussi universels que mes lectures. [AP, p.21]

Some characters also notice lexical differences that denote an anglo-saxon influence:

Il paraît que là-bas ils disent bonjour au lieu d'au revoir, alors pourquoi ne pas leur adresser un *kenavo* d'adieu en guise de *welcome*. C'est bizarre d'inverser; probablement l'influence des Anglais. [AP, p.10]

On a mangé une crème glacée. Une glace, comme ils disent ici. On s'amuse à les écouter. Eux aussi, visiblement, mais ils sont fins. [AP, p.24]

Obviously, these differences are not an impediment to communication. Furthermore, lexical differences are also used by Marois to indicate transformations in a character. Matthias and Pierre - Josée and Corinne's partners - have met via the internet and believe they are twins. While abroad, they adopt each other's lexical mannerisms. Pierre, the Quebecker, affects a French accent and adopts French swearing. Josée thinks it will pass:

Je l'ai laissé s'amuser. Il se lassera avant moi. Devant un vrai problème, il lâchera un gros «hostie!» du fond du cœur. Les sacres, ça ne s'oublie pas, c'est trop profond. [AP, p.38]

For Corinne, swearing (*les sacres*) is an integral part of the metropolitan and Québec French; it also sounds as though it constitutes the main cultural difference between French from France and French from Québec! Here, Matthias gives Corinne a quick - and fairly caricatural - 'grammar' lesson on the use of swear words:

Crisse, de Christ - crime est utilisé pareillement. Des combinaisons sont permises, genre «hostie d'chris'de calice ou tabernak de crisse de simonaque». C'est un Lego, ça s'emboîte dans tous les sens.

-Tu parles québécois, Matthias. Tu sacres! [AP, p.86]

But the main prejudice about language is in the slightly imperialist attitude of French characters towards the Quebeckers. Judging by the reaction of both Matthias and Corinne, they imagine that the French spoken beyond the borders of France is gibberish, and it seems impossible to them that it may be the official language of another country than France.

Le premier choc fut de se rendre compte à quel point, justement, les gens parlent français. Vu de l'hexagone, il imaginait le petit village d'Astérix qui résiste. Il croyait que la majorité s'exprimait en anglais et que leur belle langue n'était utilisée qu'en privé par une poignée d'irréductibles nostalgiques de l'ancienne mère patrie. Que nenni!

Le français ici, c'est un acte de résistance face à l'envahisseur. Il est causé avec force, affirmé, revendiqué. Le pire, c'est de poser une question en anglais à un Québécois. La méprise se fait sentir sans coup férir. Ils répondent en se foutant ouvertement de la bévée, dans la langue de Molière, et en imitant l'autre accent. Histoire de bien faire comprendre qu'ils ne sont pas les abrutis pressentis. On ne leur fait pas. Corinne était tout excitée.

Matthias's first assumption and misconception is to assume that French in Québec is the language of a minority when it is one of the two official languages of Canada. Furthermore, the use of the adjective 'belle' and the metaphor 'langue de Molière' underline the fact that the couple believe French is a language related to literature, with a certain grandeur and kudos. They are either ignorant of the culture and literature of Québec or unable to envisage that these traits may also exist in another francophone country. In their view, non-metropolitan French is a pale imitation of the French language, motivated by a kind of nostalgia for attachment to a great country like France. For Jacques Derrida, this attitude of appropriation of language derives from an imperialist need to assert one's power:

Car contrairement à ce qu'on est le plus souvent tenté de croire, le maître ne possède pas en propre, *naturellement*, ce qu'il appelle pourtant sa langue; parce que, quoi qu'il veuille ou fasse, il ne peut entretenir avec elle des rapports de propriété ou d'identité naturels, nationaux, congénitaux, ontologiques; parce qu'il ne peut accréditer et dire cette appropriation qu'au cours d'un procès non naturel de construction politico-phantasmatiques; parce que la langue n'est pas son bien naturel, par cela même il peut historiquement, à travers le viol d'une usurpation culturelle, c'est-à-dire toujours d'essence coloniale, feindre de se l'approprier pour l'imposer comme «la sienne». C'est là sa croyance, il veut la faire partager par la force ou par la ruse, il veut y faire croire, comme au miracle, par la rhétorique, l'école ou l'armée.²²

The cultural usurpation described here by Jacques Derrida is detectable in the speech of French characters (see previous quotation AP, p.78) by the use of the adjective 'leur', indicating the possession of the 'belle langue'. Furthermore, the characters recall events about the annexation of Québec by British troops that are over two hundred years old; this contributes to the impression that Québec has no logical reason to speak French: it is merely a whim, a desire or nostalgia to be associated with France and its History!²³ This suggests that French does not really 'belong' to Quebecers: it is more an affectation than a deeply rooted part of their cultural identity. In a way, we observe here a prolongation of the dissociation of France from Nouvelle France in the eighteenth century. French characters do not conceive that Quebecers might have overcome their 'nostalgic' feelings and developed an independent identity from France, that extends to the language too.

Yves Navarre seems to harbour the same idea of ownership of language, but he offers a more subtle perspective on the subject. We have seen earlier that Navarre describes France as a corrupt country: on the one hand, French people have surrendered

²² Jacques Derrida. *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre*. Paris: Éditions Galilée. 1996. p.45.

²³ The idea of fame and glory seems to be implied too in this quote of Marois.

their free will and creativity to a Parisian elite that dictates what art and literature should be; on the other hand, the bourgeois class suffocates people under moral rules and plots to maintain its own privileges. Navarre feels his own creativity is impeded by this debased society, which is the reason why he emigrated to Québec. In *La Terrasse des audiences au moment de l'adieu* (1990), he expresses his hopes of rejuvenation and a fresh start in Québec. He narrates some of his visits to Québec, during which he - as an author - is invited to participate in debates in universities, television programmes, etc. Each time, he underscores the eagerness of his audience and the conviviality of his hosts, attitudes that deeply contrast with the indifference of his compatriots:

J'avais participé à une quantité d'émissions plus conviviales les unes que les autres, sauf une avec la vrombissante Bombardier. A l'une de ces émissions, dite de variétés en France, Gilles Vigneault m'avait accueilli comme un frère, «toi? Ici? Avec nous?», et Fabienne Thibeault, «tu sais que je t'aime». Il y avait aussi Serge Lama, «vous êtes là pourquoi, vous?» et la chabadabada de *Un homme et une femme*, Nicole Croisille, «Yves comment?». Nul n'est poète en son pays. [TDA, p.27]

Feeling rejected by Parisian society, Navarre believes that he has already been adopted by Québec intellectual society; he feels that his talent and work are at last recognised. And in his personal life too, Québec appears to be an idyllic place where people are genuinely friendly:

L'accueil, ici, partout, est heureux, sans aucun calcul, sobre, sans aucune manière, ingénu, il y a des poseurs de piège comme partout ailleurs et je ne les ai pas encore rencontrés. [TDA, p.366]

According to Navarre, Québec appears to be an earthly Paradise, an idea reinforced throughout the book by the use of a vocabulary relating to honesty and (re)commencement:

Je veux vivre hors je, là-bas, là où ça *germe*, là où ça dit aimer quand ça aime. [...] Je n'ai plus rien à faire ici. Je demande audience au Canada et au Québec où l'on ose dire j'aime quand on aime, où tout *inaugure* aussi, la langue y est plus que jamais un exploit. [TDA, p.17, my italics]

Québec seems to provide the answer to Navarre's quest for honesty. Furthermore, it is also a country hungry for development and new ideas, a country where one can live without any boundaries and transcend one's limitations (*vivre hors je* (sic)). It therefore answers his craving for creativity:

Dans ce pays [la France], je ne respire plus. [...] Ne serai-je plus libre d'aller vivre mieux où je veux, où ça cherche, ça butine, ça demande, ça attend, ça écoute, ça chante, ça crie, ça regarde? [TDA, p.79]

It is important to note here that the lyrical accumulation of verbs used here by Navarre to depict Québec's eagerness belongs to the fields of infancy and nature. Creativity is welcomed and encouraged, nevertheless, it looks like a one-way conversation: he, Navarre

the renowned author, will tell, and Québec will listen and ask for his knowledge. At the beginning of *La Terrasse des audiences au moment de l'adieu* (1990), he has not left France yet but he already imagines himself as one of the greatest writers in Québec:

Le Sommet de la francophonie, en fait, c'est le Québec en soi, je le crois, je l'écris sans flagornerie. Ce soir, au sempiternel *Mélodine*, je pensais à Léa Pool et me vint l'idée de faire un film qui s'intitulerait *Nelligan* sur la vie du poète, son enfermement, sur les lieux mêmes de sa vie, avec pour tout texte ses poèmes et pour figurants Miron, Blais, Vigneault, Maillet et tant de témoins d'aujourd'hui comme d'hier et de demain. On m'y verrait un dixième de seconde sur le quai du port de Montréal, avec une valise [...]. [TDA, p.60]

In his mind, he is already part of the group of national writers who have contributed, book after book, to create a national and cultural Québécois identity. On the one hand, this may look as though Navarre has decided to totally immerse himself in his new life in Québec, to reject his *francité* (to quote Régine Robin) and become a 'true' Québécois. On the other hand, Navarre seems more interested in the unsophisticated and quaint aspects of the language of Québec, which he sees as marks of 'purity' and honesty:

Je veux aller là où ça germe, là où ça combat pour la langue, et la langue du Québec est la plus pure, surtout quand elle est rustre, elle parle d'antan et de demain. Elle n'a pas le plissé et l'amidonné des serviettes de table du Consulat, en toute courtoisie. [TDA, p.40]

It is the absence of ceremony or polish that appeals to Navarre. Even when he refers to authors like Gaston Miron (TDA, p.30) or Antonine Maillet (TDA, p.17), his enthusiasm seems to be motivated by their 'rough' style rather than their achievement as writers.²⁴ For example, he tells of his contempt for a writer and critic who was awarded a Prix Goncourt the year after him, and reveals that:

Je préfère celui [le prix Goncourt] d'Antonine Maillet. Il est de mêmes racines, la province des textes. [TDA, p.17]

This sentence suggests that what he admires most in Maillet's book is her seemingly unpolished style and topics anchored in tradition, which is in total contrast with the Parisian view of style, conditioned by the seventeenth century salons. This selective and exclusive representation of language in Québec is rather paternalistic and infantilising.

Navarre finally reveals his true position towards language and migration to Québec when he admits his wish to return to a more original language (as opposed to the linguistic

²⁴ One also notes that in his film project, the Québécois writers are referred to as 'figurants'; they do not have an active role. His part, on the contrary, even though short, is significant: he is seen arriving in Québec with a lot of luggage. It seems that, with this image, Navarre implies that he brings his experience as a – metropolitan French – writer.

and moral corruption that has - in his view - stricken France). He begins by presenting his migration to Québec as a personal salvation:

Je pars pour une province bastion de ma langue. Elle peut être fière d'elle-même. Paris ne dicte plus. [TDA, p.27]

Navarre is now in 'safe' territory; he has – like the province of Québec – gained his independence from Paris. But, even though he has not yet migrated, he already thinks of his future success in Québec, such success in fact that he hopes to be published in France again!

Si un jour je vis au Québec, bastion oui de ma langue, redite volontaire, thème musical, on m'y publiera, je le souhaite. Et si le livre (celui-ci?) est revendu en France l'exergue ne sera plus celui que vous avez lu en première page, amoureux, élan de fiançailles, mais si vous entrez dans ce texte avec l'idée d'y trouver de la haine, refermez ce livre tout de suite. [TDA, p.36]

Despite Navarre's denials, one wonders then why he takes the trouble to move halfway around the globe in order to be once again what he wanted to leave behind. On the one hand, he wishes to be a Québécois author, but on the other hand, he does not want to give up being a French writer. His migration resembles a retreat to a 'ville franche' as described by Jacques Derrida in *Cosmopolites de tous les pays*.²⁵ Québec is for Navarre a bastion in which French is defended against the corruption of modern times, a sort of infancy or original state of language, a mythical earthly paradise:

J'oublie Barbara, j'efface Quentin, je gomme Paris-le-bâillon, Paris-la-furole, pas la France, pas la terre de France, riche, féconde, féroce, la terre de mon âme, et je me jette à corps perdu, à corps acheté, dans les bras de cette ville qui a la bonne humeur et le sens de l'exploit sans aucune de ces réticences, de ces «manières» qui sont le sceau de la vieille Europe somme toute plus puritaine, pudibonde et culpabilisée que partout ailleurs. [TDA, p.299-300]

The battle for the 'purity' of language seems to be transformed into a battle for the purity of the soul and a return to honesty. The Parisian mask of hypocrisy gives way to unaffected feelings. Migration, in fact, is a sort of romantic attempt to preserve a sense of cultural and national identity, as Navarre explains in a letter to Edmonde Charles-Roux:

Ton inquiétude m'intimide parce que j'ai effectivement quitté non pas la France, le vivier de ma mémoire, mon encrier, mais Paris où je ne vivais plus. [...] J'aime ce pays, cette province et cette ville, le combat s'y mène pour l'exploit et l'emploi de ma langue à sa racine. [TDA, p.302]

²⁵ This notion is similar to Régine Robin's *entre-deux* or *in-betweenness*. In *Cosmopolites de tous les pays – encore un effort*. (London: Routledge. 2001.) Derrida suggests the (re-)creation of cities or places where people could live without allegiance to one country, one nationalism or one cultural identity. They could have none or more than one at once. The 'ville-franche' would be respected by all countries, but outside of the control of one in particular.

As opposed to other migrant writers, migration does not lead Navarre to question his cultural identity. On the contrary, he hopes that Québec's way of life will regenerate the moral and artistic values that he considers to be French – or at least European, and on a personal level, that it will stimulate and enhance his creativity by offering a 'pure' environment: everything there seems pure and genuine in his eyes, and language is still in a state of uncomplicated innocence.²⁶ However, in this idealistic depiction of Québec, one can also see an element of escapism: in Paris, Navarre believes that he is persecuted by Parisian intellectual society, experiences difficulties with his publishers and feels betrayed by some of his close friends. In comparison, Québec offers a fresh start - with the advantage of Navarre's renown in the francophone world - that looks more like a re-enculturation for Navarre: he does not really consider moving to Québec for its originality, or independence from France, but rather for the continuation with old pre-classical French traditions that Navarre believes it perpetuates.

Social topics

If French writers do not treat the migration of their own cultural group and its repercussions on its members, they do nevertheless propose depictions of other minorities, particularly racial ones, in Québec and address social and racial issues relating to migration.²⁷ Paradoxically, despite the fact that French culture – and, by extension, European culture - remains at the centre of their inspiration and influences, some of the French writers also tell of their discomfort at the idea of being associated with it. They disapprove of the policy of extension of French cultural supremacy, and feel uncomfortable with this imperialist attitude that is usually accompanied by consciously or unconsciously racist behaviour towards people of a different culture and colour. In Bossus's *La Tentation du destin* (1996), the main character, Jules, sees himself as a product of a white-orientated culture that, to this day, still teaches the superiority of the Caucasians; he has been culturally conditioned to feel that the white 'race' is generally superior to others:

Et cette vision surgit de mon racisme. Je proférai à voix haute: «Espèce de maudit nègre, de sale bounoule, de con d'Africain!» Deux mille ans de civilisation blanche et chrétienne passaient par ma voix et me rappelaient que tout homme de couleur est inférieur. Ma conscience (on dit qu'elle est une

²⁶ The emphasis on innocence brings to mind Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Confessions*, in which he presents a flawless vision of his own childhood, deliberately or unintentionally ignoring the details that do not fit in the perfection of the picture.

²⁷ We think here of the main characters in Bossus's novel, who are from Cameroon and Italy; Robin's characters are from Poland, France, Germany, and Israel; and some of Sénéchal's characters are from India.

sorte de mère) me reprocha cette bouffée de haine, mais je ne pouvais oublier l'image du gros poing noir de Prosper sur la bouche éclatée de la femme. [LTD, p.105]

Jules is aware that he has been conditioned by his society and admits to his guilt at being unable to take control of his behaviour; he should not be blamed for uttering racist comments because after all, he too is a victim of this racist culture; he was made to behave the way he does and believes he has no choice in it. In Xavière Sénéchal's *Le Pays d'ailleurs* (1999),²⁸ the main character, Olivia, recently graduated from Medical school, decides to put her training to the test and accept a position in India. Life in the poorest suburbs of Calcutta is a revelation for the young woman from a wealthy background. When she returns to Montréal, she realises that her social expectations and cultural outlook have been drastically altered:

Fallait-il que l'Inde m'ait métamorphosée pour que je ne reconnaisse plus rien, ne ressente plus rien d'identique, ne perçoive plus la moindre onde de reconnaissance à laquelle me raccrocher? Plus rien qui me ressemble. Plus rien qui me rassure. Étrangère dans ma propre maison, tout me semblait bizarre, terne, vide. J'étais arrivée depuis trois heures et je n'avais qu'une envie, fuir, repartir, aller rejoindre cet ailleurs qui m'avait permis de me trouver. [PA, p.96]

Her relationship with her family becomes more difficult because she is now aware of their discriminatory attitude towards coloured people, even more so when she reveals her proposal to adopt an orphan from Calcutta. Her mother's reaction is unequivocal:

Bien sûr, elle n'était pas raciste. Comme des milliers d'autres, elle n'avait rien contre les gens de couleur à condition qu'ils n'entrent pas jouer dans sa cour. [PA, p.95]

Like Jules, Olivia realises that racism underlies relationships, at least in her social and cultural group, and that it does not manifest itself in a violent outburst of words and actions, but, rather, takes the form of an insidious feeling of exclusion: people have no aggressive feelings towards others, they simply avoid mixing with undesirable 'others' and refuse confrontation. Racial prejudices subtend all encounters.

In Bossus's novel, racism is a major topic and is often intertwined with the issue of social status. Jules is white, poor and ashamed of his social position. His employment as a secretary for Mr Lougarel makes him reconsider his social position: Mr Lougarel has another employee, Nora, who comes originally from Haiti. Jules does not take well to being treated like an employee by Nora:

Je ne savais quelle sagesse antillaise poussait cette Noire à me tutoyer, sans doute me considérait-elle comme son égal, soit un domestique, mais je ne m'en offusquais pas. [LTD, p.40]

²⁸ Hereafter PA.

This remark – slightly patronising and betraying exasperation – shows that Nora might be considering Jules as an equal but that he does not feel that it is justified. This sentence is also ambivalent: is Jules annoyed at being considered a servant, or is he really annoyed at the fact that Nora does not acknowledge his implied white superiority? It is also important to note that, rather than calling her by her name, he uses the expression *cette Noire*, which sounds pejorative and indicates his contempt. In fact, in Jules's view, Nora is the one with the racist attitude; she is the one who cannot get over her 'ancestral contempt for white people' (*LTD*, p.28). Jules believes that she is too a victim of the Occidental imperialist culture, but she is at the other end of the spectrum. He imagines her as a rebellious slave:

Je me demandais s'il lui arrivait parfois de méditer sur sa condition de Noire et de servante et, une seconde, je l'imaginai en train de se ruer sur son maître et de l'égorger avec un couteau de cuisine. [*LTD*, p.50-1]

Here again, Jules's remark is ambiguous: is this a colonialist's fantasy, or is it a social comment on racial and social prejudices in a postcolonial society? In the end, his regular confrontations with Nora lead Jules to lose his self-esteem. He feels humiliated personally, socially and racially:

Nègre blanc! Je me traitais de nègre blanc, d'esclave, de laquais, de valet, de larbin, et même de ganache, un vieux mot qui, dans mon esprit, sentait le moisi et la pourriture, dépeignait ma décadence et me défigurait. Je ne méritais plus le titre d'homme. [*LTD*, p.61]

At the beginning of the novel, Jules claims that he, as a product of an imperialist white culture, should be treated with a certain respect by Nora and by their employer. Now, however, he finds himself in a situation in which roles are reversed: he, who has been brought up to believe he belongs to the dominant elite, now assumes the role of the dominated one. He has become what he despises the most: a servant, the equal of a coloured woman. His unhappiness is the result of his prejudices; he is the victim of the conditioning imposed by an outdated culture. His later association with Prosper, an illegal African immigrant, is not a sign that Jules has realised that he behaves in a discriminatory manner. It is a way to justify his decadence since he claims that he has been corrupted by Prosper:

Moi, Jules Souvillon, de race blanche, honnête citoyen canadien, bon fils, universitaire, apprenti écrivain, ex-amoureux, prenant goût à la tequila mais refusant de tomber dans l'ivrognerie, je suivais un nègre, habité par la haine et la violence, qui me conduisait sur la route du crime. [*LTD*, p.187]

In this sentence, one immediately notices the dichotomy between *race blanche* and *nègre*: the former is associated with words that connote honesty (*honnête*), cultural and

geographical legitimacy (*citoyen canadien*), respect for older generations (*bon fils*; Prosper is an orphan), education (*universitaire, apprenti écrivain*); the latter suggests destruction, violence (*habité par la haine et la violence*), and corruption (*la route du crime*). It is important to underline Jules's passivity in this sentence: he is led to commit criminal offences; he does not choose to do so. Here, the social class argument is eventually dropped, unveiling Jules's true feelings: he is prejudiced against coloured people.

In Navarre's *La Dame au fond de la cour* (2000),²⁹ Camille, who is from a wealthy background, befriends an Algerian couple. They tell her how their quality of life has waned over the years: they arrived in France twenty years earlier and have made a living there; their children have been brought up and educated in France. Twenty years on, the couple feel that they are more discriminated against than when they had just arrived; they are bullied by their neighbours and white people in general, the police put them in custody, the French administration tries to repossess the flat that it had allocated to them, etc:

Je suis berbère, dit l'homme, les clients me parlent de moins en moins. Comme si je n'avais pas ma place ici. [...] Djema et moi sommes arrivés il y a vingt ans. Nos fils sont mariés. Ils travaillent. Ils sont qualifiés comme on dit, fondus. Ils sont plus vous que moi. [DFC, p.13]

By becoming their friend, Camille is in turn discriminated against: her neighbours are suspicious of her and treat her like an enemy, or, rather, like a traitor sold to the enemy, so that she has to endure their ironic comments:

«On reçoit des lettres d'Algérie maintenant?, on joue les grandes dames du fond de la cour, on fricote avec le Front islamique?» [DFC, p.105]

Camille, in Navarre's novel, is a character who associates with people from other racial, but also social, backgrounds. Like Olivia (Sénéchal's character) after her return from India, Camille is conscious of the prejudices of her social and cultural group; and like Olivia, who decides to live in a multicultural suburb, away from a wealthy family, Camille lives in Paris, at the far end of a courtyard, isolated from people and family members. Olivia's choice to live in a working-class suburb can at first appear very noble:

Je ressortis à l'angle de l'église Saint-Nicolas, dans un quartier populaire et multi-ethnique où les gens n'aiment pas s'aventurer seuls le soir. J'y venais souvent. [...] J'aimais de plus en plus ce quartier. Des familles d'origines et de couleurs différentes s'entassaient dans des conditions peu reluisantes, dans des immeubles mal entretenus dont les façades me rappelaient les murs lépreux de Calcutta. Beaucoup d'enfants à jouer dans les rues. J'étais bien, je me sentais plus libre que jamais. [PA, p.104-11]

²⁹ Hereafter DFC.

Olivia seems to be motivated by her desire to live a simpler life, in line with her experience in Calcutta. However, one cannot help thinking that Olivia has the choice of living wherever she wishes. She is surrounded by people - mainly migrants - who have come to Québec to get a better life and, once there, are still struggling to make ends meet. In Olivia's depiction, there seems to be an indefinable charm to this way of life. However, having a well-paid profession, she has the luxury of being able to opt out of this 'poor lifestyle' at any time. As for Camille, she does not seem to try hard to become someone else: contrary to Olivia, she rebels against her group in order to be herself. She has the courage to stand against the values of her own conservative family instead of circumventing them,³⁰ and she endures the consequences of her choices:

Camille ne serait jamais modeste. Contre cela, autre handicap, elle s'est toujours insurgée, une insurrection comme un défi de caste, un goût rebelle de l'absolu, alors que les siens, de rang et de protection, se sont, depuis plus d'une décennie, repliés sur eux-mêmes jusqu'à l'étouffement. Qu'attendent-ils du pouvoir sinon la capacité de s'allier à des actes plus généreux, à des projets plus ambitieux, tout ce qu'ils n'osent pas risquer. [DFC, p.131]

Not only does Camille live on the margin of society by choice, she has also been marginalized by others. She does not seem to mind being associated with other minority groups. Without embracing all of their values, she nevertheless feels empathy with them as well as understanding, as she is aware that they are marginalized by the dominant culture on account of the colour of their skin or their lifestyles. For example, Camille, who has assisted a young homosexual friend dying of Aids, receives a letter from his aunt after his death, that explains that she could never behave like Camille:

Oui je suis de ces gens-là qui ne veulent «ni voir ni savoir», je l'admets sans aucun grief à votre égard [...]. Comment vous dire qu'il n'y a pas d'alliance avec «ces gens-là», même si l'on est de même naissance. [DFC, p.108]

The aunt implies that Camille is marginalized because she accepts people as they are, for what they are. One notes that she even avoids naming homosexuals, but calls them *ces gens-là*. Conversely, Camille appears to be able to reach the 'true' personality beyond social prejudices. Camille is Navarre's answer to social and/or racial tensions as she keeps an independent mind and challenges prejudice. This method, however, is not entirely effective as this type of character is more often than not ostracized because of it. This is demonstrated in *Ce sont amis que vent emporte* (1991):³¹ the main characters, a male homosexual couple dying of aids, have never made a secret of their lifestyle. David, a

³⁰ One can imagine that Camille's bourgeois family is of the same cast as the bourgeois family in *Douce France* (1990).

³¹ Hereafter CSA.

talented dancer, has always managed to avoid the issue of 'fitting in' by travelling professionally and for leisure. But their families have not come to terms with their homosexuality and, as a result, have but little contact with them. When they become so ill that they are no longer able to travel, they encounter problems with their neighbours who disapprove of them, and their families keep even less contact with them. In the end, despite the help and support that they receive from a network of friends - their reconstituted family - and the wider homosexual community, they die alone.

If Navarre suggests that one should stand for one's ideas despite the risk of rejection (i.e. he would rather emigrate to Québec than compromising his beliefs), other writers offer a different attitude: they suggest that one should try to ignore or detach oneself from the past, and take the opportunity to make a fresh start possible through migration. In Bossus's *La Tentation du destin* (1996), Jules goes to France, but he does not mix with intellectual and artistic circles and does not even seem interested in France itself: he chooses a part of France that seems isolated in timelessness and that offers an island of peace in which to write. As for Sophia, an Italian girl that Jules meets during his adventures in Florida with Prosper, she is adamant that she emigrated to live in the present and escape the pressure of traditions:

Mon frère tire une certaine fierté de nos ancêtres. Moi, je m'en fous, je me moque du passé, je ne m'intéresse qu'au présent et qu'à l'avenir. Silvio songe parfois, nostalgique comme un vieil éléphant, à retourner en Italie. Je préfère tourner le dos à ce pays et plonger, chaque matin, dans le plaisir de vivre le jour annoncé. [*LTD*, p.131]

Sophia rejects the traditions that might have limited her movements, but also that might have rejected her. In Sénéchal's *Le Pays d'ailleurs* (1999), Olivia follows the same line of reasoning:

Je me fiche des grottes, des sculptures, des musées. J'ai arpenté jusqu'à l'âge de dix-huit ans les galeries et les musées du monde. J'ai visité les monuments et les ruines, j'ai grandi gavée des vieilleries de la Terre à en être rassasiée. Le présent et l'avenir me fascinent, le passé m'indiffère. Nous n'y pouvons plus rien. [*PA*, p.209]

Olivia goes even further than Sophia: it is not only her own culture from which she dissociates herself, it is the whole Occidental culture that she wants to be rid of. She is looking for a new identity with the future in mind, not the past over which she feels she has no power. By concentrating on the present, she feels she can become the maker of her own identity.

As for Marois, the concept of identity seems derisive: people can adopt markers of cultural identity without 'belonging' to a culture itself, as if wearing a mask or a parallel

identity. Pierre and Matthias set upon reviving the Breton culture without actually being Bretons themselves. They unashamedly adopted the traits that suited their ambitions and fantasies: what they saw as old ways and traditions were merely myths and legends, a made-up 'culture'. In Marois's work, one feels that cultural identity has become a product or merchandise that can be acquired by consumers. When in the past it might have been shaped by history, it is now manipulated by invisible but powerful economical forces: Josée is first surprised when she discovers that the French couple with whom they exchanged houses owns the same collection of books and records, but she assumes that it is because they belong to the same generation:

Je me suis rassurée en pensant que ce devait être normal, vu que nous sommes nés dans les années 1960. C'est logique de se retrouver avec tout le kit de notre génération. C'est sans doute ce qu'on entend par culture globale et mondialisation. Ça s'appelle la standardisation. On persuade les gens qu'ils sont uniques et on leur vend la même cochonnerie sur tous les continents. Belle leçon d'humilité. [AP, p.20]

For Marois, it seems that globalisation is the end of genuine cultural identity: everything is available to everybody anywhere in the world more or less simultaneously; anyone can buy oneself a 'cultural identity'. Bossus develops a similar idea, but, here, globalisation signifies the end of the Occidental world as we know it: he depicts a vision of the future in which the planet will be the battlefield for the war between the Occidental and Oriental cultures. Here, Jules's boss exposes his fears of invasion by other cultures, but also his plans to contribute to the fight:

Et le vieux Gareau, ricanant à son tour, avait dit: «Tu devrais apprendre l'arabe ou le chinois. – Pourquoi, monsieur Gareau? – Parce que les barbares vont envahir l'Occident d'ici à vingt ou trente ans, et il sera très utile de connaître leur langue. – Pour leur vendre des chaussures? – Mais non! Pour leur vendre tout ce qui les tuera, eux aussi, mon petit Jules: le tabac, l'alcool, les drogues, la luxure, le cancer, l'infarctus, l'automobile, et le reste...» Puis il avait éclaté de rire, remuant sur sa chaise et faisant craquer ses rotules, avant d'ajouter: «Moi, j'échapperai à ce cataclysme!» [LTD, p.18]

We are far from multiculturalism and the cohabitation of different cultures here: the vocabulary is one of disagreement if not aggression and violence. Confrontations with other cultures are described in medical terms of disease and virus. The 'body' of a chosen culture has to fight the threat of contamination by a foreign one in order to survive. Evolution and hybridisation are not considered as valid compromises in order to survive. This vision of antagonistic nations fighting for their survival reflects a still imperialist view of the world and culture; despite rejecting their native country's display of this attitude, French authors seem to be reluctant to adopt the trends of postcolonial creolization.

Conclusion

Migration in the work of French authors is a very personal experience. Whereas other migrant writers relate to a community left behind or to a recomposed one in Québec, the French seem to do everything they possibly can to dissociate themselves from their culture and cultural group. They do not try to assert or recompose an identity; instead, they try to lose part of it. They tell of their disagreement and disappointment with their country and fellow citizens. Allegedly, France is the subject of their inspiration, but it is rather a negative one: it is the object of their criticisms and the source of their bitterness and resentment. Even happy memories seem to be irretrievably lost. In their view, France seems decayed and incapable of evolving with its time, and, in comparison, Québec is a symbol of modernity.

As opposed to other migrant authors, migration for the French resembles an escapist attitude: they want to liberate themselves from their nation that they see as corrupt or no longer compatible with their personal aspirations, while retaining their cultural identity. They choose Québec in the hope of finding a more fulfilling life. However, their depiction of Québec seems flawed from the beginning: their knowledge of the province does not seem to be based on facts but on hopes and imagination. In their novels at least, Québec is a preserved enclave that has kept alive the traditions and values that made the renown of France, but has managed to preserve its innocence in the face of modern times. If they do not describe the tribulations of migration, it is because they do not consider their decision such a life-changing experience: they are merely changing territory; the culture - in their view - is the same, only purer.³²

French writers' uneasiness is not only due to the decadence of which, in their view, their culture is the victim, but also to the idea that their identity is manipulated by the process of globalisation and migration: all elements of race, class, culture, history, values, religion etc. are either hidebound or mixed up. Everything is available to everybody. The past that traditionally shaped one's identity is therefore devalued and loses its intrinsic

³² There is no evidence, at least in their novels, that French authors change their mind about Québec once they live there. We know, however, that, despite the enthusiastic departure depicted in *La Terrasse des adieux au moment de l'adieu* (1990), Navarre returned to France less than three years later. Camille in *La Dame au fond de la cour* (2000) – one of Navarre's fictional alter egos – is a character created after his return in Paris. Camille leads a very solitary life in a modest Parisian flat, isolated or alienated from friends and family.

individuality. The only way out of this predicament, suggested by this group of writers at least, is a life in the sheltered intermediacy that Québec - in their view - provides.

Chapter 2: Middle Eastern writers: Breaking free from an oppressive past.

Introduction

The second group of our chosen migrant writers originates from Middle Eastern countries. Naïm Kattan was born in Baghdad and migrated to Québec in the 1950s, after spending a few years in France. Nadia Ghalem is from Algeria and Mona Latif-Ghattas from Egypt; they both arrived in Québec in the early 1980s. Lastly, Dominique Blondeau was partly educated in Morocco, despite being born in France, and moved to Québec in 1969. The particularity of this group is that all of its members are, on the whole, economic migrants, and so are the characters that they create.

Even though these authors include some elements of their culture in their narratives and analyse the causes of migration for the members of their community, they do not dwell on them, nor do they express many nostalgic feeling at having left their country of origin. In fact, although their origins influence their work, Middle Eastern writers do not hesitate to go against their traditions to achieve their personal goals. This is particularly clear in the case of women whose migration allows them to break free from cultural patterns and acquire a certain independence.

In this group, maybe because their migration is voluntary, the topic of memory is not predominant. Instead, more attention is given to the influence of culture and customs on one's personality and sense of identity. Cultural patterns appear at different levels in the texts, and determine the treatment of topic, but also the use of language(s).

The choice of language

The selected Middle Eastern writers all share the same mother tongue, Arabic, and the same language of adoption, French. Although they have clearly chosen to use French as their language of artistic expression, Arabic is nevertheless present in some of their narratives. The occurrence of Arabic words is rare and is limited to two occurrences in our corpus. The first use is in Naïm Kattan's *Farida* (1991).³³ A few lines of an Arabic song are quoted during the first contact between Salim and Farida, who will later become a singer. The translation is given in brackets:

Ya laili, Ya aini (Ô nuit, Ô mes yeux). [*Fda*, p.40]

³³ Hereafter *Fda*.

The second occurrence is in Latif-Ghattas's *Le Double conte de l'exil* (1990).³⁴ It is the name given to Madeleine by Fêve, the illegal immigrant that she has sheltered. He calls her 'Mariam Nourr'. The occurrence of the original language happens on an important occasion in these novels, and is an indication of the true identity of a character. This can be put in parallel with Madeleine reverting to her original Native American name at the end of the novel when Fêve leaves. In this novel, the character of Madeleine is used by Mona Latif-Ghattas to plead for greater racial tolerance. Madeleine, who rejected her Native American name of Manitakawa since she was a little girl and tried to mix in, progressively stands against racial prejudices. Re-endorsing her original name signifies endorsing her history and her full identity.

In Latif-Ghattas's *Les Lunes de miel* (1996),³⁵ it is not the Arabic language as such that is included in the text, but rather an imprint of it on the French language. In this novel, Tante Eulalie, who is originally from Egypt, is the narrator of most stories. She transposes into French the imagery of the Arabic language and translates proverbs and other sayings. The narrator herself notices this mannerism:

Elle me dit ce jour-là, dans ce français arabisant et coloré que possèdent les dames éduquées en Orient: «Tu sais ma fille, en Orient, quand on achète une pastèque, on ne sait jamais d'avance si elle est rouge et sucrée ou blanche et amère. On la choisit par instinct, on l'emporte et on l'ouvre chez soi. Eh bien, le mariage c'est comme une pastèque. Si elle est rouge tant mieux, si elle est blanche tant pis pour celui qui l'a choisie et qui en a payé le prix.[...]» [LDM, p.12, my italics]

Expressions, such as 'Foi de Tante Eulalie', for example, copied on Arabic idioms, are disseminated in Tante Eulalie's narratives.³⁶ Tante Eulalie herself is aware of her colourful phrasings that cross between languages and she feels the need to explain some of them. Here, she explains that Raouf could not find a suitable wife because he did not like any of the girls to whom he was introduced.

Aucune d'elles ne remplit son œil, comme on dit en Orient. [LDM, p.218]

This imprint on the French language gives a more authentic and colourful note to the character of Tante Eulalie. Slightly disorientating for a Québécois reader, it is an interesting insight into a foreign language: the use of a different system of images offers a slightly different point of view on things and situations. It underlines the fact that migrants

³⁴ Hereafter LDCDE.

³⁵ Hereafter LDM.

³⁶ Adverbs such as *bennia* (vernacular) et *ouallah* (common language), or the adjective *tebet* – spelt phonetically here- reflect Tante Eulalie's expression 'Foi de...'. See Ed Gasselin. *Dictionnaire français arabe (arabe vulgaire- arabe grammatical)*. Paris: Édition Ernest Leroux. 1880, and Jean Jacques Schmidt. *Dictionnaire français-arabe arabe-français Mots utiles de la vie courante*. Paris: Édition Duphin. 1982.

might share the same language, but they do not necessarily have the same understanding of the same situation, that they might see and express things in a different way. Language in itself does not shape one's identity, but the images that it carries do. According to Ruthellen Josselson, language is part of the process of 'embeddedness'.³⁷ Through language, one reveals his or her place within the society that he or she lives in:

Our language expresses our embeddedness in one nation or another; our accent within that language identifies our social class or place of origin; our choice of vocabulary links us to certain subgroups. We speak from our place within a society.³⁸

By choosing an *oriental* vocabulary in French for her character, Latif-Ghattas deliberately places her at the border between her ethnic community and the new society. Tante Eulalie proves to be the one that facilitates the crossings from one culture to the other and reconciles traditions and modern life for other characters.

Furthermore, most characters in these novels and short stories often seem to be multilingual and therefore able to move from one country to the other. For example, in *Les Lunes de miel* (1996), Vava, who belongs to the Egyptian Greek community of Alexandria, can speak six different languages.

Vava parlait le grec, l'italien, l'allemand, un peu d'anglais et un peu d'arabe. Mais sa langue de prédilection, c'était le français. [LDM, p.126]

This is a determinant factor in Vava's choice of country when she and her family are forced to leave Egypt. They first move to Greece, then Italy. She then acquires the rudiments of English when they emigrate to Canada, but she eventually decides to settle in Québec because she loves the French language and speaks it perfectly:

À Montréal Vava recommença à vivre. Elle retrouva très vite plusieurs amies d'Alexandrie et surtout la langue française. La ville lui plut d'emblée et, très vite, elle nota les possibilités qu'elle offrait aux émigrants de culture française. [LDM, p.127]

For Vava, learning languages has been part of her wealthy education and lifestyle. It becomes a useful skill, however, when she and her family emigrate as it facilitates the process of their settlement.³⁹

³⁷ Ruthellen Josselson, 'Identity and relatedness' in H.A. Bosma, et al. (eds.). *Identity and Development*. Thousand Oaks: London, New Delhi: Sage Publications. 1994. p.84-102.

³⁸ *Ibid.* p.98.

³⁹ This is a clear advantage when compared to less fortunate migrants who barely understand the national language. In her autobiographical narrative *Lost in translation* (New York: Penguin Group. 1989), Eva Hoffman, for example, relates the problems she and her relatives encountered when they arrived in Canada. Because they only spoke a rudimentary English, they could not explain themselves, could not understand others well, and felt isolated and alienated by their differences. Not speaking the language very well made relationship with others seem awkward and impersonal.

In Kattan's *La Reprise* (1985),⁴⁰ learning another language is not only a means of settling quicker in a new environment, it is instrumental to personal freedom and independence. In the short story 'La Conquête', Habiba and her husband have come from Baghdad to Montréal in the hope of setting up a business. Habiba's husband, Mourad, does not speak English or French very well and makes little effort to improve in either of the official languages. Habiba, on the other hand, takes lessons in both languages while her husband is at work:

Pendant ce temps, Habiba perfectionnait ses connaissances linguistiques et pouvait mieux que son mari converser dans les deux langues officielles du pays. [LR, p.108]

This proves to be a good investment when Mourad dies unexpectedly and Habiba has to take charge of the business. In fact, under her management, the business booms because she is able to read and understands official documents correctly, deal with clients directly, etc. By learning French and English, Habiba is also able to escape her normal circle of acquaintances (i.e. members of her community exclusively) and, when her spouse dies, does not have to depend on anybody to get what she wants. Previously denied any sort of personal decision, Habiba becomes her own master and is able to develop her personality according to her own interests, desires and rules. She acquires a total independence.

But multilingualism can be a two-edged sword for some characters and some writers. In Kattan's *Le Rivage* (1979), the main character of the short story 'L'Attente' (p.165-79), Mimi, can also speak several languages and seems to consider her linguistic versatility an asset:

Quelles étaient ses connaissances? Les langues étrangères. Ni diplômes, ni expérience précise. Les langues, encore les langues. Elle les signalait comme si elle indiquait autant de portes qui s'ouvraient sur le monde et sur l'avenir. [LR, p.167]

In this short story, though, language is obviously dissociated from identity: Mimi is rootless, a perpetual migrant. Multilingualism in her case is a consequence of migration, a symptom of her not belonging to anywhere in particular. All languages feel 'empty' to Mimi because she does not invest them with any values, she does not associate them with any emotions or memories. She remains on the surface of languages. They are mere tools of communication through which she is incapable of expressing any deep feelings. Her personality - and her physical appearance as she is often mistaken for different nationalities - seems to vanish in this Babel of languages because she does not identify with any of

⁴⁰ Hereafter LR.

them. To quote Ruthellen Josselson, languages have not embedded themselves in her, and she has certainly not embedded herself in any of them.⁴¹

In Latif-Ghattas's *Les Lunes de miel* (1996), Farida - who is Egyptian - has always admired French language and culture and thought them to be superior to others, including her own. She sees her wedding with a French civil servant working temporarily at the embassy as:

une promotion pour une jeune Égyptienne amoureuse de la culture française. [LDM, p.203]

She enjoys all the privileges attached to her husband's occupation:

En épousant Pierre Prince, Farida avait eu soudain accès au meilleur de son pays. Un appartement à Zamalek meublé à l'européenne, un cuisinier bien payé, un abonnement au Guézirah Sporting Club, des billets de faveur à l'opéra du Caire, les réceptions dans les ambassades, les excursions en Haute-Égypte, dans le désert, les oasis et autres lieux que les Égyptiens ne pensent pas à visiter et qui portent des merveilles d'héritage culturel que seuls les étrangers entreprenants et cultivés savent découvrir. [LDM, p.204]

This suggests that Farida never really had the opportunity to learn about her own country's history and heritage, which is only accessible to an elite of high-ranking officials and foreigners. Furthermore, with the French - and European - colonial influence being so great at the beginning of the twentieth century, Farida was probably educated in the European style to the detriment of her own culture. Farida's attitude towards French culture and language is the result of the failure of her own country to provide an education with views to develop some level of nationalistic pride.⁴² As a result, her people's status can be assimilated to that of colonised people, as described by Albert Memmi:

De même que la mémoire de l'individu est le fruit de son histoire et de sa physiologie, celle d'un peuple repose sur ses institutions. Or les institutions du colonisé sont mortes ou sclérosées. Celles qui gardent une apparence de vie, il n'y croit guère, il vérifie tous les jours leur inefficacité; il lui arrive d'en avoir honte, comme d'un monument ridicule et suranné.⁴³

This is also partly why Farida was so infatuated with her French husband at the beginning of their marriage: she was marrying into the culturally dominant class. When they move back to Paris, she thinks her dreams have come true: she will experience French culture for herself:

Arrivée à Paris, Farida se trouva en train de réaliser les rêves de toute sa jeunesse égyptienne qui avait baigné dans la langue française et sa littérature. Elle fit le pèlerinage de tous les lieux saints où vécurent les romanciers, les poètes, les peintres et les artistes qui lui avaient servi de modèles. [LDM, p.205]

⁴¹ Ruthellen Josselson. *op.cit.* 1994. p.98.

⁴² The French authors, we recall, reject this kind of conditioning aimed at making 'good citizens' out of them. Too much conditioning or the lack of it seem equally sound reasons for the selected migrant writers to go elsewhere to 'find themselves'.

⁴³ Albert Memmi. *Portrait du colonisé*. Paris: Gallimard 'NRF'. 1985. p.122.

This short story, however, quickly shows ambiguity in the attitude towards the use of the French language. Living in France, Farida realises that, even though she has embraced France and its language, she will never be accepted by French people. She is made to feel like a foreigner or, worse, like an intruder, despite the fact that she shares the same language and cultural references:

Farida fut reçue avec une gentillesse mêlée de réserve. Une Arabe, ça ne va pas de soi. [LDM, p.206]

Her qualifications as a teacher are not recognised either. In Québec, on the contrary, the situation is reversed: her skills and knowledge are welcome and valued. Her differences are accepted and, more importantly, the language that she speaks is seen as an advantage and not a cultural encroachment; she is made to feel that she can fit in.

In *Les Jardins de Cristal* (1981),⁴⁴ Nadia Ghalem's character, Chafia, is fully conscious that the language she speaks does not 'belong' to her. For her, using French is a commodity more than an asset. Chafia, like many others, was made to learn it because her country - Algeria - has been under the yoke of imperialist France. In the novel, which is, in fact, a long letter to her Algerian mother who lives in Paris, she explains how using the language of the occupying culture is a dispossession because people are colonised and alienated within their own mind:

J'ai couru le monde, j'aurais voulu te dire comment on nous voit, comment ILS nous voient, les étrangers, ceux qui ne savent rien de nous. Ils savent que nous parlons leur langue, ils ne voient pas que nos pensées sont abîmées, tronquées, lourdes de mots inutilisés. [JDC, p.20]

'ILS', here, are clearly the French who are responsible for the colonisation of her country, but it also includes the other francophones: although they all share the same language, its significance is different as it is invested with different values and memories. French language, for the Québécois, is a constituting and uniting part of their identity; for Chafia, it represents an ambiguous tool, both of oppression from colonialist occupants and of freedom as it is a way to escape her alienating society. For her, language is never a means of inclusion.

Causes of migration

Another major topic in Middle Eastern writing in Québec is the account of the reasons why migrants have left their country. Most of the time, they are driven by economic reasons, but a small proportion of them are forced out of their country of origin by a dangerous

⁴⁴ Hereafter JDC.

political climate or even war. Like Haitians (as we will see in the next chapter), these migrants have no choice but to leave if they want to live in safe conditions: some are able to pay their way out of the country, others are helped by relatives who already live in Canada; in the last resort, some immigrants take their chance and stow away on boats. For most characters of Latif-Ghattas's *Les Lunes de miel* (1996), it is a conjunction of factors that lead to their decision to migrate. The change of political regime in Egypt acted as a catalyst: Nasser came to power and, as a result, the country became less tolerant towards foreigners, other cultures and especially religions other than Islam.

Au début des années 60, le régime de Nasser avait nationalisé les entreprises privées, et séquestré les biens des familles riches qui, se sentant désormais indésirables, émigrèrent vers des pays d'accueil comme le Brésil, l'Australie et le Canada. [LDM, p.103]

In this extract, we sense, however, that the decision was made for economic reasons: their business and possessions were being confiscated and, at the same time, Canada was an expanding country, a land of opportunities. In Latif-Ghattas's previous novel, *Le Double conte de l'exil* (1990), Fêve is an illegal immigrant who has arrived from a country devastated by war and violence. Soldiers have taken away not only his means of living, but also his dignity and sense of identity. In Fêve, there is no trace of nationalism: before the war, he was barely surviving on a poor piece of land, and then he became a victim of the war in which he has no interest. Like thousands of other refugees like him, Fêve is in search of a place to settle down, where he can be safe at last. When asked by a fellow illegal immigrant where he comes from, Fêve remains vague:

-D'où?
-Du désert.
-Moi Salvador. Et toi?
-De loin.
-Famagousta...? Negev...? Arménie...? Karabakh...?
-Oui.
-La guerre?
-La guerre. [LDCDE, p.126]

Patriotism does not seem to matter to Fêve. In fact, his sense of belonging seems to have disappeared when he became a victim of war. It is significant that his country, in the novel, has no precise name; it could be any Middle Eastern country, and Fêve could be of any ethnic origin or any religion. Fêve is happy to be able to share his traditions - which, again, are not specified clearly by the narrator - and some personal memories with Madeleine, but does not show any signs of nostalgia or regret at having left his country. This is what he intends to say at his interview with the emigration officer:

Que racontera-t-il à l'agent lors de la première entrevue! Toute la vérité. Oui. Tout ce dont il se souvient et qui, pour lui, tient lieu de vérité, même s'il continue de penser quelquefois que de larges séquences de son passé se sont déroulées hors du réel. Oui, il ne lui dira que la vérité. Il racontera comment l'obus a traversé sa petite maison de pierres blanches. Comment il n'a pu retrouver, dans les débris, ni cadavres, ni papiers. Un agent humain saura croire ce récit, même en l'absence de témoins. Oui, il dira. Il dira qu'après maintes rebuffades il est enfin parvenu jusqu'aux autorités pour demander de nouveaux papiers. Il énumérera les humiliations après lesquelles on lui a signifié que, pour obtenir une nouvelle identité, il devait désormais changer de nom... et de couleur. Cela, l'agent ne le croira sans doute jamais. Ni le reste de son histoire d'ailleurs... ni le reste... le vol de sa terre... le viol de son amour... Il s'était jeté à la mer pour rejoindre le rêve perdu... Un cargo-providence l'a repêché... Par hasard, il faisait cap vers la Nouvelle Terre... C'était la pure vérité. [LDCDE, p.138-9]

Fêve's story is one of humiliation, violence and persecution. Migration, for him, was not a planned project, as it was for the wealthy Egyptian families of *Les Lunes de miel* (1999) or the French writers; it was a desperate effort to save his life, which succeeded largely through good fortune.

Even though Madeleine - Fêve's friend in Québec - has not had to flee her own country, she can relate to Fêve's experience because she was made to feel a foreigner in her own country. She too has left her past and origins behind in order to achieve a 'better life'. Brought up in an Indian Reservation, she understands feelings of humiliation and dispossession, feeling herself alienated from her own cultural identity and in exile in Québécois culture. She has been the victim of constant humiliation and disinterest from 'white' people, and knows the dispossession of her people's land and the destruction of her culture. She could be called a migrant in her own country as she goes through the same process of integration and rejection as newly arrived migrants. Unlike Fêve, at the beginning of the novel, she has decided to play by the 'new' rules: she has changed her name, and has erased all visible trace of her Native American origin.

Madeleine n'a jamais fait partie d'aucune majorité. Même quand elle était enfant. À l'école, les autres enfants la trouvaient trop brune-rouge. Ses tresses étaient trop longues et ses cheveux trop noirs. Il y avait rarement une place pour elle à la ronde ou à la marelle. [...] À l'époque, ses grands-parents vivaient sur la réserve indienne située à cent milles de la ville. Elle y passait souvent les fins de semaine et les congés des fêtes. [...] En grandissant, elle avait coupé ses cheveux et les avait éclaircis à l'eau oxygénée. [LDCDE, p.104]

Distancing herself from the stigma of being a Native American is the first step for Madeleine towards liberation. She breaks the cycle that was putting her down. She avoids confrontation, but she lives a life of solitude between two communities. Madeleine has taken one step to independence but has stopped until the moment she helps Fêve. The meeting of Fêve and Madeleine is significant: not only is it the encounter of two cultures, it is also, for both characters, the opportunity to rediscover their cultural identity. The process

of finding about one another leads them to find about themselves, and they become more aware of their own identities and cultures.

When it comes to expressing one's cultural identity, Liette and Raouf in *Les Lunes de miel* (1996) are trapped in a social dilemma. Their story is an example of an impossible love story in a Middle Eastern country like Egypt: Liette is Jewish and Raouf Muslim. Their families and respective communities are opposed to their union. By migrating, they hope that they will be able to overcome, or at least ignore the pressure from their communities. For a while, Liette and Raouf are able to elude the religious and social prejudices by first leaving their native country where they would face daily opposition to their union, then by avoiding the Middle Eastern community in Canada.

Sur cette terre libre, leur différence de religion n'avait pas d'importance. Mais dans le milieu des émigrants venus d'Orient, on continuait à les regarder comme des gens hors la loi. Ils évitèrent le milieu et les gens qui les gênaient. Parmi leurs collègues de travail et leurs voisins, ils se firent de nouveaux amis. [LDM, p.218]

For them, migration is the answer to their hopes because it enables them to abandon the part of their social identity that had become a constraint. They can tone down the importance of religion in their lives, without rejecting it completely. Changing their social group also plays an important role because they are able to select people instead of 'being born with them'. For them, Québec is a place of tolerance, which allows them to retain their cultural identities and free themselves from the restrictive traditions that prevailed in their native country.

This opportunity to escape from constraints is particularly true for Middle Eastern female characters. Even though it is generally assumed that most women migrate to follow their husband or relatives, they uncover or hope for an added benefit to migration: a freedom of movement and thought that they did not have before and certainly would not have been able to gain in their own country.⁴⁵ If social freedom was not uppermost in their mind at the time they decided to leave, they soon realise how restricted their existences were before. In *Les Lunes de miel* (1996), the character of Aglaë Balthazar remarks on the

⁴⁵ Cecilia G. Manrique, et al. 'Third World Immigrant Women in American Higher Education', in Gregory A Kelson and Debra L. DeLaet (eds.). *Gender and Immigration*. Basingstoke: McMillan Press Ltd. 1999. p.103-23.

Cecilia and Gabriel Manrique's observations come to a similar conclusion: 'Although economics may play a significant part in the decision to migrate, both our survey and our interviews reveal that non-European immigrant women often migrate to carve out a role and a life that is significantly different from what would be traditionally expected of them in their home country. The new wave of immigrants come from countries where the views of women's roles and, therefore, the options for women are still 'traditional' – centered on marriage and the raising of the family. When these women come to the United States, oftentimes to study, new avenues, once taken, are very difficult to leave. [p.116]

noticeable change in the daily activities of her friends who previously could never have held paid employment:

D'abord, elle fut un peu déçue par le manque de disponibilité de ses amies. Elles lui semblaient soudain bizarres, enfin, différentes de ce qu'elles étaient en Égypte. Plusieurs d'entre elles travaillaient de neuf à cinq pour aider leurs maris à boucler le budget. Elles rentraient fatiguées de leur journée de travail, devaient à toute vitesse préparer le dîner et s'occuper de la famille. [LDM, p.105]

Aglaë's friends might not seem liberated to a Western reader as their employment seems to enslave them even further; they have not yet achieved an entirely fulfilling life-style and still have to perform the traditionally female tasks at home. However, this might still be seen as a step towards independence: these women are now mixing with Western women and are exposed to new concepts and ideas. One may note from the previous extract that women are quicker to adapt than their male counterparts. Not only do they assume their traditional tasks and fulfil the duties that are expected of them in their cultural upbringing and community, they also take on new tasks imposed by the necessities of living in a new country. Men seem absent from this extract, and, throughout the selected novels, they take little – if any – part in the whole adaptation process to the lifestyle of their adoptive country.

A somewhat greater liberation from the traditional patriarchal exploitation of women in households of Middle Eastern origin comes about, albeit mainly by accident, in Naïm Kattan's *La Reprise* (1985). Habiba is a woman who has been brought up in a traditional Middle Eastern society that deprives women from taking any decisions for themselves, or from playing any role in society. In Québec, she continues to leave all-important responsibilities to her husband. His fatal heart attack forces her to take an active role in the family business and acts like a wake-up call for her:

C'était son mari, son soutien. Il était l'homme et il savait ce qu'il faisait à son bureau. Et justement, il ne savait pas. Habiba ne s'était jamais posé la question. Était-il intelligent? Il ne l'était pas. C'était évident. [LR, p.110]

Whereas, previously, Habiba was not encouraged to think for herself, she suddenly begins to question her own beliefs and actions. Habiba's life is turned upside down by the discovery that the rules by which she has led her life until then were largely designed to maintain her in an inferior status. The sudden change in her circumstances gives her a new and revelatory perspective on herself. She finds that she too can be as capable as a man. She tries to alert her daughter, who was brought up in a similar manner, and advise her that she too can drop the mask of the submissive woman that she is meant to play in front of

men. In the following extract, for example, Habiba's daughter complains that she does not understand the legal implications of her father's will and wishes that her husband was there to deal with the situation:

-Dommage que Yossi n'ait pas pu m'accompagner. Je ne comprends rien à tes histoires d'avocat.
-Il n'y a rien à comprendre. C'est clair et simple. Tu n'as pas à jouer les pauvres femmes ignorantes.
[LR, p.114]

Unlike her mother, Habiba's daughter refuses to go against her traditional upbringing and lifestyle, maybe for fear of having to fight a life for herself and giving up much of what she has, or maybe she simply cannot free herself from the social rules that have been engraved in her over the years. Naïm Kattan further details this type of paternalist society in *Farida* (1991). The novel is set in Baghdad in the 1930s, although it seems that little may have changed for most Iraqi women since then. The narrator, Salim, has fallen in love with Farida, a servant in his neighbour's house. He invents all sorts of reasons to meet her but, when the day of their first meeting actually dawns, he admits to himself that the risks of such a meeting are unequal, Farida having more to lose as a woman than he has as a man:

Ce rendez-vous avait-il un but particulier? Il allait le lui demander, mais de crainte de la brusquer, il se tut. Elle était venue à lui et elle courait des risques énormes. Lui? Rien ne pouvait lui arriver. Déshonorer une fille? Pour lui, ce serait une preuve de virilité. [...] Un héros, un conquérant. Et elle? Une prostituée. Elle se donne à un homme. Elle se dévoile, elle se met nue. Elle avançait sur un chemin de feu. Elle hypothéquait son destin. Sa vie ne serait plus jamais la même. Il n'en était que plus amoureux. Jamais il ne l'abandonnerait. La chute l'attendait mais il serait là. Il écartait le sentiment de pitié, de compassion envers la femme futive. Il sera l'homme. Il ne trahira jamais son rôle, sa qualité d'homme. [Fda, p.44]

Laws in this type of society are unjust towards women: they only have duties and are at the mercy of men who have almost total power over them. Salim is only too aware of this and he dreams of a more egalitarian society, influenced by Western ideas that he gleans from American films at the cinema:

D'ailleurs, la mère ne mangeait jamais avec les hommes. Elle les servait. Salim rêvait aux films américains dans lesquels la mère, la sœur, s'asseyaient à côté du mari et des garçons et tout le monde riait, parlait... [Fda, p.16]

Unlike Kattan who migrated, Salim will never experience equality between men and women. Furthermore, he seems happy to placidly comply with the conditions that he would abolish in his dreams. The real condemnation of this type of society comes in the outcome of the novel. Salim who has accepted sheepishly the rules has to flee his country, aided by Farida, when he is faced with fraudulent charges of corruption. Farida, who has challenged all conventions for love and taken risks, is the real winner: she has cleverly

taken advantage of all situations and accumulated earnings and property over the years. Her money and national reputation as a singer ensure her a certain independence denied to other women in her country.

In Nadia Ghalem's *Les Jardins de cristal* (1981), Chafia, the narrator, is running away from her fate. Despite the war against France for the independence of Algeria, little has changed in the country for women. The country might be free from the colonial oppression, but women are not free from the phallogentric tyranny of their fathers, brothers and husbands. Chafia sees her mother as the descendant of a long line of oppressed women who are subject to men; Chafia feels different and wishes to dissociate herself from her mother and the values that she represents.

Des temps de paix, après la chaleur éclatante du jour, et vos cris, mère... Vos cris, vos histoires de vaisselle-cuisine-bébés-fatigue. Vos cris qui nous blessent les oreilles, parce que vous n'avez jamais eu le loisir de rêvasser. Vous faites partie des animaux domestiques de l'Homme, de mon père. Vous êtes domestiquée. Vous ne vous révoltez pas. J'espérais ne pas vous ressembler... [LJDC, p.23-4]

Chafia's mother incarnates the traditions that she, the new generation, angrily rejects. She has witnessed the consequences of being considered inferior, both at home on her mother but, also, on her father who was denied the honours given to soldiers who fought for France on the basis of the colour of his skin. Chafia has also observed the consequences of the war for independence and has witnessed that it is possible to rebel against the established order that suppresses one's freedom. She is conscious of educational patterns and she sees the necessity to break the vicious circle, the cultural 'heredity' that would maintain her in enslavement.

Mais à pleurer de mère en fille nous risquons de faire une chaîne de larmes qui nous retiendra prisonnières de la même eau empoisonnée et qui risque de nous noyer. [LJDC, p.26]

For women whose life was governed by men, migrating to Québec is a potential liberation because it offers the opportunity to emancipate oneself from cultural patterns and to escape from a society that regulates women's lives. Not only have Western women in Québec fought for and achieved their rights; they also set new examples and new role models for the newly arrived immigrants. Middle Eastern women have, therefore, more opportunities to acquire a new lifestyle, because the pressure of their native society on them has been - at least in theory and according to the laws of their adoptive country - lifted. They now live in

a culture that recognises their individual rights to freedom, education, status, etc. They are allowed - encouraged even - to be independent in all aspects of personal and social life.⁴⁶

Idealising one's origin and past

In Dominique Blondeau's *Les Feux de l'exil* (1991)⁴⁷ and to some extent in Ghalem's *Les Jardins de cristal* (1981), the main female characters choose exile in the hope of escaping unhappiness and are faced with the prospect of an unfulfilled life. Chafia's life has been shattered by the war in Algeria; she is unable to get over the shock of violence and oppression. She also realises that her future, if she had stayed, would have been similar to her mother's. She refuses to submit herself to a husband and rules of a society that she sees as obsolete, and to be treated like one of the 'animaux domestiques de l'Homme' [JDC, p.23]. Therefore, she left Algeria, although not without regret and pain:

La guerre est finie, la vie est recommencée depuis longtemps, mais je ne m'en étais pas rendu compte. Je me suis exilée moi-même dans cette Amérique de béton et d'acier avec la nostalgie toujours présente des harmonies ocres et bleues de l'Algérie, de l'accent aussi et des mélanges de langues que nous faisions sans nous en rendre compte. On ne s'éloigne pas du pays de son enfance sans mourir un peu. [JDC, p.118]

In this extract, Chafia contrasts the harsh lines of 'Amérique de béton et d'acier' to the 'harmonies' of colours and sounds of Algeria. It shows her attachment to the land, but not to the culture in which she was raised.⁴⁸ Leaving her country is compared to leaving an earthly paradise, a loss of innocence: for Chafia, migrating is a process of growing up, of achieving maturity. After migrating to North America, Chafia feels as though she has lost part of herself but, in fact, she has now conquered her independence and re-conquered her identity:

Au bout de toutes ces années de labeur et de dépression, je [...] n'ai plus honte de mon narcissisme, j'ai fait ce qu'il fallait pour avoir enfin le droit de dire 'moi' sans penser à mes parents, mon milieu, ou à tous ces liens qui me sécurisaient parfois et d'autres fois m'entravaient. Je suis sortie de la domesticité. Me voilà libre. [JDC, p.103]

⁴⁶ This contrasts, for example, with Carol Shields's latest novel *Unless* (2002), which claims that women in Canada (and elsewhere) are still deprived of opportunities and positive representations. Women have acquired rights, think, create, etc., but their work is, nevertheless, belittled by social habits that tend not to take women seriously. The difference of standards and expectations between the presentation of Middle Eastern writers and that of Carol Shields seems astonishing, but indicates the degree of pressure to which Middle Eastern women are exposed.

⁴⁷ Hereafter *LFDE*.

⁴⁸ This reminds of the French authors – even though France can hardly be compared to an oppressive nation - who are proud of their cultural heritage and attached to the French territory, but who can no longer cope with their disagreement with the current French society.

Anastasia in *Les Feux de l'exil* (1981) also chooses exile voluntarily, but for a different reason. She has been raised in Morocco by foster parents, but only realised the truth about them when her European biological parents came to take her back. For her, this is the beginning of an identity crisis: she feels that she belongs with her foster parents, with their Arabic culture and traditions, and she utterly rejects her birth parents and their occidental culture. However, despite attempts to maintain links with her foster culture, Anastasia is unable to retrieve a place in it. She subsequently drifts from country to country and, eventually, decides to settle in Québec:

Elle n'avait jamais pensé qu'elle pouvait être de la famille des déracinés. [...] Elle a couru afin que Marrakech ne la rattrape pas. Octobre fleur bon à Montréal et pourquoi charrier en soi des senteurs fanées? [LFDE, p.14]

Even though Anastasia has a rather favourable impression of her life in Montréal, she seems unable to put her past behind her. Her memories haunt her; she suffers hallucinations, for example, and is dissatisfied that she cannot recreate her Moroccan lifestyle. Despite having constructed a life in Québec, Anastasia lets her memories invade the present. This is represented by the cancer that slowly eats away Anastasia's life and eventually kills her.

Ghalem and Blondeau stand out from the other selected Middle Eastern writers because they depict characters who feel nostalgic when evoking their country of origin. Anastasia and Chafia are probably the only characters who express nostalgia for their past and native country. Their memory of 'home' is closely linked with the evocation of childhood. These intertwined memories create the impression of a place of no return, an Eden to which they are no longer allowed admittance. Both Anastasia and Chafia seem to have left a part of themselves behind when they migrated. At the beginning of Ghalem's *Les Jardins de cristal* (1981), Chafia's description of Algeria is very much one of an idyllic place of abundance. The description, that appeals to all senses, is in complete opposition with the rest of the novel: evoking her country and past, the narrator sounds alive, aware of her body and her sensations, whereas in Québec, she seems confined to a small student room or to the boundaries of a hospital's grounds. Her independent life in cold Québec bears little resemblance to her carefree childhood in vibrant Algeria. In the description, it looks as if everything has reached a paroxysm, all feelings are exacerbated: Chafia's carnal passion for her country is at its height, nature is ripe and ready for harvest, smells are sweet and spicy, men and women are at their best in their traditional roles. The

picture, even though not entirely satisfying and already showing signs of discordance, shows Chafia's unconditional love for her childhood country.

Mon pays. Ce premier et effroyable amour. Cette passion sauvage quand nous nous roulions dans l'herbe fraîche pour atténuer la morsure du soleil. Passion sauvage, inconditionnelle, multiple qui me rattache à l'or clair des feuilles d'oliviers, aux odeurs sensuelles de la terre assoiffée buvant la pluie par ses craquelures desséchées, cette terre qui se fissure de vergetures avant d'enfanter le moindre épi de blé, le moindre brin d'herbe et qui, pourtant, gorge de suc les troncs rugueux des arbres afin qu'éclatent au bout de leurs branches ces fruits sucrés que l'on déguste comme on fait l'amour dans les draps frais des chaudes nuits d'été. Ce pays de marées humaines, loqueteuses et hurlantes, parfumées de l'odeur vanillée des corps vivants que la chaleur et la fureur mouillent de transpiration luisante. Peuple de colère et de joie. Peuple des mélodies enivrantes de la musique orientale qui porte sur ses ailes les paroles indéfiniment répétées des douceurs poivrées d'une poésie qui n'en finit pas de saouler. Peuple d'hommes durs et musclés, de femmes "maternantes" et de ces vieilles qui berçaient nos enfances angoissées sur leurs seins ridés, en murmurant des mots aux résonances rauques et tendres. [LJDC, p18]

But the adult Chafia knows she cannot go back there; she is separated from it by the memories of the destructive Algerian war, the Muslim regime that replaced the French administration, and the restrictive attitude of men towards women. Living in exile, in a cold, unfeeling «Amérique de béton et d'acier» [JDC, p.118] is the price of independence for Chafia. *Les Jardins de cristal* are a frozen and fragile representation of this initially happy period and place. The narrative, addressed to Chafia's mother, is a means of reconstituting the past, of justifying her reasons for leaving and opposing traditions; it is also for Chafia an exploration of her cultural heritage and the foundation upon which to start a new life.

Similarly, in Blondeau's *Les Feux de l'exil* (1991), Anastasia is longing for her life in Morocco. She recalls the beauty of the desert, the bustling *souks* in which she knew her way, and the simplicity of life. Like Chafia's, Anastasia's reminiscence appeals to all senses. From the very first page of the novel, Anastasia is introduced as a very sensuous character:

Elle affirmait en plaisantant qu'elle faisait l'amour avec le soleil, que depuis sa naissance à Marrakech, les odeurs, les senteurs, les parfums et le soleil en plus s'étaient emparés de son esprit et de son cœur. [LFDE, p.11]

Anastasia appears like a luminous person; her whole body and soul seem to be inhabited by the essence of Morocco. She recalls the simple, uncomplicated life that she used to lead with her foster parents:

A Marrakech ses parents nourriciers possédaient peu. La fille des ruines lui avait appris le détachement de tout. A Marrakech elle dormait sur une natte ou enroulée dans une couverture de poils de chèvre. Pour le boire et le manger, des figues, des grenades, des dattes. Et l'eau. L'eau propice. Oui, la fille du ramadan lui avait appris à se détacher de tout. Elle s'était tue à propos des cœurs et même des âmes. [LFDE, p.40]

She recalls her basic and frugal life in the lushness of the *souks*, in contrast with her modern lifestyle in a Northern American city, where she benefits from an abundance of food and technology: in Algeria, nature appeared to provide and fulfil all her needs; she had no greed for possession. Here, again, childhood – linked to the country of origin – is presented as an earthly paradise, a natural place to which one longs to return. Caren Kaplan explains this longing for return in *Questions of Travel – Postmodern Discourses of Displacement*, as follows:

Various manifestations of nostalgia participate in Euro-American constructions of exile: nostalgia for the past; for home; for a 'mother-tongue'; for the particulars that signify the experience of the familiar once it has been lost. Such nostalgia is rooted in the notion that it is 'natural' to be at 'home' and that separation from that location can never be assuaged by anything but return.⁴⁹

It is because Anastasia (and Chafia) knows that she has been excluded forever that she fosters the nostalgic longing for 'home'. The idea of an impossible return gives a mythical sense to Anastasia's memories, echoed in their magical aspect. As a child, she has listened to and believed in Morocco's legends. Her evocation of her friendship with 'la fille du vent'⁵⁰ is comparable to these legends. In Anastasia's eyes, 'la fille du vent' looks like a witch or fairy, and seems gifted with magical and divination powers. 'La fille du vent' could guess her friend's feelings and became, to a degree, Anastasia's double. Her death - or, rather, her disappearance - itself becomes a sort of legend:

La fille du vent a disparu dès qu'Anastasia a quitté Marrakech. Certains ont prétendu l'avoir croisée dans le Sahara; certains l'ont vue assise au pied d'un acacia, dépouillée de tout, les vêtements déchirés et brûlés par la violence des intempéries. D'autres ont raconté que les moines la recueillirent dans leur monastère; ils l'aidèrent à se lever, la moitié de son corps avait pris racine dans le sable. Elle ne put déplier ses jambes et mourut. D'elle, les moines voulurent faire une sainte. [LFDE, p.34]

Whereas health and happiness transpire through these memories, we learn that Anastasia's childhood in Morocco was based on a lie. The parents whom she thought to be hers were, in fact, foster parents who had found her in the desert. When, eventually, her real parents returned for her, she has to give up her adopted culture to follow them, and feels betrayed and cheated. From then on, she is never able to fit again into Maghreb society, despite her efforts; she has been locked out of Eden and her childhood:

Anastasia vouée au mystère de sa naissance, extirpée malgré elle de son enfance et de son adolescence, séparée de la fille du désert, comprend qu'une personne sollicitée violemment se tait ou s'enfuit. [LFDE, p.55]

⁴⁹ Caren Kaplan. *Questions of Travel – Postmodern Discourses of Displacement*. Durham: Duke University Press. 1996. p.33

⁵⁰ This character is a variation on the will-o'-the-wisp character found throughout world literature.

Anastasia carries in her memory an inspiring past and country, yet, like Chafia, her past and her old self - of which 'la fille du vent' can be the symbol - is irremediably lost and is in total contrast to her present life.

Even though Chafia and Anastasia have a nostalgic approach to their country and their past, they are both conscious of the process of remembering and of the transformations that occur in one's mind. They are both aware that their memory might play tricks to enable them to cope with present situations (like their exile, for example), and that all might not have been as ideal as they now remember.

A Marrakech, la mémoire d'Anastasia va et vient, comme les marchands d'eau sur la place. [...] De la Chine au Maroc, les écrits d'Anastasia s'opposent entre vérités et mensonges. Le souvenir qu'on embellit, le visage qu'on idéalise ne sont-ils pas des miroirs inversés nous permettant d'inventer le pays natal tel qu'il ne fut jamais? [LFDE, p.17]

As for Chafia, she admits that her memory is certainly not infallible and anything that she might recall is subjective and transformed by distance and time. The most important thing for her, nevertheless, is to convey her feelings. In her view, memory is a source of great, conflicting emotions, be they pleasure or pain, not just a source of inspiration for her work as a journalist:

Comme je ne suis ni bionique, ni caméra, vous n'aurez de lui [le passé] qu'une image déformée à travers le prisme infidèle de ma mémoire. [...] J'ai souvent porté l'avenir dans mon ventre et le passé dans ma tête, et ils étaient si lourds l'un et l'autre que je ne sais lequel des deux m'a fait basculer en premier. Mais le fait est que j'ai basculé. Maintenant, j'essaie de parler et mes paroles ne rendent que des impressions, telles celles que des peintres fous essayent de jeter en même temps que leurs couleurs sur une toile, pour dire au monde leur nouvelle façon de voir, et qui finissent par s'aveugler eux-mêmes avec une tache d'un jaune lumineux qu'ils n'arrivent pas à traduire. [JDC, P.86]

Although Anastasia idealizes the past in her memory, she does not seem able to stop it from superimposing itself on the present, enhancing the dullness of the present by the beauty of the past and blurring the linearity of time and the geographical borders. In the following extract, for example, the shift from one country to the other, from one time to another is barely perceptible:

Pas plus qu'à Marrakech, à Montréal elle ne possède rien. Que des levers de soleil sur l'océan et des couchers de soleil sur la palmeraie. Sur les avenues, elle se souvient des orangers sauvages dont les branches ployaient sous le poids des fruits; les fleurs s'épanouissaient, suaves. Elle en cueillait un bouquet, arrachait les pétales avec lesquels elle se frottaient le visage et les mains. Elle mordait dans les oranges et sa bouche imprégnée de leur acidité la faisait grimacer. [LFDE, p.28-9]

The circumstances that prompted Anastasia and Chafia to choose a life in exile were quite different (i.e. being retrieved by birth parents and escaping a restricting patriarchal society) to those that forced characters of other selected novels to emigrate (typically fleeing war or

poverty). Consequently, Anastasia and Chafia both feel that they have 'died a little'⁵¹ when they left, while other Middle Eastern characters have little regret about their decision of migration.

Conformism and rebellion against old social rules and order

Often, when they arrive in Québec, immigrants instinctively seek the assistance of their community, which, in the first instance, provides help. But, in the long run, such communities tend to reproduce the old ways of the societies that immigrants have left behind. In Latif-Ghattas's *Les Lunes de miel* (1996), one catches a glimpse of what is like to live in such a small community, in which everybody knows each other's deeds and thoughts. The novel aims to recreate, through a few characters, the atmosphere of the Egyptian community. Even though most characters have adopted the ways and fashions of their new country, they are all, for various reasons, expected to perpetuate old traditions by their peers.⁵² Christine grew up in Québec and has benefited from a North-American style education. The influence of such ideas and behaviours has led her to oppose then distance herself from her parents and community, who try to perpetuate traditions and recreate a lifestyle that resembles that of their country of origin. Through Tante Eulalie's stories, she gets the chance to rediscover the people of her community and understand their motivations; she learns more intimately about their personalities, their relationships, their relatives, their dreams, etc. Until the time that she met Eulalie, Christine was estranged from her community because she has adopted Québécois women's attitudes to relationships. She wishes to live on her own, have a career and refuses the traditionally female tasks (such as getting married, for instance). Her attitude contradicts the traditions and social expectations of her family and the Egyptian community. By the end of the novel, Christine reconciles her own expectations with those of her community: to the traditional ceremony of marriage, she introduces the notions of personal choice and decision; she indeed gets married, but on her own terms. By doing so, however, she secures her place back within her community and attends the social gathering of the year: the wedding of Martine and Stéphane. Tante Eulalie's narratives have shown to Christine

⁵¹ see *LFDE*, p.33 'Où tu iras, tu vas mourir un peu...' and *JDC*, p.118 'On ne s'éloigne pas du pays de son enfance sans mourir un peu.'

⁵² Marco Micone remarks upon a similar phenomenon in Fulvio Caccia's *Sous le signe du phénix* (Montréal: Guernica. 1985. p.265.): the Italian community living in Québec changes very slowly despite appearances: «Les mentalités changent très lentement en dépit des discours rassurants mais mensongers que les notables tiennent aux autorités québécoises, à l'effet que les italophones s'intègrent à la société québécoise sans difficulté.»

that her fierce opposition to her parents and their traditions alienate her just as much as a thoughtless, unconditional embrace of them. The underlying message of Eulalie's stories is to know oneself and one's origins. Conflicts arise between Christine and her parents because they stopped communicating and refused to compromise. They ended up in two distinct groups, separated by misunderstanding.

Migration is often the opportunity for characters to emancipate themselves from the old social rules that regulated their lives previously. While their ethnic community often recreates some of these rules in the adoptive country, the legal system does not enforce these traditions and, thus, they can simply be avoided if individuals wish to avoid conservative members from their community. Many Middle Eastern characters attempt this. Feeling that there is nothing to go back for in their native country, they show a will to change and to adopt new ways of life. Such characters see their migration as a positive life-changing experience and they are keen to embrace many of the values of their new country. Fêve, for example, is literally in love with Québec; it seems that he is in complete osmosis with it through the intermediation of Madeleine:

Il a aimé ce pays comme on aime la femme qui vous sort de l'enfance. Absolument. Il a appris sa langue et lui a transmis des fragments de la sienne. Il venait de si loin. [...] Elle [Madeleine] avait patiemment répété ces mots qu'il ne comprenait pas. Il les avait attentivement écoutés avec l'ardent désir de les inclure dans son destin. [LDCDE, p.9]

For Vava, the constant traveller in Latif-Ghattas's *Les Lunes de miel* (1996), adopting a new way of life is a social strategy: she has been brought up in the rich circle of Alexandria in Egypt, and feels that she should maintain the same standards in Québec. She soon realises that she has to adapt her values to the new country and temporarily adopt new ones:

Vava, quant à elle, réalisa que son système d'images n'impressionnait pas les gens d'ici, habitués aux choses pratiques et à la simplicité. Elle se trouva donc obligée de se rabattre sur "l'égyptiannerie" qu'elle avait tant dénigrée, mais décida de jouer sur tous les tableaux. Elle tentait d'impressionner la société alexandrine en exil en montrant combien elle était intégrée au milieu canadien. Elle allait faire du patinage sur glace avec ses filles, tondait le gazon, organisait des épiluchettes de blé d'Inde et des parties de sucre. Puis elle décidait un jour d'éblouir ladite société en organisant une fête qui leur rappellerait soudain la vie opulente d'Alexandrie. Il fallait faire des prouesses pour recréer des atmosphères de là-bas. [LDM, p.128]

In this extract, we note that Vava has identified a few elements (clichés?) of the Québécois way of life and she uses them to show how integrated she is. She also uses elements of her own culture to impress people of her community and maintain the façade of an upper-class lifestyle. In doing so, she hopes to fulfil expectations from both worlds: she is exotic for the Québécois, and a model of integration for her community. She creates the illusion of

perfect harmony. Even though Vava is mostly faking integration, superficially she is an inspiration for all women of her community.

Women are more often than not the instigators of change. We have discussed earlier that they come from societies that have restricted their responsibilities, decision-making and personal autonomy. Consequently, migration is a revelation for them and they become the ones who push back the boundaries of tradition the furthest. In *Les Lunes de miel* (1996), Tante Eulalie tells the story of Theodore, the only son amongst eight children. Even after the whole family emigrated to Québec, his wife tries hard to maintain the Eastern tradition, which allows Theodore to dictate decisions single-handedly for the whole family. His sisters, now married to Western husbands, have agreed to concessions in the name of this tradition but, now realising the ridiculousness of the situation, put a stop to it:

Le *mythe* du “chef de famille” avait fini par fondre avec les neiges de Montréal. Les filles de Dora commençaient, elles aussi, à mépriser ce *cirque* où le fils était encensé, adulé, supporté, sous *prétexte* qu’étant de sexe masculin, il était destiné à perpétuer le nom. [LDM, p.177, my italics]

In fact, the underlying message of most - if not all - of Tante Eulalie’s stories is the awakening of women and their refusal to obey the old rules. Tante Eulalie remarks to Christine:

Ne t’étonne pas, car les femmes d’Orient ne savent pas toujours combien la vie au Canada les a rendues lucides. [LDM, p.187]

Women seem to reject the role that they had to play in their previous society. Even though women’s movements have now developed in a number of Middle Eastern countries, female characters – in our selected novels at least – only seem to encounter these ideas when they settle in Québec.⁵³ Surrounded by a different culture, they now question the workings of their own. In *Les Lunes de miel* (1996), there is another example of rebellion in the character of Marie Maccabe, married to one of the Trix family. This family is as a tight-knit group, and any spouse is treated as an intruder and belittled constantly. Marie decides to fight back and goes against family and social traditions: not only does she contradict her husband and his family but she also, ultimately, divorces him (along with the rest of their family):

⁵³ We can draw a parallel with Régine Robin’s *La Québécoise*, in which the narrator, as we will see in the following chapter, explains how she has found a community in the female population of Québec. She has rediscovered herself by following the example of other women and their relaxed and free attitude.

Marie avait ouvert les yeux à bien des choses. Elle se demandait soudain pourquoi on la reléguait toujours au deuxième plan, sous prétexte qu'elle n'était que l'épouse de Trix qui, d'une part, refusait qu'elle travaille à l'extérieur et, d'autre part, lui faisait sentir qu'il l'entretenait. [LDM, p.187]

Marie refuses to be treated like an inferior being, and takes the opportunities that Québec's law offers her to attain her independence.

In Kattan's *La Reprise* (1985), the character of Habiba is the incarnation of this type of 'rebellious' woman. As mentioned before, she successfully takes care of the business after her husband's heart attack and death. This, however, is not enough for Habiba. She manages to deprive her daughter of her inheritance in order to keep full control of the business. Although, at first, Habiba attempts to maintain a façade of normality to avoid confrontation with the community (e.g. by observing the period of mourning), she soon flies off on a cruise where, away from the community's spying eyes, she discovers freedom: she no longer has any bounds financially, socially or sexually:

Elle chercha dans son souvenir son visage de jeune fille, de jeune femme... En vain. Des photos? [...] C'était une autre femme. Mère consciencieuse et épouse soumise. Maintenant, elle avait commencé une vie nouvelle. Fortune et plaisir étaient disponibles, à sa portée. Elle voyait des hommes, les accompagnait, dansait avec eux. Libre. Une femme libre, comme n'importe quelle Occidentale, sauf que celles-ci ne savaient même pas ce que cela voulait dire. [...] Elle n'agissait plus comme une petite fille orientale qui ne consomme pas de boissons alcooliques, mais le vin lui donnait des maux de tête et l'alcool, des brûlures d'estomac. [...] Née à une mauvaise époque, au mauvais endroit, elle s'était mariée au mauvais moment et n'était pas tombée sur le garçon qui l'aurait comblée. Et la voilà qui découvre le désir, l'envie de vivre alors que son corps est décrépit, un instrument suranné, qui n'obéit plus. [LR, p.121]

In her fifties, Habiba starts a new life, delineated by new social rules, or the lack of them as it seems to her. Her attitude would be shocking if divulged to the rest of the community but, little by little, she reveals her new self whilst attending important social occasions. In contrast, Semha, in the short story 'Les rêves de la mère' (*La Reprise*, p.159-80), lives her Canadian life only through the accounts of activities and relationships of her daughter Joyce. Lacking the confidence to start an entirely new lifestyle (like Habiba did), she chooses to live the Canadian way by proxy and is frustrated by her daughter's lack of ambition for a career or a less conventional way of life.

In Ghalem's work, independence for women is accompanied by guilt: as we have seen earlier, women try desperately to shake off the cultural patterns instilled into them by their mothers, but doing this also entails the renunciation of a part of themselves: they have to forget attitudes towards men like timidity and submission, and have to learn how to stand up for themselves. In fact, they have to reinvent for themselves the concepts of 'being a woman' and of 'femininity', which were controlled by men in their native

country. New cultural concepts help women redefine their personal identity, their role within society and their position towards men. In Québec, Chafia has found a community of women who support each other in accomplishing this. She relies on a group of women led by

les plus jeunes qui se sont lancées à corps perdu vers une liberté trop longtemps espérée et qui ressentent parfois les fatigues et qui nous donnent à toutes, avec cette arrogance un peu naïve, le pouvoir de dire 'Je', même si nous ne sommes pas tout à fait sûres d'exister. [JDC, p.125]

Chafia gives two specific examples of other women, role models, who, like her, have rejected their legacy of alienating cultural patterns, and who, daily, have to prove themselves and struggle against their own fear:

Victoire sur le voile et la timidité, [Hayat] ira avec son casque et ses bottes sur les chantiers discuter avec les ingénieurs et les ouvriers de ces murs dont elle a rêvé pour mieux enfermer la paix des autres. Et Latifa qui est née en prison en 57 et qui passe un temps fou à présenter ses amis à d'autres amis et qui dit en riant: « Moi, je suis une fille de la prison. J'étais collée à ma mère et ma mère n'a jamais eu peur des soldats et tout le monde croit que c'est ma sœur parce qu'elle est jeune et belle.» [JDC, p.125]

In *Le Double Conte de l'exil* (1996), Latif-Ghattas chooses a Native American character, Madeleine, to demonstrate that the act of rebellion can take the form of accepting one's true origin. Madeleine, who at the beginning of the novel hides her origin to avoid racist comments and exclusion, decides to readopt her Native American identity and way of life. She presumes that, having Native American ancestors who once owned the territory of Québec, she has rights in Québec, and she wants to use these rights to help the clandestine immigrant Fève stay:

Madeleine se leva calmement, lui prit les deux mains, le regarda dans les yeux avec cette force que personne ne soupçonnait et lui dit: «Je suis une Québécoise, moi. Une ancienne du "Kébec". Tu sais ce que signifie "Kébec"? "là où passe le fleuve." J'ai des droits sur cette terre et je te garderai...» [LDCDE, p.127]

For the first time, Madeleine finds the strength to stand up first to her colleagues who are making racist comments about newcomers, and then to the Immigration administration. Her reaction when Fève is refused a permit to stay in Québec is to invoke her Native American culture in the broadest terms. Calling out the names of lost languages, tribes and warriors, she hopes to find inspiration and strength to bring Fève back, to fight what she sees as an injustice:

Madeleine appelle, appelle, appelle ses langues d'origine... Béothuk, Tlingit, Haïda, Tsimshian, Wakashan, Salishan, Jutenai.....

Madeleine appelle, appelle, appelle ses peuples d'origine... Kutchin-loucheux, Peaux de Lièvres, Dagrit, Couteaux Jaunes, Nahanis, Chipenwyman, Castors, Sekami, Micmacs, Malécites, Naskapi, Mistassin, Moskégon, Algonkins, Ojibways, Tête de Boule, Crow, Cris.....

... Madeleine appelle, appelle, appelle ses prophètes... Shawnee Tecumseh, Ten-Squah-Tah-Wah, Pontiac, Sachem Ottawa, Wowocka, Handsomelake.....
 ... Madeleine appelle, appelle, appelle ses guerriers... Sitting Bull, Red Cloud, Crazy Horse, Spotted Tail, Cochise, Geronimo
 ... Plus le bateau s'éloignait du port, plus elle devenait mince, mince, jusqu'à la transparence, jusqu'à la disparition. Alors Fève, de loin, leva la main droite vers le ciel et hurla: «MARIAM NOURR.....» [LDCDE, p.160-61]

In the end, Madeleine does not succeed in bringing her old culture to the rescue and save Fève from a second exile. What she has gained, nevertheless, is inner strength and the feeling that things should change in the future. She becomes a dissident voice who tells the real story of the creation of Québec. She teaches the little girl she is looking after not the myth of the foundation of Québec, but the true history of the violence against and the submission of the Native people, and the greed of the colonizers. She is, at last, true to herself, to her people and ancestors, and to other people. Latif-Ghattas emphasizes again that it is only through the knowledge of one's own origins and new culture that one can reconcile both lifestyles. In this novel, Madeleine/Manitakawa is at the confluence of different cultures and languages, and she does not hesitate to learn and teach cultural elements. Her proactive attitude eventually pays off and makes her successful, like most of the like-minded female characters of *Les Lunes de miel* (1996).

Conclusion

Like other migrants, Middle Eastern writers reflect upon the reasons or motivations that led them out of their country of origin. Some migrants left because they felt estranged from others, refusing to submit to the current rules of that society, but most were forced to leave by political or economic circumstances. Although some characters express nostalgic feelings about their country of origin, they are mainly longing for their past: the country of origin is associated with childhood (a generally happy period of one's life), to which it is impossible to return. The Middle Eastern migrants who have been forced into leaving, however, seem less inclined to nostalgia. It is as though they see migration as an opportunity for a better life, rather than exile from the place they love. Traditions remain important to these characters, but they focus predominantly on changes.

Female characters are both more prone to and exposed to changes, and it is hardly surprising to find that women dominate this group of writers. When they arrive in Québec, they are either unaware of the new options offered to them in terms of personal freedom, or they are seeking a place that will allow them to express their voice. Either way, most women - at least most female characters in our selected novels - find independence and

freedom of expression. They rid themselves of the paternalistic traditions with which they have been brought up. They become a proactive force in the community which implements changes, embraces new values, and puts in practice newly acquired rights. At different levels, they are all influenced by feminist theories, which lead them to rethink their personal and cultural identity. Not only do they reinvent their concept of being a woman in light of their new lifestyle, they also re-evaluate their place within society and their own culture. The 'absence' of men is noticeable: despite a few positive male characters in the novels, men are mainly represented as inactive, useless, abusive, two-faced or weak. Compared to women, they undergo changes but do not embrace them. For them, migration is not synonymous with emancipation, but rather with a disintegration of their traditional way of life.

Chapter 3: Haitian writing in Québec: the importance of memory.

Introduction

The Haitian group of expatriate writers who have settled in Québec is, in comparison to the other groups included in this study, the largest, spanning several generations. For example, Émile Ollivier and Gérard Étienne belong to the first generation of political exiles; Dany Laferrière left Haiti in 1977; Stanley Péan and Marie-Célie Agnant are amongst the new generation, who, despite being born in Haiti, have spent most of their lives in Québec. This group offers a wider range of analysis, images and emotions about the migration process than any other group.

The selected Haitian writers can be characterized by their attachment to memory. It is not the kind of deconstructed memory favoured in Jewish narratives as we will see in the next chapter, nor the memory charged with mixed emotions of the French and Middle Eastern authors. Haitian writers seem to cherish their memories of Haiti and its people, and try to recreate its atmosphere in a large proportion of their novels. Although they blame the political regime that forced them to leave, their fondness for their country is such, in fact, that most express the desire to return and settle there one day. This idea subtends most novels, and is probably another important difference between Haitians and the other studied minorities. They do not – at least not immediately – consider themselves to be migrants but, rather, see themselves as exiles: in their view, they do not intend to settle permanently in Québec and hope to return ‘home’ in the future.

Haiti remains the centre of their preoccupations, and of most of their novels. In fact, the selected authors have produced a large number of narratives based on their life on their native island, and on their memories of that time and place. In these books, they usually present a positive and idyllic image of their past in Haiti, and it seems that, for them, writing is a means of mapping their culture and sense of belonging, not only for themselves but also for their readers. Although authors cannot completely avoid mentioning the climate of poverty, violence and oppression that exists in Haiti, they often choose to present it in a historical perspective, counterbalancing the recent poor decades with the heroic events of independence.

Memory and embeddedness

One of the characteristics of Haitian writing in Québec is the predominance of the past and its depiction. Memory is often seen as one of the key factors when it comes to defining one's identity. It is memory that ensures continuity in one's self, maintaining the link between past and present. Even though memory is a very subjective matter - and is therefore not always reliable -, it is the only certainty an individual has of being one and the same person throughout time. Along with its role in defining identity, memory plays a vital part in the processes of *enculturation*⁵⁴ or *embeddedness*.⁵⁵ These two similar concepts are the result of integrating with one's self the major components of one's culture: a language and its images, traditions, laws, religion, social behaviours, education, etc. As Ruthellen Grotevant explains,

We are embedded in our culture, which is embedded in us, creating a sense of identity that, if firm and well integrated, organize us to such an extent that we become unaware of it. We belong, we are connected, we are in the world that is in us.⁵⁶

Contrary to the French or Middle Eastern authors, Haitians admit to their national pride at being the first 'black' nation that shook colonial imperialism and gaining independence as soon as 1804. It is not surprising then that Haitian writers should turn to their memory (personal or collective) for inspiration and use their past to feed their work, be it openly autobiographical or slightly disguised.

It is significant that most authors should turn to their past for inspiration, because it is a way of denying the traumatic conditions and period of migration. Firstly, it looks as though authors wish to return to the unspoilt period before their political awareness, to the innocence of the time before their displacement. They show their 'embeddedness' in its purest state. Childhood narratives like *Le Charme des après-midi sans fin* (1998) and *La Chair du maître* (1997) by Dany Laferrière, *Alexis d'Haïti* (1999) by Marie- Célie Agnant, or *Mille-Eaux* (1999) and *La Discorde aux cent voix* (1986) by Émile Ollivier, all evoke the beauty and the luxuriance of Haiti together with its picturesque characters and unique history. Even though the Duvalier dictatorships are mentioned, their violence certainly does not overpower the narratives, as happens in *Le Cri des oiseaux fous* (2000), for example, in which Dany Laferrière recounts his last days in Haiti, hunted by the *macoutes*.

⁵⁴ Émile Ollivier. 'Quatre thèses sur la transculturation', *Cahier de recherche sociologique*, vol.2, No.2, 1984 (Septembre). p.75-90.

⁵⁵ Ruthellen Grotevant. 'Identity and relatedness', in H.A. Bosma, et al. (eds.). *Identity and Development*. Thousand Oaks; London; New Delhi: Sage Publications. 1994. p.84-102.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* p.98

Authors generally choose to put such painful memories aside to enjoy the pleasure of reliving their earlier, happy memories:

J'ai écrit ce livre pour une seule raison: revoir Da. [...] Et je les[les habitants de Petit-Goâve] ai tous revus.
Voici Da, assise comme toujours sur sa galerie au 88 de la rue Lamarre, en train de siroter son café.
Et aussi ce bon vieux Marquis qui vient se frotter contre ma jambe, en remuant la queue.
Le soleil de midi. Les rues désertes. La mer turquoise scintillant derrière les casernes. La ville fait la sieste. [CAMSF, p.295]

Such focus on memory may denote, however, nostalgia for the past. Ultimately, authors describe what they have lost and what they hope to find when they return. Their attempt to cling on so much to the past shows their angst at having to struggle to retain this part of their identity and maybe their dissatisfaction with their lot as exiles. Dissatisfied with the present, memory becomes a form of escapism.⁵⁷

Secondly, this recourse to reenacting the past is a way of reaffirming their cultural identity. The society in which Haitian authors have decided to settle tends to consider migration as a social issue. It provides migrants with material assistance and encourages them to 'integrate', to blend in progressively thanks to education and employment. This society is keen to 'absorb' the migrant flow but often overlooks the migrants' background. Memory, here transposed in literature, becomes the instrument for regaining one's individuality, and provides an opportunity to show the Haitian migrant community from a different perspective through Haitian characters and settings. Be they ostensibly real or entirely fictional, the characters depicted by migrant writers become part of the imagination of the reader, no longer in terms of faceless statistics, but in terms of representations of people, neighbours, co-workers, etc. Migrants can no longer be ignored under the pretence of ignorance of their past, of what they have been through. Sharing a piece of a migrants' past through literature initiates the beginning of a dialogue and a complicity with his adoptive country, and maybe provides the basis of a better understanding of his experience and his life. In the narratives, memory and 'embeddedness' manifest themselves in different manners: the interplay of languages; the recreation of the Haitian environment and atmosphere; the use of Haitian imagination; the evocation of the family and of the community.

⁵⁷ We will treat the source of their dissatisfaction in further chapters.

The languages

The linguistic allegiance of Haitian writers is split between vernacular Creole and formal French. On the one hand, Creole is their mother tongue and is used in all informal dealings. But, although Creole has emotional connotations, it also carries social stigma and is often equated with lack of education. Pride in Creole cultural identity is a fairly recent and sporadic development. French, on the other hand, is the language of education, of officialdom, and, for our writers, of intellectual development and achievement, despite being also associated with the oppression of the colonial era. In both cases, language carries the legacy of slavery. Their attitude towards both languages is ambivalent and reflects the dilemma faced by the population of Haiti: French remains even today an official language of Haiti despite its connection with colonisation and the fact that the major part of the population speaks Creole, which gained official recognition only in the late 1990s.⁵⁸ The use of both languages therefore splits the country: on one the hand, there is French, which is the language of oppressive officialdom, and on the other hand, there is Creole, the language of the Haitian people condemned to a parallel and enclosed world.

In Dany Laferrière and Émile Ollivier's work, for example, French is presented as the language of formality. In Ollivier's *La Discorde aux cent voix* (1986), for example, Madame Anselme and her daughter pray in French: the Bible and prayers are in read and recited in French (p.206-8). In Stanley Péan's in *La Mémoire ensanglantée* (1994), Leila, the narrator, recalls that her parents usually address her and her brother in Creole, but they switch to French for important announcements:

Mais allez savoir pourquoi, c'était de préférence en français qu'ils nous apostrophaient quand ils avaient quelque chose d'important à nous dire... [MEN, p.13]

And French is definitely the language of the law and its representatives. In *Le Charme des après-midi sans fin* (1998), for example, Djo, the local policeman, reads out aloud, in French, all official announcements on the public square, which, for most of the village crowd, is an incomprehensible babbling:

Finalement, Djo consent à expliquer en langue vernaculaire ce qu'il vient de dire. [CAMSF, p.181]

⁵⁸ Some 90 to 95 % of the Haitian population speak Creole according to the statistics provided by the website <http://www.saxakali.com/caribbean/LanahL.htm>. However, according the UNESCO website (<http://www.ibe.unesco.org/International/Databanks/Dossiers/rhaiti.htm>), French largely remains the language of alphabetisation and education - particularly in secondary schools and universities, despite directives from Haitian education authorities to encourage the use of Creole as the main language and bilingualism.

Here, Laferrière shows the pomposity and absurdity of this use of French: Haitian officials might use a language that is considered sophisticated, but it does not make their communication to the population more relevant because they do not understand it.

Education, provided in Catholic schools for the privileged few, is also delivered only in French. Da, the narrator's grandmother in *La Chair du maître* (1997) and *Le Charme des après-midi sans fin* (1998), takes pride in young Dany's good French education:

D'abord, à notre école, on ne tolère personne de plus de treize ans, alors que, à l'école nationale. Il y a des élèves de dix-huit ans. [...] Nous (ceux de l'école des Frères), tout ce que nous entendons autour de nous c'est: «Le seul travail que je te demande de faire c'est d'étudier.» [CAMSF, p.79]

... while, among the middle class, Émile's mother insists that he speaks perfect French at all time and not the vernacular:

Madeleine voulait que je m'exprime en français avec la précision d'un chimiste qui pèse ses poudres. La concordance des temps se devait d'être impeccable, le mot propre, l'expression imagée déposés à leur place comme des talismans; et c'était offense impardonnable que de trébucher sur le genre d'un substantif. [ME, p.59]

Émile Ollivier underlines his ambiguous relationship to French. Although, for him, French is associated with unpleasant memories of rules and repression from his mother and at school, it is, however, the language of literature. In *Mille-Eaux* (1999), the author recounts his love of reading from a very early age but, more importantly, he describes in great details his first literary experience, writing a letter:

Pour la première fois, le gosse écrivait, non dans le cadre de ses travaux scolaires, mais avec une stratégie de séduction. Certes la langue ne lui venait pas de l'extérieur; il l'avait intériorisée depuis quelques années déjà, dans une sorte de socialisation sauvage, subie, imposée; elle lui venait pour ainsi dire du dedans. [...]

Je date ma naissance à la vie d'écrivain de cet instant où, assis pieds ballants devant le bureau de mon père, sur cette chaise en acajou massif qui, compte tenu de ma taille, m'engloutissait, je dus rédiger une lettre de circonstance. [ME, p.24-5]

When examining this determining episode, at first, the narrator detaches himself from the boy that he was then. At this time, he can read and speak French perfectly, but it still remains a tool, a familiar but not yet personal element. When the narrator assumes the first person again, it is as though he also assumes the language fully and invests it with personal feelings too. There is a connexion, a fusion between the boy and the older man sealed by the purposeful use of French language.

Even though the authors are bilingual, the use of Creole in their narratives remains rather parsimonious and its influences on the French language are quite subtle. It is

invariably used as a way of transcribing a popular attitude. For example, Émile Ollivier quotes a Creole song and its translation in *La Discorde aux cent voix* (1986) to reinforce the popular – if not working-class – traits of Madame Anselme. The author also uses the *Cric! Crac!* formula, characteristic of popular and traditional Haitian storytelling, as children make fun of Diogène Artheau and invent this little song:

Cric!

Crac!

Devinez! Qui a la tête ronde comme un potiron et adore les têtes de poissons?

Maitre Diogène Artheau

Cric!

Crac!

Qui peut dire pourquoi le diable blanc a battu sa femme?

Pour une tête de poisson! [DCV, p.38]

In *Mille-Eaux* (1999), Creole is the language of imagination and fantasy. Émile transgresses his mother's orders for the pleasure of the image:

Ma mère ne ratait aucune occasion de tancer mes écarts de langage, tant en français qu'en Créole, car les expressions rudes, imagées, concrètes dont le Créole a le secret et qu'il m'arrivaient d'utiliser déclenchaient chez elle des accès de fureur folle.[ME, p.59-60]

It seems that Ollivier associates Creole with spontaneity, as opposed to associating French with effort and affected manners.

Dany Laferrière's novels, like *Le Charme des après-midi sans fin* (1998), do not use Creole as such but, instead, he integrates the popular tradition of nicknaming into the narrative. For example, when Vieux-Os – Dany Laferrière's nickname given by his family – is introduced to the local *hougan* (a sort of magician, herbalist and priestly intermediary between men and Voodoo gods), the Notaire Loné comments:

Voici Josaphat qui se fait appeler Nèg-Feuilles pour mieux mystifier les gens... [CAMSF, p.126]

Then it is the author's own nickname that is explained by Nèg-Feuilles:

Vieux-Os! S'exclame Nèg-Feuilles, c'est un nom très puissant, Vieux-Os veut dire que tu ne crains pas le temps. Vieux n'a pas peur du temps. Le temps court dans le même sens que Vieux-Os. Tu es le fils bien-aimé de la mémoire... [CAMSF, p.127-28]

A very appropriate - and visionary? - nickname indeed for a boy who became the author of autobiographical narratives like *Le Charme des après-midi sans fin* (1998), *La Chair du maître* (1997) or *Le Cri des oiseaux fous* (2000)! Laferrière also claims, in *J'écris comme je vis* (2000), that the French syntax of *L'Odeur du café* (2001) is influenced by that of Creole:

L'Odeur de café est un livre écrit en créole. Quand j'ai envoyé le manuscrit à mon éditeur, celui-ci m'a fait remarqué un fait assez étrange. S'il comprenait tous les mots, il peinait quelquefois à comprendre le sens de certaines phrases. J'ai repris tout de suite le manuscrit pour finir par découvrir que c'était la syntaxe du créole. D'une certaine façon, il était pratiquement impossible d'écrire un livre qui raconte mon enfance à Petit-Goâve dans une langue autre que le créole. Je l'ai écrit en français parce que la très grande majorité de mes lecteurs ne lisent que le français. Mais tout le livre se trouvait baigné dans une culture haïtienne dont le créole est l'épine dorsale. J'ai repris le manuscrit afin d'établir le texte en français. (...) Le fait est que je me perds dans ce fouillis linguistique. Je suis traversé par différentes langues, par différentes coutumes, par différentes histoires, qui se livrent une guerre incessante pour savoir qui va dominer mon esprit. [p.180-81, my italics]

According to the author, using French words is only accessory; the essence of the text is Creole.

Stanley Péan makes use of Creole in a very different manner. He scatters his narratives with Creole words, even though none of his novels actually takes place in Haiti; only a few brief episodes are set there. The author usually stages characters belonging to the Haitian community living in Québec. Creole words reinforce the 'exotic' aspect of the plots, inspired by legends, myths and political events from Haiti, and often result in the estrangement of the non-creolophone reader in his own language. We find words like *zombie* (though commonly used in French and English), *bizango*, *dechoukaj*, etc. in the course of the novels, usually referring to Haitian concepts which do not have a French equivalent. The characters explain most words, or, as in *Zombi blues* (1999) for example, a glossary is included at the end of the book, which gives a definition of Creole words as well as a brief description of Haitian people and events.

Like Péan, Marie-Célie Agnant's use of Creole is scarce, but serves the purpose of reinforcing cultural traditions and symbolism. Instead of using isolated words, Agnant includes whole proverbs, such as those recited by Ma-Lena to her grandson Alexis, who is about to leave Haiti; their underlying advice will help him to overcome the emigration process and keep his sense of identity. Furthermore, the novel - *Alexis d'Haïti* (1999) - concludes on a Creole word, *Ayabombe*, which is a greeting meaning 'good day'; for Alexis, this is the first positive thing that he hears since he left Haiti, and it is the promise of an improvement in his situation and an acceptance within a new country.

We have seen that the diglossia provides a linguistic basis to expatriate Haitian writers for the recreation of their native land. Although the Haitian readership can easily identify and enjoy these subtle references, it is interesting to note, though, that Haitian writers make sure that this does not exclude other francophone readers, by including explanatory notes in or with the text, and by blending the linguistic elements into the

themes and structure of the narrative. Again, here, this may be seen as an attempt by the writers to open the culture of their minority to a wider audience. They embrace all readers rather than writing solely for their own community; they chose inclusion over marginality.

The recreation of the original environment: 'mapping' memories

In addition to the use of linguistic markers, we note the abundance of geographical names: streets, squares, suburbs, towns, but also cafés, cinemas, shops, hospitals, etc. It seems as though authors attempt to paint an exhaustive map of Port-au-Prince and the whole island of Haiti by listing every place that they are able to remember. Names act like an incantation. In Laferrière's *Le Cri des oiseaux fous* (2000), for example, the juxtaposition of the names recreates the island in an impressionistic or even poetic style for the non-Haitian reader; but, also, it feels as though the narrator is trying to transcend or conjure the geographical and temporal distance:

Ma mère m'a conduit très tôt le matin à la Station Sud. Bruits de camions en partance pour la province (Léogâne, Grand-Goâve, Petit-Goâve, Mirogoâne, Jacmel, Baintet, Les Cayes, Jérémie, Part-Salut, Torbeck, Saint-Louis-du-Sud, Pestel, Corail, etc.). [COF, p.53]

The impression created by this abundance of details is that authors hope to bring back to life these far away places that they left several decades ago. The reader can follow accurately the characters' tribulations in town and beyond. More than an attention to detail, such enumeration sounds like a nostalgic attempt to immerse oneself again in the atmosphere of Haiti, a hope that names will recall and encapsulate the reality of the place. Geographical names, particularly in novels set in Port-au-Prince, the capital of Haiti, are also used as an indication of wealth. Not only do names provide a map of the city, they also chart a character's progress up or down the social ladder, thus contributing to the narrative framework. Like the character of Roseanna in *Bonheur d'Occasion* by Gabrielle Roy, Dany Laferrière's mother in *Pays sans chapeau* (1999) worries about having to move house to a worse area than that in which they currently dwell. The suburb in which one lives determines the social class to which one belongs, and one's degree of comfort in this third-world country.

Quand on perd son quartier, on perd tout. Un cadre dans lequel on peut être à son aise, des amis qui sont devenus avec le temps presque des parents, les petites épiceries qui vous fournissent à crédit parce que vous vous êtes fait une réputation de bonne cliente, l'école des enfants dont vous connaissez la directrice, le cinéma tout à côté. [PSC, p.42]

In *Mille-Eaux* (1999), we follow the young Émile and his mother through ever poorer suburbs each time they change house: from the house in Martissant, a middle-class neighbourhood, they move to a two-room flat in Chemin des Dalles, and then move again to Lakou Jadine, a basic accommodation in a working-class area. They eventually move in with Émile's grandmother because his mother is totally ruined:

On avait donc déménagé. Ce que Madeleine n'avait avoué à personne, c'est qu'elle avait hypothéqué la propriété de Martissant et n'avait pas pu rembourser. [ME, p.124]

Like Creole words and allusions, geographical names contribute to the recreation of the Haitian landscape and atmosphere, and also provide a web of references into which authors weave descriptions.

These descriptions show the beauty of Haiti with its luxuriant nature and colourful places - each with its own atmosphere - but somehow avoid mentioning the country's extreme poverty and state of desolation. In the fifth chapter of *Mille-Eaux* (1999), the narrator marvels at the beauty of Port-au-Prince, the town in which he was brought up. This chapter is a meticulous recollection of his childhood memories and experiences. It is a description made by an informed narrator, who seems to have explored Port-au-Prince in all its dimensions: it is a presentation of the city that appeals to all senses and whose thoroughness makes the reading experience an almost physical one.

Comment la mémoire assure-t-elle l'enchaînement du temps au-delà des ruptures qui en scandent les différents moments? Y aurait-il une autre manière de comprendre qui ne soit pas qu'avec son corps? Il y a des foules de choses qu'on ne comprend qu'avec son corps, sans trouver les mots pour le dire. Il y a des souvenirs qu'on ne sait pas dire. [ME, p.77]

Yet, despite being vivid and poetic, one cannot help but notice that the narrator seems reluctant to go beyond the account of sensuous observations of a young boy, refusing to pass on the analysis of the older man. Even in *Les Urnes scellées* (1995), which proposes a more objective vision of Haiti, detailed descriptions are the way to make memory more tangible and vivid, and to recreate the atmosphere of places. The narrator, for example, mentions the haggling skills of the vendors and their clients, and marvels at their eloquence with which they obtain the best deals:

Au marché, l'invective est jeu, elle fait sourire et appelle la réplique. [US, p.70]

In *La Chair du maître* (1997), we find a similar description of interaction at the market place:

"C'est la fête en plein marché du Samedi." [CM, p.63]

The explosion of life and vitality contrasts with the coldness (not only meteorologically, but also socially) of Northern America. Authors notice the buoyant mood of the people and the friendly atmosphere of the market because they find no equivalent in their country of adoption. Market places seem to encapsulate not only the liveliness and the sense of humour of Haitians, but also the richness of senses on offer. In the following description of a market place, Ollivier, rather lyrically, recalls a whole way of life, of thinking and behaving, and offers a vision that addresses all sense in a dizzying mix of sounds, colours, tastes, textures and movements:

Le marché, poème d'étalages construits le matin, détruits tôt le soir, quand la marée descend et que le soleil se couche avec la déterminante rapidité qu'on lui connaît sous le ciel caraïbéen. L'œil s'accrochera d'abord aux étals couverts de haricots, de navets, de carottes, de choux; il sera surpris par la grosseur des ignames, des bananes-plantains et des patates douces. Les ronces crochues des corossols, la peau douce et lisse des cachimans cœur-de-bœuf, les grumeaux des pommes-cannelles, le jaune moucheté de vert des papayes, le rouge, le rouille d'autres fruits à promesse de succulence qui s'amoncellent en congères à côté des pamplemousses, des mangues, des pastèques et des avocats le déroutent. Des ménagères palpent les yeux vitreux des poissons tachetés, bariolés, aussi bien bonites argentées, mérour que dorades, thazars et carangues, enfilés par les ouïes, suspendues à des crocs en fer plantés sur des supports en bois. [US, p.69]

The lengthy list of fresh and colourful products certainly contrasts with the food of 'là-bas', in North America, and indicates a sort of craving for this Caribbean repletion of the senses and jolliness.

The topic of Caribbean food plays an important role too in mapping memory as it is often used to access different aspects of memory, and adds connotations of conviviality, pleasure, relationship, etc. For our chosen authors, mentioning food is equivalent to evoking a host of worldly and spiritual memories: it is a tangible link between 'here' and 'there', 'now' and 'then', acting like the Proustian Madeleine. In Dany Laferrière's novels, there are many scenes in which Da, the narrator's grand-mother, or Marie and Renée, his mother and aunt respectively, prepare his food and watch him eat: it is an unspoken gesture of deep affection and care. In Stanley Péan's work, the Caribbean restaurant is the privileged place for meeting other members of the community and keeping in touch with the mother country. The explicit comparison of food is a way of emphasizing the distance between the Haitian and North American cultures, between a lively, spicy way of life as contrasted with a bland and sanitized, possibly even sterile, one. This is particularly clear in *Les Urnes scellées* (1995):

Reine n'annoncera pas, aujourd'hui Vendredi, les rougets frits ou la dorade au court-bouillon dont la marchande lui aurait garanti la fraîcheur; on n'entendra pas Caroline rappeler que hier on avait servi du cresson et de l'avocat et qu'il faudrait une salade d'épinards, question de varier le menu. Ariane ne rapportera pas le grand panier de fruits achetés devant la porte de la pharmacie: un monument de grenadines, parce que c'est la saison; de caïmites parce que, cette année, leur succulence est un vrai

péché; de cachimans cœur-bœuf dont Sam qui ne devrait pas tarder à rentrer raffole. On n'entendra point les exclamations exprimant la satisfaction de Sam et les gloussements des sœurs Monsanto entrecoupés d'une litanie d'exhortations des marchés de plein vent, d'hosannas pour les produits qui sentent la terre, de suppliques en faveur du cuit longtemps à petit feu, de tollés contre le surgelé en provenance de Miami, de salade vendue en sachets de plastique: halte au massacre! Leurs prières afin que survivent longtemps haricots tendres, pois de France, laitues de Boston, lambis et chevreaux de lait. [US, p.168]

In this extract, Ollivier puts the emphasis not only on the profusion of food, but also on a way of eating that is natural, seasonal, varied and full of flavour. He implies that this is the 'normal' way to live, the way nature intended. By contrast, the way of living disconnected from nature that is prevalent in northern modern societies appears bland. Ollivier and the other Haitian writers, it seems, try to demonstrate, through their depictions of Haitian customs, that living in exile is unnatural, and their recreation of the Caribbean lifestyle is a desperate attempt to return to their earthly paradise.

Authors add another dimension to the idyllic recreation of Haiti by drawing on their personal childhood memories. Émile Ollivier's *Mille-Eaux* (1999), for example, is an autobiographical narrative covering his childhood up until his early teenage years. As for Dany Laferrière, out of ten volumes in his autobiographical cycle, he has devoted three to his childhood, namely *L'Odeur du café* (2001), *Le Charme des après-midi sans fin* (1998) and *La Chair du maître* (1997). As for Marie-Célie Agnant, her novel *Alexis d'Haïti* (1999) is not autobiographical, but she chooses to present Haiti through the eyes of a young boy. It seems that, through their childhood narratives, exiled Haitian writers have set out to show Haiti at a time during which the narrator is not yet critical or aware of the political problems afflicting his or her country. (In fact, even in the more objective narratives depicting the authors' return trip to Haiti, the positive aspects of their native island remain predominant.) It looks as though they wish to dissociate themselves from the common conception of Haiti as a third-world dictatorship. In these childhood narratives, the Duvalier dictatorship or politics seem to be forbidden topics, or are given vague treatments which certainly do not overpower the text. Haiti is remembered and described mainly from the perspective of a child. Note Stanley Péan's remark about Ollivier's *Mille-Eaux* (1999) in the literary magazine *Lettres québécoises*:

De cette chronique d'enfance vécue dans la privation du père, Ollivier a évacuée presque toute référence explicite à la misère, au contexte politique, comme par volonté d'affirmer la primauté du rêve et de la magie dans l'apprentissage du gamin qu'il a été autrefois. Cela dit, la primauté du registre poétique n'exclut pas l'acuité du regard et la lucidité presque douloureuse (Ollivier, faut-il

The absence of backwards and forwards movements between past and present in the autobiographical narratives is also significant. There is little – if any – reference to the present situation of the narrator or his future. The narrator, who presently lives in Québec, acts as if he does not want to intrude in the story, which, in Dany Laferrière's novels, is often narrated in the present tense. At times, Émile Ollivier detaches himself from the little boy he was by addressing his former self, using the pronoun *tu*. This suggests the distance between the present and the past, but also that the author does not wish to intervene: he merely becomes an on-looker, an observer of his past. It seems that everything is done to erase the trace of the 'present', to make the reader forget that the narrator has migrated and now lives away from Haiti. For Marie-Célie Agnant, choosing to tell a story from the perspective of a ten year old boy allows her to keep to a minimum the negative elements of reality, and, as the previously mentioned authors, enables her to put a greater emphasis on the agreeable aspects of life in Haiti:

Coincée entre la mer et le Morne à Congo, une des plus hautes chaînes de montagnes de l'île, la Ruche compte environ un millier d'habitants. Un vallon *fertile*, que longent deux rivières aux *eaux claires et limpides*: la Gosseline, tranquille, et la Mousseline, plus tumultueuse. Ça et là, des bosquets d'ajoncs, des marais où poussent de longues tiges de bambou et des nénuphars aux larges feuilles qui servent de radeaux aux grenouilles. Un *petit nid* qu'Alexis et Jérémie n'ont jamais eu l'occasion de quitter, même pas pour une visite à la capitale. Avec ses maisons peintes de couleurs vives et recouvertes de tôle ondulée, ses champs de caféiers et ses bananeraies à perte de vue, cet endroit leur a toujours paru le *lieu idéal où habiter*. [AH, p.10-1, my italics]

Adopting the perspective of a child and voluntarily excluding the violence of dictatorship, authors allow themselves to ignore the violence and poverty that prevail in Haiti. They can pretend that Haiti is an enclave of happiness and harmony. Along with the use of geographical names and numerous descriptions, the evocation of an idyllic childhood is another way of 'mapping' memory. Although this (re-)creation process may seem self-delusive, it can also be interpreted as a way of rehabilitating the population of Haiti and its culture by dissociating it from the desperate and violent conditions created by the Duvalier regime.

Spirituality, Imagination and History: 'mapping' the imagination

While childhood narratives present Haiti almost exclusively through rose-tinted glasses, it is not the only manifestation of memory in Haitian writing. The use of Haitian imagination

⁵⁹ Stanley Péan. 'Émile Ollivier: Entre nostalgie et lucidité', *Lettres québécoises*, No. 102, 2001 (été), p.12.

through myths, legends, religion and historical events introduces the darker side to the idyllic depictions that we have seen above. This is quite striking in Stanley Péan's work. The plots of his novels usually revolve around elements originating from Haitian legends. In *Zombi blues* (1999), for example, some key elements of the plot are directly inspired by Haitian folklore: for example, a *macoute* hopes to increase the magical powers attributed to twins in Haitian folk tales, with a concoction prepared by a *hougan*. Péan relies on traditional legends to provide the fantastic edge to most of his narratives, as well as using elements of Voodoo such as the fear of a werewolf-like creature (also used in *Quand la bête est humaine* (1997)).

In the work of Dany Laferrière, the allusions to Haitian folklore are less obvious, and tend to refer more to the religious beliefs associated with Voodoo. For example, in *Pays sans chapeau* (1999) - a title that is, as Dany Laferrière explains, the French translation of the Creole expression for the world of the dead - the narrator includes a dream sequence in which he visits the next world and meets some of the gods of the Voodoo pantheon (*PSC*, p.248 – 271). In novels like *Le Charme des après-midi sans fin* (1998), these references to Voodoo are mainly encapsulated in characters like Nèg-Feuilles (a *hougan*), la vieille Nozée (a clairvoyant and 'fiancée' of the Voodoo god, Baron Samedi), or even Da (the author's grand-mother), who talks to her dead ancestors and for whom a cup of 'café des Palmes' is be poured even after her death! Unlike Péan, the use of Haitian beliefs is mainly allegorical for Laferrière: through these characters or episodes inspired by Voodoo, he introduces the idea of fate and predestination. In childhood narratives, for example, Nozée seems to be able to predict the – then – young boy's successful future as well as his migration. This prediction, which passes almost unnoticed, is a subtle way of introducing the author's hindsight and of linking Haiti and Québec from the beginning of his life, as though his destiny was to live in exile. Similarly, when Laferrière narrates his return to Haiti in *Pays sans chapeau* (1999) and knows then that he will never be able to live there again permanently, he chooses to name his novel with an expression originating in Voodoo and signifying the realm of death. With this title, not only does Laferrière assert that Haiti is close to dying due to the consequences of corruption and years of negligence but, also, that this part of his life – i.e. living in Haiti permanently – has come to an end for good with his first visit.

In Émile Ollivier's work, religious superstitions and beliefs feature less prominently, though they are mentioned occasionally; more importance is given to Haitian

history. In *Mère-Solitude* (1999), the vicissitudes of the Morelli family are intricately linked with the history of Haiti and changes of regime over the centuries:

Évoquer la mémoire de Nicolas Morelli, c'est rappeler dans un contexte de repression, d'incendie, de tremblement de terre, des paysans en haillons, armés de pic, qui semaient la terreur la nuit dans le plat pays et se réfugiaient le jour dans les massifs de la Hotte. Évoquer la mémoire de Nicolas Morelli, c'est rappeler l'armée souffrante conduite par des chefs comme Jean-Jacques Acaau, Jean François, Jeannot Mouline qui ont fait trembler l'île entière. La répression de ce mouvement a été dure, tranchante, aveugle. Évoquer la mémoire de Nicolas Morelli dans le décor de ce demi-siècle, c'est évoquer, aux yeux de la bourgeoisie, un dégénéré, un hystérique, un "sang-sale" qui toute sa vie a travaillé dans le désordre, pour le bruit. [...] Évoquer la mémoire de Nicolas Morelli, c'est évoquer, aux yeux du haut clergé, l'image d'un suppôt du diable qui aurait partie liée avec la cabale, la franc-maçonnerie et les hougans de Trou-Forban. [MS, p.49]

Narcès Morelli, the youngest member of the Morelli family, questions his ancestors' past, unravelling the history of Haiti at the same time. The author uses the same process in *Les Urnes scellées* (1995) to describe the Soliman family:

[...] une famille de féodaux, d'hommes politiques de grande influence. Trois siècles les avaient vu faire carrière dans le Droit, l'Église et la politique. Les Soliman, des "musiciens-palais". [...] Les Soliman ont mangé à tous les râteliers, ont excellé dans l'art de s'adapter aux conditions et aux temps, de retourner habilement leur casaque, toujours la même, avec une infinité d'envers. [US, p.84-5]

There follows a summarized history of the successive regimes that took power in Haiti: colonialism under Napoleon, Toussaint Louverture and the independence movement, Faustin I and a succession of corrupt presidents. Whereas Péan and Laferrière pay more attention to recent history, Ollivier refers to a variety of events that happen over a period stretching from the foundation of Haiti to this day. His view on Haitian history seems quite pessimistic, particularly as he recalls that, despite being the first country to shake off colonial domination, the succession of oppressive regimes has left Haiti drained. In *Les Urnes scellées* (1995), Adrien, the main character who returns to Haiti after the collapse of the Duvalier regime in 1986, witnesses the massacres at the time of the first election in 'free' Haiti, and is trampled by a crowd that then lynches a man believed to have been a *macoute*. In Ollivier's work, Haitian history introduces the notion of fatality: history repeats itself indefinitely, each era increasing further the degradation of the island. From colonisation to the hereditary Duvalier dictatorship, the Haitian people have never managed, despite their attempts, to get rid of the oppressors. The survivors in this context, the successful citizens are the ones who seemingly accept betrayal, compromise and submission. Other ones are dead – unknown or martyr like Laferrière's friend Gasner (see *Le Cri des oiseaux fous*) – or in exile like all our authors.

This view is partly shared by Marie-Célie Agnant. She, unlike the other authors of this group, includes the legacy of slavery in her novels. Her characters are usually aware of their slave ancestors, or become aware of them, and this knowledge empowers them by giving them a strong sense of identity. There is a significant episode in *Alexis d'Haïti* (1999) in which Ma Lena discloses to her grandson the story of their origins and entrusts him with a precious family heirloom:

Ce coquillage est magique, je crois, répond Ma Lena. Il est sans doute aussi vieux que le monde et nos peines réunis, il vient de très loin, confie-t-elle, avec un air mystérieux. Il a déjà traversé l'océan d'un bout à l'autre. Il est venu de Guinée, Son voyage a duré plusieurs mois et l'a mené des côtes d'Afrique jusqu'aux Antilles, dans les poches d'une petite fille qui était l'arrière-grand-mère de mon arrière-grand-mère! [...] Dans la famille, on l'a toujours gardé avec la plus grande vénération. [AH, p.61-2]

For Alexis, this shell is the only thing that he manages to save when he and his mother illegally migrate to the USA; it is the symbol of his identity, his origins and his ancestors' courage. It is a reminder of his legacy, but also an object of pride. In *Le Livre d'Emma* (2001), the legacy of slavery is more pessimistic and resembles Ollivier's vision of fate. For Emma, it is impossible to break free from the patterns established by years of slavery. Despite all her efforts and her quest for the recognition of her history, she finds that nobody is prepared to listen to her. In her desperation, she kills her daughter to stop the cycle of events in which she believes all black Caribbean women are trapped. For Agnant and the other Haitian authors, history seems to doom their narratives with the evidence that the circle of exploitation and oppression cannot be broken, and that freedom for the individual lies not in revolution but in exile. For them, living in their native land is less important than knowing their history and being aware of how it has modelled their vision of the world, than living in one place: they focus on the journey, rather than on the arrival.

Relationships with the family and the community

Haitian authors evoke page after page the language, the landscapes and the atmosphere of the Haiti that they miss. Their depiction would not be complete, however, without mentioning the people, and particularly the family. For Dany Laferrière, as for Émile Ollivier or Marie-Célie Agnant, the female characters are the most important of all. Laferrière and Ollivier were both separated from their father at an early age: Ollivier's father died and Laferrière's was forced into exile.

Mon père, lui aussi journaliste, s'était fait expulser du pays par François Duvalier. Son fils Jean-Claude me poussera à l'exil. Père et fils, présidents. Père et fils, exilés. Même destin. Ma Mère, elle ne quittera jamais son pays. Et si jamais elle le quitte, j'aurai l'impression qu'il n'y a plus de pays.

J'identifie totalement ma mère avec le pays. Et elle est assise à côté de moi dans ce taxi qui file maintenant vers Martissant. Le torse bombé sous la douleur: ma mère, mon pays. [PSC, p.149-50]

Here, we note that Laferrière presents his mother as the anchor of cultural identity; she becomes the link to the country and to his patriotism. Laferrière paints a very affectionate portrait of his mother, filled with tenderness. She is the archetype of the Haitian mother who looks after her children to the point of suffocation, and who is strong minded. Even though he points out the weaknesses she tries to hide, he mainly shows the sacrifices she has made - and still makes - for him, and how proud of him she feels. Laferrière also recalls her strength of character and courage. We refer here, as an example, to the chapter of *Le Cri des oiseaux fous* (2000), called "Le Passeport (3h48)"(p.42-47), in which the author explains how his mother went to a colonel to enquire if her son's life was in danger, obtained a passport for him and arranged for him to leave the country the next morning in order to save his life.

In *Mille-Eaux* (1999), Émile Ollivier's mother does not have an obvious positive role: she represents the extreme discipline of language, the constant movement of domestic location, isolation from other children, and even madness. She is, nevertheless, at the core of the author's character: despite his settlement in Québec for over twenty years, he still defines himself as a migrant, a trait he inherited from her.

Je suis donc fils de migrants et, en ce sens, ma migration ne date point d'hier. Mes veines sont irriguées de globules rouges de l'errance. Et j'ajoute la plupart du temps: par-dessus le marché, ma mère avait les pieds poudrés de la poussière des chemins. [ME, p.142-3]

Ollivier's mother is also instrumental in her son's love of reading since she gave him a weekly allowance to buy books of his own choice. This, as Ollivier remembers, is the beginning of a 'dialogue' between the books and him, and a perpetual maturation process:

J'avais au fond découvert que les mots avaient une mission: ils devaient nous apprendre à vivre. [...] Je savais que je poursuivrais ma conversation avec eux et que je disposais pour le faire de l'infini de l'espace et de l'infini du temps. [ME, p.160]

Even though Ollivier depicts himself as neglected by his mother, his grandmother is there to look after him. She tempers the mother's negative influence and allows the child a bit of freedom. More importantly, she is the one who urges the young Émile to recreate reality and introduces him to the pleasure of reading, even before the allowance is given to Émile: handling books and the entertaining solitude that they procure. According to the author,

this was the second step towards becoming a writer:⁶⁰ his love for books and reading moulded his imagination, and refined his taste and interests.

Une fois que je m'étais plaint de ne pas avoir de compagnons de jeux, elle m'avait gourmandé: «Arrête de te morfondre! Invente, invente le monde! Réinvente la réalité! Lis, tu te sentiras bien moins seul.» [ME, p.156]

In Dany Laferrière books, the mother and the grandmother are depicted in a rather different way, but both have an enormous influence on the author's life too. Da, his grandmother, is the most developed character in *Le Charme des après-midi sans fin* (1998), and has probably the most influential role in the author's childhood. We learn in *Pays sans chapeau* (1999) that Laferrière's mother had to send him to live with her mother in Petit-Goâve for his security, and therefore Da fills the role of a second mother for him. She represents continuity with the traditions and popular culture of Haiti, as well as family history. She tells him stories of when she was young, of how she met his grandfather, of how they bought and remortgaged their house to give their daughters a chance in the capital. She also teaches her grandson about Voodoo and how to 'talk' to their ancestors. We note, for example, that the text is riddled with sentences like the following:

Da dit qu'il faut savoir se taire parfois, surtout quand on a tort. [CAMSF, p.94]

Je préfère les histoires vraies de Da aux contes de la vieille Cornélia. [CAMSF, p.189]

She is a sort of mentor for 'Vieux-Os' (Laferrière), who fully benefits from her practical teachings. What is common to Ollivier and Laferrière is that they both describe charismatic women who contrast with the very faint portrayal of absent fathers. Traditionally caring for their children and transmitting to them traditions and other elements of culture, women create a cocoon of affection and tenderness around them, from which it is often difficult to break free. They have a determinant role in shaping the personalities of their sons and grandsons and senses of identity.

In *Alexis d'Haïti* (1999), Agnant assigns a similar role to Ma Lena. It is she who passes on the family history to her grandson and soothes his fears of migration by explaining their origins to him. Ma Lena ensures that Alexis's links with and affection for Haiti grow stronger thanks to a deeper knowledge of its history. In *Le Livre d'Emma* (2001), Emma plays a similar part for Flore. Emma, who is acutely aware of her origins and of her ancestors' legacy, undertakes to 'educate' Flore. She teaches Flore the cultural heritage that she had forgotten, and, more importantly, she shows her how to become

⁶⁰ The first step is writing a letter for his father, as we mentioned before.

independent, to refuse the assimilation process which tends to erase her history and dilute her differences to make them invisible. In this sense, Emma assumes the traditional role of mother or grandmother.

Even though these authors describe remarkable women, one cannot help but notice that these female characters are at the same time the victims and the survivors of the absence of men. Ollivier's mother becomes quite unstable and is considered demented by her family. Laferrière goes as far as sketching an 'emasculated' picture of Haitian society, in which men are made powerless by the *macoutes*⁶¹ and women are left to take on all responsibilities. However, if they are respected socially for their honesty or their wisdom, women neither have nor seem to desire any active or political power. By surrounding their children with care and comfort in the hope of discouraging from taking any risk, one gets the impression, however, that they contribute unwittingly to the apathy of men, and, in a way, help to maintain the dictatorship by encouraging their children not to take risks. As Laferrière puts it:

Il y a la prison de Papa Doc, mais il y a aussi la prison des mères. Papa Doc jette les pères en prison. Les mères gardent les fils à la maison en les gavant de nourriture. Cela fait de gros fils dégriffés. Nos rivaux en la matière, ce sont les chats des vieilles. [COF, p.182]

This constitutes a sweet, affectionate environment indeed for a child, but has disastrous consequences for adults.

Haitian authors also seem to have a predilection for charismatic characters. Memorable for their strong personalities, these characters play an important part in autobiographical narratives, as they most certainly made a great impression on the (then young) author; in works of fiction, they probably reflect the warmth and spry spirit of Haitian people. We have already observed these traits in descriptions of market places, for example, where invective, retort and the ability to haggle are expected and admired. Rather than portraying individuals, Émile Ollivier's charismatic characters are some examples of different archetypes. In *Les Urnes scellées* (1995), there is Zag, the multi-talented barber: by day, he works in his shop and chats innocuously with his regular clients and, occasionally, he becomes a very sought-after hairdresser, capable of the most extravagant hairstyles; by night, he is a member of the 'société des hâbleurs', debating politics but not taking any active part in political life. There is also the incarnation of poverty, malnutrition

⁶¹ We should say here that the *macoutes* themselves are dehumanised and are never portrayed as men but as beasts.

and general poor healthcare in the character of Sô-Tiya, the servant of the Monsanto sisters.

Une petite vieille maigrichonne, en haillons, chaussée de lourds brodequins d'homme, était à demi-accroupie derrière une tombe [...]. Elle avait un visage angulaire, taillé au couteau, une tête bilieuse d'oiseau que prolongeait une mâchoire de caïman, des yeux morts entre des bourrelets de chair violacée, un nez en bec d'aigle. Sur la lèvre supérieure à la peau flétrie, crevassée de mille rides verticales, de mille petites incisions, poussait une moustache. Au bas du cou, un goître mal dissimulé par un foulard noir. [US, p.65]

Ollivier also includes the character of the embittered intellectual whose brilliant career never materialised, and who was never given the chance to pursue his dreams of recognition: this is Léopold Seurat. This character bears quite a few resemblances to one of the main characters of *La Discorde aux cent voix* (1986), Diogène Artheau.

Léopold Seurat, qui n'avait pas taquiné la muse depuis quatre décennies, gardait une auréole, un prestige de grand écrivain, de poète. [...] Toute sa vie, il a attendu une reconnaissance caraïbéenne qui n'est pas venue. [...] Malheureusement, le candidat pour qui il avait appelé à voter aux élections de 1946 avait été défait et, deux fois de suite, il n'avait pas eu plus de chances aux urnes. [US, p.171]

The characters of Léopold and Diogène could be interpreted as imaginary doubles of the author: he might have turned out like them - a frustrated intellectual - if he had stayed in Haiti. Their disillusionment and feelings of unfulfilment are expressed through bad temper and acrid criticism of the regime; their failure to produce anything other than one modest essay in the case of Diogène, or nothing at all in the case of Léopold, is the evidence of wasted creative minds and of the impossibility of expressing oneself freely under a totalitarian regime.

Laferrière takes a different approach to secondary charismatic characters: he chooses to present a gallery of portraits as if one had met them by chance in the street. For example, there are the visitors to his grandmother's house, like Fatal, the revolutionary, always dropping in and out giving information in exchange for some of Da's coffee, or Thérèse, the bride-to-be in her 40s who wants to lose her virginity before getting married (*Le Charme des après-midi sans fin*, p268-271). In Laferrière's novels, there are numerous scenes in taxis which are usually shared between people. These scenes are the opportunity for a quick sketch of characters and the transcription of a supposedly overheard conversation. The narrator admits to secretly eavesdropping, allowing himself - and the reader - to enter the intimacy of strangers and get an insight into their lives and minds. Rather than dealing with types of characters, one experiences informal and immediate

encounters with people in the street, raw information. One can put oneself in the hero's place:

Je fais semblant de dormir dans le tap-tap mais, en réalité, j'écoute la conversation entre les deux hommes assis en face de moi. [COF, p.105]

Je ne vois que des ombres, mais j'entends tout. La nuit, je ne suis qu'une grande oreille. Je veux capter les dialogues les plus intimes. La parole secrète de la ville. [COF, p.189]

In *Pays sans chapeau* (1999), in a chapter called 'La Révélation'(p.147-149), it is the author's turn to be overheard and commented upon by the people who share his taxi, when he meets Lisa, an old flame. With this artifice of immediacy, Laferrière can pretend to present the 'true' Haiti: it looks as though he simply and faithfully transcribes what he saw without altering it, like a journalist. One gets the impression of accessing the real, uncensored voice of Haiti. The author, in this instance, appears to be a mere transmitter of the Vox Populi and not an interpreter.

Unlike the other Haitian authors, Laferrière also introduces characters based on real people for whom he has admiration. These figures - mainly artists, or at least free spirits - act as role models in the narratives. In *Le Cri des oiseaux fous* (2000), it is Laferrière's friend Gasner who fills this role. Gasner was a well-known radio journalist, well-loved by his audience, yet he was murdered by *macoutes* for being inquisitive. He is presented in the novel as a martyr who died in the quest of the truth whilst opposing the Duvalier regime. As such, Gasner personifies the revolutionary youth who are prepared to die for their ideas and freedom, hence the feeling of guilt that Laferrière feels when he is about to leave the country and give up the fight. The narrator implies that Gasner, who courageously fought the dictatorial regime, is the real hero of the novel, not he who cowardly leaves the country. The author of *Pays sans chapeau* (1999) also mentions painters: returning home after years of exile gives Laferrière the opportunity to rediscover Haitian art pieces that he loved and that were originally engraved in his memory:

Je venais souvent ici, autrefois. Je passais des heures devant les peintures. Il y a deux toiles que j'aimais beaucoup. *Le bourgeois chez lui* de Mucius Stéphane qui représente, je crois, un homme assis sur une dodine avec un chat sur lui ou à ses pieds, j'ai oublié. L'autre toile est un portrait inachevé de la Grande Brigitte par Hector Hyppolite. Tout cela est bien brouillé dans ma mémoire, aujourd'hui. Il y a aussi le triptyque de Wilson Bigaut (*Paradis, Purgatoire, Enfer*), une jungle de Salvane Philippe-Auguste, et un magnifique Louverture Poisson (*Haïti chérie*, je crois) qui représente une femme très sensuelle assise sur une chaise basse en train de se coiffer devant un grand miroir. Ce sont des images inscrites dans ma chair qui m'ont accompagné durant ce long voyage dans le nord. [PSC, p.177-8]

These are images that have impressed upon the narrator's memory and have accompanied him beyond the years of exile. They have nourished his imagination while he was cut off

from his country. Laferrière is always keen to mention the artists (painters, writers, etc) who have contributed to keep his vision of Haiti as alive and rich as possible, and often pays tribute to them.

Conclusion

Memory is a major theme in Haitian writing in Québec: it allows the recreation of both a past and a place to which Haitian writers love to return. As long as the Duvalier regimes lasted, memory and imagination were the only safe ways to go back to Haiti. The impossibility of returning home is probably the reason why these evocations are often tinged with nostalgia. Having left their country against their will and, therefore, having become migrants, the only way for them to preserve their identity is to preserve memories, to protect their way of life - at least in their writing and their memory - and to celebrate Haiti and Haitian people despite the dictatorship and despite their exile. Recreating a universe in which they feel comfortable allows them to replace themselves into their original context. They reaffirm their roots, their belonging, and their 'embeddedness' to use Bosma's expression.⁶² They also present a new vision of Haitian people to their adopted society: the anonymous Haitian migrant in Québec becomes more familiar, with a past and a history, and with stories to tell.

These detailed depictions of Haiti and its people might also denote a certain guilt at having left their native country. Although they continuously praise their culture, these authors are, nevertheless, trying to make the reader forget that they have lived in the abundance that a rich country like Québec can offer while their family and friends lived in poverty and terror. The positive portrayal of Haiti may also be an attempt to make amends for not being there.

Lastly, the idyllic vision of their country of origin presented by exile authors may be a way to slow down the process of hybridity: by holding onto their perfect image of Haiti, they retain a sense of identity and the feeling of a distinct cultural difference.

⁶² H.A. Bosma, et al. (eds.). *Op.cit.* 1994. p.98.

Chapter 4: Jewish writers or the fragmentation of memory.

Introduction

Jewish writers are characterized by a conspicuously multiple or episodic identity which allows their characters to cross borders between communities, to lead several lives and assume many identities at once, and to escape classification. Unlike Haitian writers who assert their identity by developing topics linked to their childhood and country, or Middle Eastern writers who put the emphasis on being able to emancipate themselves from the conservatism of their traditions, Jewish writers present a fragmented vision of their identity.

In their work on identity and sense of identity in *Identity and Development* (1994),⁶³ all of the contributing psychologists and psychoanalysts agree that one's sense of identity is rooted not simply in the past, but in the idea of a continuity, a consistency from the past. One builds an identity with the knowledge of both its uniqueness and its sharing cultural and social ideas and behaviours. According to Tobi L.G. Graafsma,

indeed, a sense of identity, as the relatively enduring, but not necessarily stable experience of oneself as a unique and coherent entity over time, is very important in many ways. The same applies to the second aspect of a sense of identity: the experience of a persistent sharing of some kind of essential character with others.⁶⁴

For Jewish writers and most of their characters, coherence stopped with the Holocaust: it constitutes a break in the continuity of the past and of a people's history. We will see how authors reconcile the idea of continuity and fragmentation to define their identity.

In this section, we will study two writers - already mentioned in previous chapters - whose work was as much influenced by their origin as their religion: Régine Robin and Naïm Kattan. Régine Robin was born in 1939 of Polish parents a few years after they arrived in France; she grew up and was educated during the troubled years of World War II and the post-war period; she moved to Québec in the early 1980s. Naïm Kattan was born in the Jewish community of Baghdad and moved to Québec in the 1950s. At first, it seemed logical to include both authors with those of similar geographical origin. Kattan and Robin, however, share and have devoted part of their work to specific topics centred around

⁶³ H.A. Bosma, et al (eds.). *Identity and Development*. Thousand Oaks; London; New Delhi: Sage Publications. 1994.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* p.22.

Judaism, which distinguish them from other writers. It therefore soon became obvious that these two authors should be studied independently.

The characters described by Kattan could be classified into three categories: migrants clearly coming from Middle Eastern countries, Québécois without any 'ethnic' characteristics and, finally, Jewish characters, most of whom belong to the Jewish community of Montréal and are European survivors of the Holocaust. Despite a common religion, some Jewish characters have nevertheless very different backgrounds. The eponymous character of 'Mon nom est Esther'⁶⁵ and Méir, the narrator of *La Fiancée promise* (1983),⁶⁶ for example, do not even share the same century. Esther is a young girl who leaves seventeenth-century France in order to marry a Dutchman. The shipwreck of her boat causes her temporary amnesia, but, little by little, she regains her memory and sense of identity. Judging herself unworthy to go back to her family because she has broken her religious rules, she decides to travel under different male disguises. Her adventures lead her to work in many different types of professions, and assume a male identity for a while. The adoption of these successive identities teaches Esther who she really is and the nature of her own identity as a woman and as a Jew. As for Méir in *La Fiancée promise* (1983), he arrives in Québec from Baghdad in the 1950s. He has – like Kattan himself – received a Jewish as well as Arabic education, and has learned English and French. Neither he or his family have been exposed to the Holocaust and, therefore, he does not share the same history and culture as the Jewish community of Montréal.

Being Jewish plays an important part in Robin's books, *La Québécoite* (1983)⁶⁷ and *L'Immense Fatigue des pierres* (1999).⁶⁸ Jewishness appears to be the core identity, the true self around which the characters develop a multiple identity, and on which their nationalities are superimposed; it is the link between the different facets of the characters' identity. Concurrently, the theme of the mask runs through Robin's work. All characters eventually come to adopt several masks so as to cope in various circumstances, and their recourse to disguise fragments their sense of identity. It is only when they confront their past that they are able to piece their identity together.

⁶⁵ This short story appears in *La Reprise* (1985), p.223-33

⁶⁶ Hereafter *LFP*.

⁶⁷ Hereafter *LQ*.

⁶⁸ Hereafter *IFDP*.

Kattan's use of language remains fairly implicit in his work. One has to look for the clues given by the author in order to determine which language a character is speaking. Kattan sometimes announces, but, more often, only suggests the language used by his characters. We have seen in chapter 2 that, in *Farida* (1991), there is a rare example of Kattan's direct use of a 'foreign' language in a text written in French. Kattan scarcely uses Arabic, his language of origin. In this novel, the action takes place in Baghdad where the characters have lived their whole lives, so the actual language that they speak is implicit, but for the few words of a song that constitute the first appearance of Farida in the text. In *La Fiancée promise* (1983) - a novel roughly based on the author's own experience of migration in the 1950s -, the main character Méir explains at the beginning of the novel that he speaks Arabic, French and English. In the train that takes him to Montréal, Méir shares his compartment with another Jewish man who is from Europe and has survived captivity in a concentration camp. He enquires about Méir's plans when in Montréal:

- La communauté juive à Montréal est très puissante, remarqua-t-il.
- Il paraît, répondis-je en bâillant.
- Nous allons dormir.
- Vous parlez le yiddish au moins?
- Le yiddish? Pas du tout.
- Comment allez-vous faire? Tous les Juifs parlent yiddish.
- Je parle le français et l'anglais; les deux langues du pays. [*LFP*, p.3]

Here, Méir is confident that the languages that he speaks will be sufficient to ensure his survival in Montréal. He has faith that speaking French and English is the key to integration in the country to which he has newly emigrated. For his interlocutor, the thought of a Jew not speaking Yiddish is baffling. In his eyes, speaking the language of one's community is more important than speaking the official language(s) of the welcoming country: Yiddish is the language of the Jewish community and, therefore, by extension, it should also be Méir's. For Méir, this is the first in a series of misunderstandings with all the communities in which he is admitted. Those errors, based on languages and religion, occasionally play in Méir's favour and allow him to be admitted by other communities.

Méir does not fit the stereotypes that his languages and religion connote to the people that he meets. This allows him to manipulate and play with perceptions of his identity. At the beginning of his first-person narrative, Méir introduces himself as a Jewish

⁶⁹ This expression is borrowed from Jacques Derrida, *Le Monolinguisme de l'autre*. Paris: Éditions Galilée. 1996. p.98.

man, born and brought up in Baghdad, and educated in Paris. He speaks Arabic and has learnt French and English. In the eyes of other people, though, he appears to be a different person. Méir soon becomes aware of the range of identities available to him, that are linked with the many connotations suggested by the languages that he speaks and his religion. For example, when he starts looking for work, he is asked why he does not seek the support of his own community, meaning the Jewish community. People mistake his religion - a non-orthodox Jew - with his culture:

-Mais qu'attendez-vous pour aller voir les vôtres?
-Les miens? Fis-je innocemment.
-Les vôtres, les juifs. Ils sont dans le commerce. Partout. Ils ont même un bureau de placement.
[LFP, p.16]

Then, because Méir speaks French, a potential Québécois employer assumes that he is a Catholic. For this man, Jewishness is a nationality and a culture, not a religion or an ethnicity; and obviously, in his view, the French language has a religious connotation: a French speaker in Québec is inevitably catholic:

Il regarda à nouveau ma lettre.
-Rue Tupper. Dans quelle paroisse est-ce?
-Je ne sais pas.
-Enfin, il y a une église dans votre quartier?
-Oui, sûrement. Je ne vais pas à l'église.
Ahuri, suspicieux, il demanda:
-Pourquoi?
-Je suis juif.
-Je veux bien. C'est une nationalité. Vous parlez français. Vous appartenez à une paroisse. [LFP, p.18]

This comical mistake underscores the ignorance of Méir's Quebecer interlocutors, not only about migrants living beside them in Québec, but also regarding what goes on beyond the boundaries of their country. To make matters worse, misunderstandings also rise from his religion. Méir seeks the assistance of the Jewish community to obtain a job but there again, people have preconceptions as to his cultural and linguistic identity:

Il m'interrogea et je ne compris pas.
-Je ne parle pas le yiddish.
-N'êtes-vous pas juif? Me demanda-t-il en anglais.
-Oui.
-Et vous ne comprenez pas le yiddish, dit-il hostile.
Je lui expliquai qu'à Bagdad, les juifs parlent l'arabe.
-Et l'hébreu?
-Je connais les prières. Je lis la Bible.
-Je vois. [LFP, p.19]

In this extract, even the Jewish community is ignorant of the sociolinguistic situation of Jews in Iraq. At first, Méir is startled by people's assumptions and suspicions, but he soon

realises that these preconceptions create opportunities for him. He begins to literally 'live in the language' (*habiter la langue*, as Derrida put it). Languages represent many keys to different and separate worlds. With a specific language come a set of friends and acquaintances and a set of cultural attitudes and assumptions. In Méir's case, switching language and community is equivalent to switching cultural behaviours. His attitude in one community hardly bears any resemblance to his behaviour in another. He is not 'himself', i.e. a migrant trying to fit in and to learn the rules of the new country. His identity seems to be fragmented and changes according to external expectations, the emphasis on one fragment being the key to each community: he is successively the French-speaking Jew; the Jew who does not speak Hebrew nor Yiddish; etc. He adopts a mask to fit in; he does not entirely adhere to the - tacit - rules of each community, knowing he can go from one to another. Méir adopts this attitude as survival technique: when he arrived in Québec, he had hoped to find a job rapidly and make a living; after a few months, he has spent all his savings and is in an uncomfortable situation; community-hopping provides him with new professional and personal opportunities. But is this attitude sustainable indefinitely? Kattan does not suggest an answer to this, as the book finishes when Méir starts settling in his new life it, just a year after his arrival.

The feeling of being almost totally free from any rules seems to derive from the impression of not belonging fully to a single community who would share the same codes and values. Méir feels foreign to all cultural groups because he has lost his points of reference:

J'allais devant moi, fort de mon énergie, fier de ma détermination. Je passais devant des importateurs d'épices et un nom libanais éveilla mes souvenirs comme une blessure. Ici, j'étais loin et je ne parvenais pas à mesurer la distance, ne sachant où fixer le point de départ. [LFP, p.15]

Even in the company of people of same origins, who would arguably share the same values and understand what he is going through, Méir seems to have changed in a way that makes it impossible to belong. He becomes aware of this shift of values when he goes out with Rose, also a native of Baghdad.

Nous nous embrassons comme dans un mauvais film sentimental. Un film égyptien, car les Américains ont l'habitude.

-Tu ne veux pas entrer?

Elle retrouva sa politesse et sa tenue. Regretterait-elle son écart? Je ne pourrais jamais sonder ses sentiments ni deviner ses réactions. *Comme si en Amérique nous avions été doublement étrangers.* [LFP, p.109-10, my italics]

It is as though playing a role has become his identity. Not only does Méir feel like a foreigner in Canada but, in the end, he also feels estranged from his own people. The use of the collective pronoun 'nous' here is ambivalent as it suggests that his feelings were shared by Rose: is it really the case or is this just Méir's wishful interpretation of his own uneasiness? He is now unable to behave in a natural manner - i.e. in a relaxed manner that is not composed consciously beforehand and that unconsciously and spontaneously conforms to a specific set of cultural rules - because nothing feels 'normal' any more. This loss of normality in one's life brings to mind *L'Étranger* by Albert Camus, in which, following the death of his mother, Meursault, the main character, loses his ability to connect with his normal way of life and fails to express his feelings; he seems out of place, out of context, as though he does not belong. As for Méir, he is «doublement étranger» because he does not entirely belong to his new society and he no longer belongs to his original society: he is a foreigner to others and to himself. The only solution for him is to live in the language and, therefore, in its immediacy. While he speaks a language, he is part of a community, he belongs. His self is divided into temporary identities, and Jewishness is the link that ensures its continuity.

In *L'Immense Fatigue des pierres* (1999) and *La Québécoise* (1983), Régine Robin develops this idea of multiple identity to the extreme and seems to come to a similar conclusion. In Kattan's *La Fiancée promise* (1983), Méir's use of language appears mainly instrumental to obtaining what he wants or needs: one is under the impression that he is quite unscrupulous in taking advantage of the several communities that welcome him. In Robin's work, on the contrary, identities adopted via languages are not temporary: they coexist because they correspond to different stages of the character's personality and personal life. Languages - namely English, French, Hebrew and Yiddish - are primarily a means of communication, of course, but also appear to be invested with historical or personal values and memories. In her work, Robin chooses some languages as designated supports for memory and identity. The first female narrator of *L'Immense Fatigue des pierres* (1999) - whose identity is uncertain - describes language as territory: one has to learn its geography in order to personalise it and 'live' with or in it.

Une langue, c'est un pays avec

ses routes
ses carrefours
ses chemins creux

Il faut pouvoir s'y perdre les yeux fermés
Tu ne savais pas qu'on ne ferme les yeux que
Sur ses propres images [...]
S'inventer sa propre langue

Se lover dans l'hébreu comme toi
Ou dans l'anglais comme moi
Se déprendre du français ou le contraire
Multilinguisme des errants
S'inventer sa part d'ombre dans la langue
S'inventer même le silence. [IFDP, p.34]

Here, language is described with the vocabulary normally used for a landscape, a geographical area: it is a place to explore at leisure, a place of refuge and relaxation, but it is also a place of disguise and privacy («s'inventer sa part d'ombre»). The impression is that language is like a shell that can be adopted or shed, that one can tailor in order to survive particular situations like migration.

English, for example, is presented as such by the narrator mentioned above. For her, a person who has chosen to live in New York and who is a successful writer of best-sellers, English is merely a commodity: she earns money with her novels, but seems more than reluctant to call her writing 'self-expression' or art:

Je n'écris que des romans qui coulent comme de la pâte [...]. [IFDP, p.11]

In fact, she sees English as instrumental, a tool available worldwide to play with, to use or not to use; it is occasionally a playful language, useful to get by but in which she has invested little emotion:

Et puis à Montréal, si on veut, on pourrait continuer à parler l'anglais comme à New York pour la mère, comme à Jérusalem avec les touristes et avec les commenditaires pour la fille. Pour toutes les deux, l'anglais a été la *lingua franca* de ce siècle et elles ont appris à se l'approprier, à ruser avec la langue dominante, à attendre que ça passe, ou à se lover dedans. [IFDP, p.47-8]

Again here, along with the idea of mere communication, one notes the idea of refuge in language. Migrants living in Snowdon⁷⁰ in *La Québécoise* (1983) and the first narrator of *L'Immense Fatigue des pierres* (1999) adopt English because of their circumstances: their choice of moving to another country is the reason why they need to speak this particular language. It is mainly the utilitarian language of exile.

Hebrew seems to be just as instrumental as English. It is chosen by some characters to show their belonging to a certain lifestyle and set of political ideas; it is a radical stand to live their Jewish identity. In *L'Immense Fatigue des pierres* (1999), the narrator's daughter in the short story that also provides the title of the whole collection has chosen to

⁷⁰ The narrator of *La Québécoise* lives in Snowdon, which she describes as follows: 'Quartier d'immigrants à l'anglais malhabile où subsiste encore l'accent d'Europe centrale, où l'on entend parler yiddish, et où il est si facile de trouver des cornichons, du Râlé natté et du matze mail.' [LQ, p.23]

walk into the steps of the Jewish colonizers who, as survivors of the Holocaust, decided to take their destiny in hand and build themselves a country (with the consequences that we know). The mother dismisses this aspect of Jewishness, this identity deeply rooted in the territory of Israel. She - who has chosen to live in New York and to write in English for a living - seems to find this identity too conspicuous and, paradoxically, associates it with the persecutions that Jews suffered during World War II.

Dans le rêve, je me réveille, je me lève, j'enlève ma chemise de nuit pour prendre ma douche, je l'accroche machinalement à la patère de la porte de la salle de bains et qu'est-ce que je vois sur la chemise de nuit? L'étoile, marquée «JUIF», l'étoile que j'ai portée durant cinq ans et que nous avons brûlée dans un feu de joie à la Libération.

Je ne t'en parlerai pas demain à Roissy, tu serais trop contente. Des rêves de judaïté. Ton triomphe. Depuis le temps que tu me casses les pieds avec ton identité juive et avec ma cécité, ma bêtise égale à celle des Juifs allemands de la fin des années vingt. Comme tu dis, pourtant nous devrions être quittes aujourd'hui. J'ai fait un rêve qui montre à l'évidence que rien n'est jamais résolu et toi, avec tout ton baratin sur le judaïsme, la judaïté et tutti quanti, tu m'envoies un télégramme pour me dire que tu quittes Israël, que tu viens t'installer en Amérique. [IFDP, p.19]

In this short story, it seems that living in Israel and speaking Hebrew are artificial: it is yet again another mask. The yellow star that Jews were forced to wear was an obvious sign, a stigma; life in Israel and in Hebrew might be a proud and dignified way to show one's Jewishness, but, in her view, it is merely an extreme reaction to the yellow star. Besides, we see here that mother and daughter are constantly questioning not only each other's choice, but also their own choice of lifestyle. It seems that no answer, no mask is a long-term solution.

French, on the contrary, is a language that represents another kind of identity: an identity that, as a traditionally persecuted Jew, one may wish to hide in Québec, but that allows concealment in France. For some of the characters in *L'Immense Fatigue des pierres* (1999), French is the language of schooling, of higher education, and of cultural and trivial references. It has influenced and shaped their cultural identity and view of the world. Similarly, for the narrator of each narrative in *La Québécoise* (1983), France and the French language are the country and the language of his or her education. In the first narrative, for example, the narrator takes pleasure in reading French political and cultural magazines regularly; she feels the need to maintain the link with the culture of France:

Elle irait chez Renaud-Bray prendre la presse, c'est-à-dire *L'Huma*, *Le Matin*, *Le Monde*, *Le Nouvel Obs* puis regarderait longuement les nouveautés ponctuant sa quête de «tiens, tiens, un tel a publié son travail», ah! il est enfin «paru» comme si les ponts n'étaient pas coupés entre elle et le parisianisme, comme si le dialogue imaginaire était encore possible. [LQ, p.62]

This 'imaginary dialogue' that the narrator mentions here suggests that she has contributed to French culture as much as French culture has contributed to her own cultural identity; this also hints that her intellectual or cultural life in Montréal is not as fulfilling and, perhaps, that the 'dialogue' - if there is one since she does not explicitly confirm there is - is not as stimulating as it was in Paris. She is, however, conscious of the polarisation - not to say the snobbishness - of her intellectual training and tastes, and is ashamed of her preference for French and European views, which she presents as being on the verge of narrow-mindedness:

Elle n'aurait rien dit, honteuse de son trop visible europocentrisme, de son eurocommunisme, de cette impossibilité par moments à sortir des cadres étroits de sa culture parisienne. [LQ, p.77]

In fact, the narrator of the second story in *La Québécoise* (1983) goes as far as trying to suppress all obvious signs of her education (which is fairly similar to that of the first narrator). She feels the need to hide the French side of her identity:

Il lui aurait fallu faire oublier sa trop visible «francité», son accent où percerait sans qu'il y paraisse un je-ne-sais-quoi d'impérialisme culturel, ses années de Sorbonne, d'École normale supérieure, ses années de *cursus honorum* un peu trop parfait, faire oublier toutes ses parisianités. [LQ, p.105]

The narrator presents her education as an embarrassment, an obstacle to her integration in the Québécois society. She seems to think that sounding French is considered pretentious and condescending, and fears rejection from Québécois people.⁷¹ French culture is seen as a stigma that stops her from integrating into her new society. Furthermore, French can also be a source of misunderstanding amongst French speakers. The narrator speaks French from France, with all the cultural references attached to it:

Il t'en a fallu du temps pour comprendre que ces initiales [P.C] ici s'appliquaient au Parti Conservateur. Ah bon!

Oui, noter toutes les différences. Ne rien oublier, ni les marques de dentifrices, les chaînes de Barbecue, celles de Pizzas, ni les marques de savon ou de lessive. Pénétrer l'étrangeté de ce quotidien. En exil dans ta propre langue. Le leurre de la langue. Ni la même, ni une autre.

L'AUTRE dans le MÊME.

L'inquiétante étrangeté d'ici. [LQ, p.183]

Here, the character is alienated by the very thing that she shares with the Québécois: the language. She feels estranged within the language; she understands the words, but not their connotation. The full meaning slips away from her. She realises that language and culture are intricately linked, and that language, thus, ties her to a cultural group. This partial loss

⁷¹ This attitude may also be due partly to an awareness of a certain anti-French prejudice in some quarters of Québec francophone society, which goes back to French foreign policy of 1763-1855, when France allowed its former colony to stagnate. This prejudice is reinforced by class-consciousness: until the 1960s, most Québécois were working-class while French visitors were usually relatively affluent.

of significance makes her aware of the boundaries of her own cultural group. In order to fit in the Québécois society, La Québécoite had prepared herself to give up or hide external cultural traits, but she is surprised to discover that language is not the neutral key to integration that she thought it was. Moreover, she realises that she cannot let go of 'her' French without letting go of part of herself, part of her past, education, social recognition.

In *L'Immense Fatigue des pierres* (1999), French language and - by association - culture are used as a disguise for a little Jewish girl during World War II. She and her family are originally from Central Europe, but moved to Paris at the beginning of the war. When German troops invade France, mother and daughter go into hiding, which proves difficult partly because the mother hardly speaks French and the little girl does not speak it at all. During the day, the mother goes out to find work in order to be able to buy food, and places her daughter in the care of Juliette, a young French woman working in a club. With Juliette, the little girl learns to speak French; in fact, she learns it so well that she can pass as a native:

Elle se défit très vite de son accent d'Europe centrale. Elle prit même la gouaille des titis parisiens et au bout de quelques semaines on l'aurait crue originaire de Belleville. [IFPD, p.83]

The little girl quickly understands the significance of this new identity acquired through language. On the one hand, as in Régine Robin's novels generally, there is her mother's tongue that is associated with the stigma of the yellow star that Jews are forced to wear, clandestine life and death; on the other hand, there is French, which is associated with freedom and life. French is the mask that allows the little girl to get away from the dark garage in which she and her mother are hiding, to live outside, in what she imagines is the open and free world. It is a disguise that keeps her relatively safe from the Nazis:

Ainsi, à Paris, il y avait deux vies, deux mondes qui ne se rencontraient que dans ces moments furtifs qui duraient une demi-seconde. Le monde de ceux qui portaient l'étoile, qui devaient se cacher, qui parlaient tout bas, qui parlaient yiddish, et le monde de ceux qui buvaient du champagne, qui allaient au caf'conc', qui chantaient J'attendrai et qui allaient au guignol. Elle apprit à séparer les deux mondes, celui de la mort et celui de la vie. Elle savait qu'elle appartenait aux deux et que sa vie avec Gratok, les histoires qu'elle lui racontait, c'était l'entre-deux, une façon d'échapper à cette coupure. [IFPD, p.90]

Not only is French language adopted to be included in the dominant group, it is also a mask to guarantee one's survival, a new identity with which to face the outside world. While both Jewish and French identities seem to coexist, the little girl gives preference to the French one. It is only in her adult life that she realises she has chosen the easy route and the comfort of the mask. In choosing French over Yiddish, she avoids the issues - mainly the Holocaust - linked to her true cultural identity; she pushes aside her own people

and its history to embrace a culture to which she does not entirely belong. One notes also the atmosphere of clandestinity in which, a few years later, she learns about her true ancestors and the concentration camps. It is as if Yiddish was the language of silence and of the unsaid:

Cette fois, le yiddish n'était pas seulement une langue de mort, dangereuse, la langue des porteurs d'étoiles, mais la langue des morts, de tous ceux qui avaient disparu en pensant, en rêvant et en parlant dans cette langue. [...] Elle sentait un malaise en face des trésors de cette langue. Elle n'était pas bien dans sa peau. Elle avait lu des livres et des articles que ses parents lui cachaient. Elle savait tout d'Auschwitz. La langue sentait le gaz et la fumée. [...] Elle, la petite, c'est à l'école de la République qu'elle était heureuse avec nos ancêtres les Gaulois, la belle forme hexagonale de la France, le *Tour de France de deux enfants*, et ses poètes s'appelaient Lamartine et Musset. [IFDP, p.93-4]

Here, there is an underlying irony when she recalls learning about her 'Gaulish ancestors', that shows the French education policy of cultural standardization, regardless of the various ethnic backgrounds of the pupils. Adopting French language and culture is the easy way to live for her, it is the mask of happiness and insouciance.

In Régine Robin's fictional work, values attached to Yiddish are often ambiguous. Beyond the meaning of the words, this language has an intrinsic connotation of violence and death. In her adult life, the little girl has become a translator but, because of her experience as a child, she finds that translating Yiddish immerses her into a world of death and drains the life out of her:

Traduire des romanciers et des poètes juifs de langue yiddish, c'était à la fois passer du royaume des morts à celui des vivants. Ils ressuscitaient dans une autre langue bien vivante celle-là, mais les traduire, c'était descendre à chaque fois aux enfers. [IFDP, p.95-6]

Another reason why Yiddish is associated with death is because it is the language of memory. In Robin's novel, most Jewish characters are originally from Eastern Europe and, therefore, speak - or at least know of - Yiddish. It is the language of the characters' ancestors, of personal memories and of history. It is, however, a language that constantly reminds its users of a loss. This idea was already expressed in *La Québécoite* (1993):

Ceux [les signes] de ton enfance, de ta mère, de ton seul pays ce langage. Un langage à l'envers, allant vers on ne sait quoi. Une image graphique qui est tout un paysage. Un langage sang, mort, blessure, un langage pogrom et peur. Un langage mémoire. [LQ, p.140]

We note here that *La Québécoite* describes the written language with very graphic and concrete terms such as 'pays' and 'paysage' (that connote a geography), as well as with terms like 'sang', 'blessure' and 'mort' (that refer to a physicality, a body); terms like 'pogrom' and 'peur' refer to images and feelings of persecution and exile. Yiddish is made

tangible by this description, it is almost personified, an incarnation of the Jewish identity. It also creates the impression that language has become the incarnation of all the Jews who died in the concentration camps: it is their bodies, their voice, their memory, and their identity. It is a language that transports the narrator beyond time and death.

In the short story 'Mère perdue sur le World Wide Web'⁷², Yiddish almost has the power to resuscitate this lost people and its way of life. The character has come to Montréal in search of his mother, but communication proves difficult:

Son anglais n'était pas parfait; quant au français qu'il entendit à son arrivée, il n'y comprit rien et se trouva désemparé. Il parlait yiddish, cela pouvait l'aider, cela devait l'aider. C'était sa seule planche de salut. [IFDP, p102]

Yiddish - which is now only spoken by a few million people round the world⁷³ - is the narrator's last hope of communication within the Jewish community, even though he believes it to be an almost extinct language. The narrator is all the more surprised to hear people communicating in Yiddish, and to find, in the heart of Montréal, a community that has recreated the Central European ways of life

Des bistros il y en avait plein, et puis des magasins de fringues, de nippes, des lieux gentrifiés comme partout, mais aussi de vieilles échoppes qui rappelaient l'Europe centrale et où l'on trouvait de tout, des épices dans des tonneaux, des cornichons comme en Pologne, des poivrons comme en Hongrie. Il sentit son cœur battre très fort quand il entendit parler yiddish dans la boutique où il venait d'entrer. Il se mêla à la conversation. On lui fit bon accueil, étonné qu'un étranger pût encore maîtriser si bien cette langue qui n'était parlée que par les hassidim et les très vieux. [IFDP, p.104]

Language seems to be the key to integration by this community, but also to a timewarp: the narrator witnesses scenes of a life that he thought was long lost and destroyed.

Au détour d'une rue, il vit apparaître quatre ou cinq hassidim en costume avec leur caftan et leur shtraïml, ce bonnet de fourrure qu'ils portaient aux jours de fête par tous les temps, et leurs chaussettes blanches qui leur montaient jusqu'aux genoux. Barbus, maigres et blafards, ils avançaient gravement, lentement comme dans un film au ralenti. Il resta pétrifié. La dernière fois qu'il avait vu une scène semblable, c'était en Pologne, en 1937, l'année de la mort de son père et de leur départ pour la France. Il avait sept ans. Depuis, rien. Ces gens, c'était la réincarnation du Shetl, d'un monde qui était parti en fumée. Il prit peur. Montréal lui sembla une ville étrange, la ville des fantômes. [IFDP, p.109-10]

Terms like 'apparaître', 'un film au ralenti', 'pétrifié', 'réincarnation', 'ville fantôme' – a type of vocabulary generally associated with ghost literature and cinema - reinforce the impression of a spectral apparition.

⁷² IFDP, p.99-125.

⁷³ The number of Yiddish speakers is estimated to be between two and three millions. According to the website www.worldlanguage.com, 'the destruction of European Jewry in World War II reduced the number of Yiddish speakers by half. Since that time the number has decreased even further as the younger generation of Jews in America, Russia, and Israel are abandoning Yiddish for the language of their homelands'. And according to <http://www.ling.upenn.edu>, the number of Yiddish speakers would be around three millions.

Yiddish in Robin's work is the incarnation and the survival of memory; it is the core identity of the Jewish characters of her books, even though this identity is a multiple one: it is at a crossing of several languages and cultures and never anchors its speakers in one geographical territory:

Et puis à Montréal, il y a une fragilité de la langue, de leur langue, comme un tissu qui se défait, et cela leur rappelle étrangement les vieux qui parlaient yiddish avec le sentiment que ce n'était pas tout-à-fait une langue, tout juste un dialecte, un jargon, une mélangue et qu'il fallait être Juif pour comprendre qu'on n'avait pas vraiment de langue à soi, que même sa langue était une pièce rapportée, qu'il fallait vivre avec et que le mieux qu'on pouvait faire, sans nostalgies des racines, sans De profundis, c'était traverser les langues comme d'autres traversent les miroirs. [IFDP, p.47-9]

The image of the translator

One type of character epitomizes the intersection between languages and cultures in the works of both Robin and Kattan: the translator. This character, however, has a somewhat ambiguous role. For Robin, the translator is the link between the present and the past, but is also the one who severs this link. In *L'Immense Fatigue des pierres* (1999), the translator confesses her suffering and struggle to interpret the intentions and tones behind the words that she translates, even though she knows the language perfectly. There is no 'dialogue' between the translator and her subject, just the omnipresent reminder of death. Translation is a draining task, intellectually and physically, because it attempts to revive something forever lost:

Ce n'était pas tant de jouer dans les dictionnaires et les grammaires d'une langue qui avait perdu presque tous ses locuteurs qui lui faisait tant de mal, ce n'était pas tant l'étrangeté de ces caractères hébraïques si familiers qui la mettaient mal à l'aise. Non, c'était quelque chose qui était associé au silence, à la nuit et à la mort. [...] Ce voyage [en enfer], elle le faisait chaque jour, il était inscrit dans chaque lettre de l'alphabet. Elle étouffait. [IFDP, p.96]

The translator endures an emotional pressure from her work. In her view, she is more than a translator, she is both an intermediary between living and dead and an interpreter of the dead: when translating, she feels what they must have felt or said; she makes these emotions alive again at the cost of her own emotional balance. Unlike other translators, she feels that it is her duty to transmit their heritage and make it accessible to subsequent generations. In the end, however, she feels that she has to stop translating in order to prevent the world of the dead taking over her life and the world of the survivors.

In Kattan's short stories, on the contrary, the translator is a character who keeps his or her distance. He or she is perceived as being dishonest, as though it was acceptable for one individual to belong to two or more cultural communities at once as long as he or she keeps them separate, but unacceptable for this same individual to reveal one community to

the other via the translating process. Translation always appears to be a sort of betrayal or lie. People around the translator, and sometimes the translator him- or herself, seem to feel uncomfortable with the lack of clear boundaries between cultures, between 'us' and 'them'. For example, in the short story 'Le traducteur',⁷⁴ the main character - who is the translator - is invited to a party where he meets, by chance, his ex-mistress and her husband. She alludes to their relationship in veiled terms. Noticing that he remains seemingly emotionless, she hastily concludes that his work as a translator extends to his emotional life and that he translates his feelings in order to hide them. She, on the contrary, has given up her translating job – and implicitly the lies – to concentrate on her own writing. Again, here, as in Kattan's work generally, we encounter this idea that speaking another language is speaking through someone else's culture or voice, and is assuming someone else's identity. In another short story, 'L'attente',⁷⁵ Kattan describes the translator as someone who speaks the language, but who does not 'live' or 'feel' it:

Les langues, oui, bien sûr, mais on n'avait pas besoin d'interprète à Vancouver, où l'on ne parlait qu'anglais. Elle possédait cette langue, bien qu'à sa manière à elle. Elle en avait fait le tour, exploré les obstacles et les embûches, appris à les éviter, mais elle n'avait jamais pénétré les mystères d'un instrument qui lui restait étranger. Elle commettait rarement d'erreur et maîtrisait un vaste vocabulaire, mais à l'entendre parler on avait l'impression qu'elle se tenait à la clôture, qu'elle refusait de se frayer un chemin à l'intérieur de l'enceinte, rejetant, avec le mystère, toute vie. [LR, p.167]

Relations with the Jewish community in Montréal

We have seen earlier, when discussing Haitian and Middle Eastern writers, that being surrounded by a community of migrants from a similar cultural background plays an important part in the first stages of the immigration process. The relationship with such a community can be beneficial because it offers support and understanding, but it can also be unpleasant if it reproduces the oppressive conditions that existed in the country of origin. In the case of Robin and Kattan, the relationship with the Jewish community is different because none of their characters really belong or feel they belong to it: even though their religion and/or experience of life link them with the community, their cultural or educational background prevents them from feeling as one with the Jewish community.

For Robin, the Jewish community is, somehow, a bubble of the past. Members of the community have recreated their old European ways so much so that the narrator of the short story 'Mère perdue sur le World Wide Web'⁷⁶ thinks he is seeing ghosts in Montréal.

⁷⁴ Naïm Kattan. *Le Silence des Adieux*. Québec: Éditions Hurtubise HMH. 1999. p.43-53.

⁷⁵ Naïm Kattan. *La Reprise*. Québec: Éditions Hurtubise HMH. 1985. p.165-79.

⁷⁶ IFDP, p.99 – 125.

Similarly, the narrator of *La Québécoise* (1983) likes a particular suburb of Montréal, Snowdon, because, there, she can immerse herself again in the European way of life that she has left behind. Snowdon is a

Quartier d'immigrants à l'anglais malhabile où subsiste encore l'accent d'Europe centrale, où l'on entend parler yiddish, et où il est si facile de trouver des cornichons, du Râlé natté et du matze mail.
[LQ, p.23]

The characters rely very little on the community. In fact, the latter is only mentioned in its external signs of cultural difference; there is no insight into the community or detail regarding characters within it. The Jewish community is one amongst others:

CHACUN SA LANGUE
SA COMMUNAUTÉ
CHACUN SON QUARTIER
SON DÉPUTÉ. [...]
CHACUN SON HISTOIRE [LQ, p.158]

In Kattan's narratives, the Jewish community's role is also fairly limited. In *La Fiancée promise* (1983), it is this community that offers Méir his first employment and helps him find his feet. However, despite making new friends, he never really becomes part of it. The community is, nonetheless, presented as a tight and well-run organisation, almost self-sufficient.⁷⁷ A Québécois character claims her admiration for the community:

En tout cas, ce que je peux vous dire c'est que j'admire les juifs. Ils commencent avec rien et puis vous les voyez en peu de temps, propriétaires de commerces, d'immeubles. Ils sont travailleurs. Pas comme nous, les Canadiens. Nous aimons trop nous amuser et nous sommes paresseux.[LFP, p.199]

This remark, even though stereotypical, shows that the community projects an image of efficiency and success. The community looks after its members and even has an employment agency, which benefits Méir in the novel. Méir realises that members help each other out on the basis of a shared religion, identity, and history:

Qui étaient ces jeunes gens? Chacun avait une histoire mouvementée mais qui suivait un modèle ressemblant. Nés en Pologne, en Hongrie ou en Tchécoslovaquie, ils avaient été des miraculés. Ils avaient tous perdu parents ou famille dans les camps. Après la guerre, enfants, ils avaient passé quelques années en France, en Belgique, avant de venir au Canada. [LFP, p.42]

The fact that Méir never really fits in is due to him not sharing the same cultural and historical patterns. The only glimpse into the community is through the eyes of the narrator of the short story 'Quand ton grand-père' in *Le Silence des adieux* (1999)⁷⁸. The narrator is

⁷⁷ According to Nicholas De Lange (*Atlas of the Jewish World*. Oxford: Phaidon Press Ltd. 1984. p.63), the Jewish Colonization Association has been active in Canada and Québec since the 1890s and has largely contributed to the relief of Jewish misery and the settlement of communities over America.

⁷⁸ Hereafter *SDA*.

a Jewish woman, from a modest background, who is married by her parents to a rich but old husband at the age of fifteen. Her narrative tells the story of her life as a young wife and woman within the Jewish community over a period of eighty years: an arranged marriage, the hierarchy within the family, the importance of descent and having children, etc.:

Je venais d'avoir quinze ans quand j'ai vu ton grand-père pour la première fois. Il était habillé à l'ancienne, la coiffe d'un rabbin et les vêtements d'un chef de tribu, la barbe blanche, le front ridé. [...] Il avait l'âge de mon père. [...] Cet homme riche, puissant était maintenant mon mari. Veuf pour la deuxième fois, il régnait sur une famille nombreuse, innombrable. Six garçons et une fille. Tous mariés, avec des ribambelles d'enfants. Dans la grande maison, chaque fils avec femme et enfants, avait sa chambre. Dans la cuisine, c'était l'alternance entre les disputes et les partages. Chacune des femmes faisait sa propre cuisine. Ma place était toute désignée. Heureusement, les bonnes étaient là qui accouraient à mon secours. En dépit de mon âge, j'étais l'épouse du maître, la grande dame. [SDA, p.121]

In this extract, the picture depicted by the narrator shows a community anchored in traditions and archaic ways of life. However, like other female characters in Kattan's work, the narrator manages to turn the situation to her advantage and gains a sort of emancipation from this way of life when her husband dies: with his death died her strict adherence to traditions.

Holocaust and Jewish identity

Unsurprisingly, another topic developed in the narratives of Jewish writers is the Holocaust. Kattan appears to prefer to include it as part of the biographical or historical background for a character or a story. Characters are either survivors of concentration camps or their descendants. The common element to all of them is the void that exists in their lives: all of them have lost most - if not all – of their relatives and silence is the price of their survival. In the short story 'Les yeux fermés' - which is included in *Le Sable de l'île* (1981)⁷⁹ - Ruth and Mordechaï, whose parents perished in a concentration camp, have been adopted by Canadian families. Even though their origin has always been explained to them, they feel they should not openly discuss it. They would like to explore this part of themselves without jeopardising their relationship with their adoptive family, who seem to be reluctant to help them find out about it. The fact that they cannot discuss - let alone express - this part of their selves seems to deny its existence. They feel that their identity remains incomplete: their past is inaccessible, their genealogy severed. Ruth explains:

J'avais deux ans quand mes parents ont disparu, évanouis dans les fours. La famille qui m'a adoptée ne m'a pas caché mes origines. Ils sont chrétiens mais, en fait, ils ne pratiquent aucune religion. Ils ne m'ont jamais parlé des années de la tourmente. J'ai eu une enfance heureuse, insouciance. Parfois

⁷⁹ Hereafter *SDI*.

je leur en veux de m'avoir tant protégée. Ils ont voulu m'éviter des angoisses et des souffrances inutiles. Je ne sais presque rien sur mes parents véritables. Mes parents actuels n'en savent pas davantage et ne peuvent donc rien me dire. Comment et où m'ont-ils recueillie? Dès qu'ils en parlent, je sens leur malaise et leur réticence. Je me sens frustrée et je m'en veux car ils sont chics. Je suis leur fille et ils m'aiment. [SDI, p.11]

Ignorance of reality only reinforces the feeling of void: the characters cannot come to terms with something that remains unknown or vague. They cannot mourn the disappearance of their people. A similar guilt and desire to find out about one's origin is expressed by the narrator of the short story 'Le Pacte'.⁸⁰ During a trip to Europe, he decides to go and visit Dachau, where - according to his parents - relatives of his that he never met died. Until then, he seemed to have little concern with the fate of these faceless relatives: he knew what had happened to them without fully grasping the whole reality of their disappearance. The visit to Dachau acts as a catalyst: he is suddenly and violently reconnected to his memory as the past becomes almost tangible:

Ici, nous étions dans le passé, dans l'histoire et je me retrouvais dans ma mémoire. Les pleurs de ma mère éclataient soudain dans la réalité. Cette famille inconnue emportée dans le tourbillon était réelle. Mes lointains oncles et tantes avaient des visages. Et un après-midi d'automne, ils étaient réduits à un souvenir. [LR, p103]

As memory flows back to the narrator, it fills the void left by his voluntary ignorance of facts and an abstract knowledge of the Holocaust. Kattan's work shows the Holocaust as an unknown factor in the characters' identity, an unfinished matter, left untold, and causing them to feel as though their life is incomplete. It is interesting to note here that none of Kattan's characters are adult survivors and therefore have no first-hand knowledge of the Holocaust. One might recall here that Kattan is not a European Jew, so he would not have been affected by the Holocaust as personally as Régine Robin, for example. Nevertheless, his work conveys his observations of loss and uprooting that have become part of Jewish identity.

Régine Robin takes this idea even further. The Holocaust, in her work, is the cause for the loss of structure in oneself, leading to a loss of significance or sense of belonging for all the characters appearing in the narratives. In *L'Immense Fatigue des pierres* (1999), the narrator recalls:

Mémé avait eu un tel choc à la Libération qu'elle avait cessé de peser les mots, elle ne connaissait ni l'euphémisme ni les litotes. [IFDP, p.36]

⁸⁰ LR, p.93 – 105.

Here, language partly loses its power of significance; everything is told with equal importance: gravity or joviality no longer seem to matter, everything is apprehended with the same enthusiasm or lack of interest. Hence, the choice to live in exile like the first narrator of *L'Immense Fatigue des pierres* (1999), or to embrace passionately a wholesome life in Israel like her daughter; the choice to live without memory or, on the contrary, to trace one's genealogy; the choice to root oneself in one language, or to explore and use several at the same time.

The erosion of meaning is noticeable in Robin's texts themselves and is a recurrent topic. In *La Québécoise* (1983), Robin uses the traditional form of narrative, but mixes it with lists of names, hockey games results, long literary or political quotes, school manual exercises, restaurant menus, radio and television guides, recurrent sentences or sentences in English or Spanish; Hebrew is dismantled and only letters appear. In both books, the narratives are also broken up by Robin's games with syntax and experiments with the visual aspect of the text. Not only does it give the impression that the text is a disorderly and disorientated accumulation of facts, but also that the 'normal' or 'traditional' forms of narrative and language fail to provide tools to express the experience of the modern exile. The text is torn by two extremes: meaninglessness or a meaning so broad that it needs a broader language, a universal language that would convey all concepts and that Jacques Derrida names 'idiome pur'.⁸¹

The trauma of the Holocaust leads Robin to question the reality and reliability of collective memory, which, in turn, leads her to question the reality and coherence of one's identity. These are certainly the main recurrent themes throughout both *La Québécoise* (1983) and *L'Immense Fatigue des pierres* (1999). In *The Past is a foreign Country*, David Lowenthal points out that

The past as we know it is partly a product of the present; we continually reshape memory, rewrite history, refashion relics.⁸²

In her narratives, Robin certainly does remould memory and, consequently, the view of conventional identity. In the short story 'Journal de déglingue entre le Select et Compuserve',⁸³ Robin also suggests that the perceptions of the past can be altered. The

⁸¹ See Jacques Derrida. *Op. cit.* 1996. p.126.

Robin's work fits Derrida's description of multilingual writers aiming for the 'pure idiom': ' Bien sûr, on peut parler plusieurs langues. Il y a des sujets compétents dans plus d'une langue. Certains mêmes écrivent plusieurs langues à la fois (prothèses, greffes, traduction, transposition). Mais ne le font-ils pas toujours en vue de l'idiome absolu? Et dans la promesse d'une langue encore inouïe? D'un seul poème hier inaudible?'

⁸² David Lowenthal. *The Past is a foreign Country*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1985. p.26.

⁸³ *IFDP*, p.127-71.

narrator earns a living as a writer: she approaches people with offers to write their biographies, but embellishes the narrative - at their request mostly but also without their knowledge - with facts and even quotations copied from novels. She sees her work as both a way of improving on reality and of defying fate:

Les jours coulaient ainsi dans la fabrique du renouveau biographique. Elle donnait une nouvelle chance à tous ces malheureux, aux estropiés de la vie, aux victimes du destin, elle reconstituait leurs itinéraires au moment où ces derniers auraient pu bifurquer. Elle leur permettait d'opérer d'autres choix. [IFDP, p.156]

She reinvents the past to enhance the present, she fashions a memory to make up for her clients' lost opportunities and unfulfilled ambitions. Surprisingly, her clients go along with the modifications. They do not seem to think that tampering with their past will undermine their authenticity, quite the contrary. According to the narrator, her clients are satisfied with her work because they feel more real: she provides them with a - allegedly falsified - written proof of a fulfilled life, a heritage worthy to be passed on to their descent.

As for the narrator of 'L'agenda',⁸⁴ she tries to reconstitute her deceased mother's life, using the notes written in her mother's diary to fill in the gaps in her knowledge. Immediately after the death of her mother - who was a famous writer -, the narrator gave all manuscripts and original documents to publishers and libraries. All she has left from her mother is the diaries that she found later on and her memories. But, as Lowenthal suggests,

Memory feels no less residual than history. However voluminous our recollections, we know they are mere glimpses of what was once a whole living realm. No matter how vividly recalled or reproduced, the past progressively becomes more shadowy, bereft of sensation, effaced by oblivion.⁸⁵

The narrator's will to reconstruct her mother's life and feelings could be interpreted as a desperate attempt to retain an ever elusive past and to make it more tangible. In order to do so, she reinterprets other memories of the past, she manipulates her memories to fit in with the new facts: she transforms the past as she knows it, but also comes to the conclusion that she will never be able to know her mother's entire past and will have to accept its 'shadowy' nature.

While the past and one's own memories may appear malleable and not always easily accessible, they do not seem to determine the present and future. This is the case in *La Québécoise* (1983), for example. The book is composed of three narratives, each of which is told by a female voice that sounds identical to the other two narrators. They seem

⁸⁴ *Ibid.* p.75-83.

⁸⁵ David Lowenthal. *Op.cit.* 1985. p.192.

to share characteristics, tastes, memories, history, cultural background, and all three eventually return to Paris. Their circumstances in Montréal, however, are totally different; their life journey may have taken all three of them to live in exile, but, subsequently, their choices - and not their past - have determined their present. Here, Robin does not so much manipulate memory itself but shows how it can affect one's choices in life; she explores three possible futures for the same character. Could it be that, even though the past is the same, the present can be different and altered? In the context of the Holocaust, it might mean that nobody is prisoner of memory, that the past can be transcended, so that Jews can lead a full life.

The consequence of this malleable - but somewhat inconsequential - past in Robin's books is the impression that one's sense of identity - like meaningfulness - is fraying. We have seen earlier that languages are used as masks but, here, it is the whole idea of coherent identity that seems to be questioned. The narratives of *L'Immense Fatigue des pierres* (1999) show how identities can be hidden, borrowed, altered or even multiplied. All the characters - who have survived the concentration camps or are the descendants of survivors - play games with their personal identity, which they constantly reinvent as they reinvent the past. The successive narrative voices even seem to be a single one: details - such as the brand of cigarettes they are smoking or a taste for the same whiskies - common to most narrators point to the same person being reinvented through different narratives. It seems that Robin tries to fragment identity indefinitely: all these characters could be distinct facets of the same person, real or fictional. Maybe we could see this as a tactic used by Robin to throw the reader into confusion with regard to autobiographical interpretations? This seems to be confirmed by the narrator of 'Journal de déglingue entre le Select et Compuserve', who is the most confusing character of all: not only does she reinvent other people's biographies as a living, she also suggests that she does not have an identity or, rather, that she could also be all the characters at once and, even, the author on the cover of the book, Régine Robin herself:

Moi, je suis Pamela Wilkinson, ou Emilia Morgan, ou Nancy Nibor, ou Martha Himmelfarb, ou les alias du personnage quand elle prend part à des forums de discussion sur Compuserve ou sur Internet; je suis peut-être la fille de la narratrice, ou même Régine Robin si vous voulez. [IFDP, p.157-8]

This is a dizzying deconstruction of one's identity and, in turn, one is faced with questioning the part of reality in the narratives themselves: (auto-) biography, fiction, past and memory, all seem malleable, transformable. There is no apparent unity, no continuity,

reality is no longer separated from fiction. Memory and identity are infinitely extendable and equally meaningless, which leads the narrator of 'Manhattan Bistro'⁸⁶ to conclude:

Construire des reliques? Déconstruire des reliques? Pétrifier, muséifier sa propre histoire? Retour du refoulé. Ce qui fait retour dans le réel, ou au contraire historialiser sa propre mémoire. Des reliques, des bouts, des restes, à peine des souvenirs. Quelques listes, l'arbre, quelques dates. Faire avec? Faire quoi? Avec quoi? [IFDP, p.206]

Conclusion

Jewish writers offer a representation of identity that differs from that provided by the other groups of authors studied in this thesis by its lack of unity and continuity. The Holocaust has introduced a break in time and in memory. This incomprehensible rupture in people's lives and families shatters the idea of constituting oneself in the continuity of time and in the traditions of a culture. The near-destruction of the Central European Jewish people – targeted on the basis of its religion and culture – seems to render almost inaccessible their pre-existing culture. Memory and identity lost their coherence with the movement and disappearance of millions of people in concentration camps.

The representation of identity also seems to retain the idea of clandestinity, developed during the war. Adopting a mask was a way or at least an attempt to escape persecution, to save one's life. This technique is employed by Méir in *La Fiancée promise* (1983) in order to survive and avoid exclusion: the mask allows him to display cultural traits common to the group that he wishes to join without compromising his 'true' identity.

For the Jewish authors, migration is merely a geographical displacement: the cultural shift has already taken place and has been a survival tactic in reaction to a threat against their cultural self. Robin's characters point out that their place of migration itself has little importance as long as it is a cosmopolitan one, with no overbearing culture, and where a lot of cultures coexist: a sort of extrapolation of the self.

⁸⁶ IFDP, p.173-220.

Introduction

So far, we have looked at the ways that migrant writers have expressed specific aspects of their identity and what differentiates them from the Québécois population. By recalling childhood or arrival in a new country, for example, not only do migrant writers offer an alternative portrait of migrants, but they also provide themselves or their characters with a voice and individuality. Immigrants, almost invisible in the majority of Québécois novels, become the focus of attention in migrant writings. But migrant authors also analyse the actual process of becoming a migrant and its consequences on the individual's life. They use their personal experience in their novels and short stories, to give a different perspective on themselves and their communities, but they also present their reflections on what is to be(-come) a migrant. Even though their writing is, of course, a testimony to their personal and cultural origins and suggests their holistic identity, it nevertheless dissects the process of migrating: taking their experience as a template, migrant writers describe the different stages of transformation that migrants go through and document the consequences of migration; they investigate migrants' feelings when leaving their culture; they question their relations to their native culture and the one that they have adopted. In doing so, they destroy stereotypical images of migrants, and replace them with a subtle depiction and analysis of a human journey, not only in the geographical sense, but also its emotional, psychological, intellectual, and political effects on the individual.

We can distinguish several stages in the process of migration: the circumstances in which the individual becomes alienated from his or her culture, the actual departure from their native country and arrival in the new country and finally, the first compromises that the migrant must make to adapt to the new culture. The novels that describe the process of migration and acculturation are very different in tone, from those mainly dedicated to childhood memories, as they intend to create an impression of dire reality and urgency by quoting political or economical facts, by describing acts of violence, etc. Stress and disorientation transpire through these narratives.

⁸⁷ We have seen at the beginning of chapter III, that 'Enculturation' (or 'embeddedness') is the on-going process of learning the elements of one's culture, which organise one's thoughts and connect one with the rest of one's society. Acculturation, on the contrary, is the action of being removed or separated from one's culture, causing the individual to feel disconnected, disorientated, and alienated because he or she cannot make sense of the world around him or her: they have lost their cultural markers that allow them to understand and apprehend the world.

When does acculturation occur?

The first step in the definition of a migrant is to determine when the process of migration begins. The obvious answer seems to be that migrants' new lives begin when they leave their country, are separated from their family and friends, and start living in a foreign culture and way of life. However, Émile Ollivier's definition of 'acculturation'⁸⁸ states that the experience of foreignness or estrangement does not necessarily involve leaving one's country or culture:

S'il advient que l'individu émigre ou que son pays soit momentanément dominé par un modèle sociétal étranger, il connaît un phénomène d'identification à une culture qui n'est pas la sienne, processus d'acculturation.⁸⁹

As we have seen previously, most writers - or narrators - have identified and described the reasons that made them leave their country of origin and choose a life in exile. These reasons caused the authors/narrators/characters to feel isolated in their own culture, and that they no longer belonged. What used to link and anchor them in their society of origin is damaged if not entirely severed. Consequently, they have become migrants in their own culture; actually leaving it behind is the physical expression of a separation that has already occurred. This is well illustrated, for example, by the French writers who leave their country for no apparent reason of financial or political hardship. They – and their characters – believe, however, that they can no longer connect with a society that does not fulfil their hopes and aspirations. In their novels, France is represented as a decaying country, a prisoner of its past and traditions, in which intellectual and artistic life is debilitated by the *Parisianisme* that Navarre and, to a certain degree, Régine Robin hate so much. On a political level too, French authors/narrators also seem disillusioned and express their doubts about the French government and fellow-citizens, who appear to be abandoning the French democratic ideals. We refer here to episodes like the 14th of July Ball in André Marois's *Accidents de parcours* (1999), which bears more resemblance to a carnival parade than a dignified and respectable event. Marois contrasts this pitiful party with the celebration of the National day in Québec, during which the premier heads the celebration and appears approachable to people (p.63). To the characters, it seems a better indication of attachment to the democratic and nationalist values than an army parade. In Yves Navarre's *La Dame au fond de la cour* (2000), Camille – an autobiographical double of Navarre – is outraged by the French authorities' persecution of an Algerian immigrant

⁸⁸ Émile Ollivier. 'Quatre thèses sur la transculturation', *Cahiers de recherche sociologique*, vol.2, No. 2, 1984 (Septembre). p.75-90.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* p.81

couple who have lived in France for more than twenty years. Not only is the couple treated badly by other people and persecuted by the authorities, but Camille herself, by association, is harassed and isolated by her neighbours. In Francis Bossus's *La Tentation du destin* (1996), Mr Lougarel, originally from France, mainly recalls the cowardice and hypocrisy of the French people during World War II. To him, his compatriots do not inspire heroism, only contempt, because they submitted to the invaders rather than fight them.⁹⁰ In short, it is the spinelessness of their compatriots that convinces the writers and/or their characters that they no longer belong in France.

For Jewish writers and characters - apart from Méir in *La Fiancée promise* (1983)-, the links with one's culture and country are brutally and abruptly severed by the Holocaust. Constant reminders of it in Europe - and, often, open anti-Semitism - make it impossible for the survivors to stay, and they look for a fresh start. In his *Atlas of the Jewish World* (1984), which retraces Jewish identity throughout history and around the world, Nicholas de Lange remarks that

The Nazi holocaust heightened the anguish of the Jewish condition, by forcibly demonstrating the failure of assimilation even in countries which had pioneered it.⁹¹

De Lange emphasizes that Jews have always had a sense of having a 'special function in the world' and, as such, throughout history, they have accepted being separated from the rest of the societies in which they settled. According to him, centuries of persecution and diasporas made the Jews a migrant nation within a nation:

The segregation, although brought into being and maintained by the non-Jewish powers, was generally accepted by the Jews themselves. The system had the great advantage of permitting them to live under their own laws, which were considered to be divinely revealed. A potential source of serious conflict was thus avoided. Drawing on precedents from earlier times and on texts from the sacred scriptures, the Jewish leadership developed the notion of Israel as a holy people, separated from "the nations" to the service of the one God. So long as they were not physically maltreated, the Jews could see the separation in a positive light as a legitimate expression of their special function in the world.⁹²

⁹⁰ It is not clear, in the novel, why Lougarel is so dismissive of his compatriots, despite the heroic acts of the Resistance and other soldiers. A possible explanation would be that German officers requisitioned the farm in which the young Lougarel lived with his family, and he did not accept well the submissive attitude adopted by all. His bitterness seems to have survived ever since.

⁹¹ Nicholas De Lange. *Atlas of the Jewish World*. Oxford: Phaidon Press Ltd. 1984. p.81.

⁹² *Ibid.* p.54.

The Holocaust forced Jews to reassess their Jewishness and their position in relation to other nations.⁹³ The more unwarranted the persecution of the Jews, the more they became migrants within their own identities: the sense of uniqueness could no longer explain the relentlessness and the violence against them; they could no longer trust their own cultural and religious explanations of the world. This is mirrored in the novels of Jewish writers. Causing an incommensurable shock, the Holocaust leads Kattan's and Robin's characters to lose their sense of meaning in life, they feel that they no longer connect with anything: they move from country to country to which they do not feel attached by any sense of nationalism; they speak several languages, none of which adequately expresses their real self; their link to history and memory – be these personal or national – is damaged by or even totally disappears with the disappearance of family and friends in concentration camps. Their identity dissolves in the intangibility of their past and the uncertainty of their future. One of Robin's recurrent topics, for example, is that of 'drifting' or 'rootlessness': her characters often travel but never settle anywhere, their identities are at once vague, multiple, fragmented and ambiguous, as mirrored in Robin's own disjointed style. We have shown previously that in *La Québécoise* (1993), for example, Robin includes in the fabric of her narratives snippets of television and radio guides, menus, sports results, lists of names, literary quotations, etc. It seems that there is no order, no hierarchy that organizes the importance of the successive scraps of information: everything seems to matter – or not matter – equally. Here, migrating is verging on aimless nomadism.

Marie-Célie Agnant and Gérard Étienne identify a factor in Haitian culture that contributes to the acculturation of one part of the population: the exploitation of black Caribbean women.⁹⁴ This is one of the major topics of Marie-Célie Agnant's *Le Livre d'Emma* (2001). The novel tells the story of Emma and Flore: the former has been committed for killing her daughter, whilst the latter is her translator. Emma is a black woman from Haiti, who has migrated to Québec; she refuses to speak French, even though she can speak it perfectly, and considers Flore as a 'négresse ratée' because she has forgotten her origins. In the unravelling of Emma's life story, both women learn about themselves, and about what it means to be a Caribbean black woman, a descendant of

⁹³ The creation of the State of Israel in 1948 was one of the many answers to this identity crisis. Alienated in other nations' territories, condemned to a perpetual state of migration, some Jews felt that they had to acquire their own territory in order to be recognized as a fully-fledged nation.

⁹⁴ Liberation of women and feminist issues have also been developed by Nadia Ghalem and Naïm Kattan. The difference with the Haitian authors is that they do not present these issues as a major cause of acculturation, but rather they show them as an unexpected and beneficial discovery made by women who have migrated.

slaves. For Flore, in particular, translating Emma's life is a revelation, a reconnection with her past which leads to a better understanding of her present life. Consequently, Emma realizes that black people, and women particularly, are dispossessed of their history, because their previous 'masters' write – or rather re-write – history for their convenience, coddling their consciences:

Tu dois tout avoir appris dans ces livres qu'ils ont eux-mêmes écrits pour te conter ta propre histoire. [...] J'en ai lu, moi aussi, de ces livres, où l'histoire est tronquée, lobotomisée, excisée, mâchée, triturée puis recrachée en un jet informe, reprend-elle. [...] Ainsi, eux seuls continueront à écrire pour nous, pour qu'on ne sache pas que déjà sur les bateaux ils nous volaient et notre corps et notre âme. [LLE, p.22-3]

Emma also points out to Flore that black women have been the ultimate victims of slavery, being abused by men whether white or black, and that the Duvalier dictatorship has contributed to – if not encouraged – the continuation of their subordinate role:

C'est cette même année de mes neuf ans que sont arrivés les hommes vêtus de noir. Armés de leurs fusils, le regard dissimulé derrière leurs cagoules, ils sillonnent l'île. Le pays couché ne se relèvera jamais, prédisent les vieux, puisque les femmes, pour nourrir leur marmaille, apprennent à vivre sur le dos, sous les bottes des hommes en noir. [LLE, p.73]

Despite her education and improvements in her material life (before she was committed) that are probably due to her migration to Québec, Emma feels that she remains a victim: she no longer has to deal with physical abuse, but she faces silence on the part of others, those indoctrinated by Occidental culture which would like to forget the guilt of slavery imposed upon black men and women. Emma is faced with incomprehension and denial of her history and that of black Caribbean women generally:

Vivre dans une peau de négresse, c'est vivre en permanence dans une nuit sans étoiles, disait Mattie. Une nuit dense qui nous pèse tel un faix. Voilà pourquoi nous voulons nous en défaire, nous éloigner d'elle sans regarder en arrière. [LLE, p.108]

For Flore, translating Emma's story for Doctor MacLeod, a white male, is equivalent to trying to make him understand years of female suffering, frustration, and humiliation: it proves impossible. Emma's narrative contains a few optimistic notes for Flore, however. She believes that she has enlightened Flore with regard to the extent of the exploitation of black women, who are, more often than not, not fully aware of it themselves, owing to the influence and disinformation of colonialist discourse. Emma's legacy to Flore is a better understanding of and a reconnection with her cultural inheritance. In Emma's view, it will empower Flore and the black sisterhood generally, enabling them to 'stand on their own two feet':

Pour répéter un rêve, on n'a qu'à fermer les yeux et refaire, en sens inverse, le chemin du rêve. Ça ce sont des paroles de vraies négresses, tu sais, de celles qui n'ont jamais eu pour tout bien que leurs rêves. A l'arrivée des nôtres sur les plantations, on les dépouillait de leur nom, de leur corps, de leur existence – ne fais pas cette tête, Poupette, c'est la vérité pure ce que je te dis. Et pendant des siècles, d'autres ont usé, abusé, vendu, acheté, tué, rejeté, ignoré ces êtres que nous sommes, alors que veux-tu? Tu as beau faire, tes rêves seuls t'appartiennent. Tu ouvres de grands yeux, n'est-ce pas? Lorsque tu auras fini ton travail avec petit docteur, tu seras peut-être sur le chemin pour devenir une vraie négresse, une négresse debout. [...] Rien ne suscite autant de haine qu'une négresse debout. Ils voudraient nous voir toutes couchées. [LLE, p.58]

By the end of the novel, Flore accomplishes Emma's prediction: she has become stronger and able to fight discrimination for herself as well as for her 'race', or in Emma's words, a 'négresse debout'.

Gérard Étienne's vision of the condition of Black women is very similar to Agnant's.⁹⁵ Furthermore, in *La Romance en do mineur de Maître Clo* (2000),⁹⁶ Étienne blames Haitian men, who consider women to be objects at their disposal. Maître Clo, for example, states that

[Les] femmes haïtiennes [sont] nées, disait-il, pour accoucher des esclaves, non pour changer une société à l'instar des femmes cubaines, chinoises, israéliennes, palestiniennes. [LRDMC, p.29]

[Les] femmes noires [sont] exploitées, zombifiées, écrasées par la polygamie. [LRDMC, p.29]

But Adrienne, Maître Clo's sister, offers a deeper analysis of the acculturation of Black Caribbean women. In her view, the root of the problem is Haitian popular culture, legacy of African origins, that always presents women in a subordinate or negative role:

La femme noire, on la mange dans les chansons populaires; on en fait une diablesse dans les églises. Oui, [Adrienne] a lu les livres écrits par ses frères de race. A chaque fois qu'on parle de la femme noire, c'est dans des situations où elle se fait supplanter par des femmes au teint clair. Les portraits ne changent jamais, selon Adrienne: un panier de légumes sur la tête, des sandales usées, une robe bleue en forme de camisole, une large bande de toile autour des reins. [LRDMC, p.99]

Adrienne underlines the culpability of male intellectuals in perpetuating this tradition dating back from the times of slavery.⁹⁷ Like Emma in Agnant's novel, Adrienne believes that Black Caribbean women are prisoners of the past, held captive by their own cultural beliefs:

[Adrienne] réalise maintenant les conséquences dramatiques d'une telle relation avec une femme⁹⁸ dont le monde rappelle celui qui mangeait le nègre en l'assujettissant aux manipulations des propriétaires d'esclaves pour qui la moindre transgression des lois du code de l'esclavage signifie

⁹⁵ Gérard Étienne has worked as a journalist, both in Haiti and in Québec, in parallel with his teaching career. He has a realistic approach to fiction, and his narratives are well documented and tinted by his political and social analyses.

⁹⁶ Hereafter *LRDMC*.

⁹⁷ This tradition, in fact, can be traced back to Africa, where polygamy, for example, still exists in some societies to this day.

⁹⁸ The woman mentioned here is the goddess Erzulie, represented as a white woman. Gérard Étienne explains that the ritual to initiate young men to her cult resembles a sexual act.

une mort lente, voire la perte totale de son bon ange. [...] Pour Adrienne, la révolution demeure une pensée qui tourne sur elle-même aussi longtemps que le nègre haïtien reste prisonnier d'un esprit plus enclin aux folles amours qu'à la liberté totale de ses serviteurs. [LRDMC, p.99]

Women, here, are deprived of their freedom by their past and its perpetuation. For both Agnant and Étienne, in the subjugated Haitian society, women are maintained in exile in the past, incapable of breaking free from cultural clichés, and this leads to acculturation.

In Middle Eastern and Haitian novels, political factors are the main causes of migration or exile. A change of regime or war forces the characters to seek another - safer - place to live. The Middle Eastern characters also largely see their departure as an opportunity to improve their economic status and lifestyle. They very occasionally express nostalgia for their old ways of life, but the novels generally centre on their adaptation to the adopted country and culture. The impression is that Middle Eastern characters do not suffer from being cut off from their native culture. The cultural transition is different for Haitians writers and the characters that they have created after resettlement. For them, there exists a double process – and for Marie-Célie Agnant or Gérard Étienne, a triple process – of ‘acculturation’: the acculturation process is rooted not only in their departure from their country of origin, but also in the violence that they have to endure within their own country. In the case of Haiti, an individual, supported by a militia, has usurped the power and exerted ultimate control over the whole nation, consequently imposing - in Ollivier’s terms - a different societal model and restricting the normal political and cultural development of a society: this system is a dictatorship. Out of the four selected nationalities, the Haitian writers are the only group to describe this type of regime: France is a democratic country, and authors of other nationalities and/or their characters have left their country of origin when the situation was changing or was about to. This is a major topic for the Haitian writers, as we will see below, and it has prompted them to reflect on the subject not only through their creative work but also in their critical writing.

Circumstances of acculturation within one’s culture

While authors from other minorities describe personal reasons or changes in the circumstances of their lifestyles as reasons for their migrations, exiled Haitian writers describe their struggle with a dictatorial regime, which, in their view, has put their nation

under siege, and show in great detail the process of ‘acculturation’ under such a regime.⁹⁹ They become migrants within the boundaries of their own country, exiled in a moribund culture that cannot express itself. The image of the Duvalier dictatorship (1957-1986) is common to all the books of the Haitian corpus, except maybe Dany Laferrière’s *Comment faire l’amour avec un nègre sans se fatiguer* (1999) and *Éroshima* (1998), in which characters appear to be migrants but not necessarily Haitian.¹⁰⁰ As for Ollivier, he may have changed the names of people and places in his novels, but the disguise is transparent. Like other Haitian authors, he graphically exposes the whole Duvalier dynasty and its disastrous consequences for Haiti today (malnutrition, disease due to the lack of medical resources and clean water, etc.).

One of the main topics in the novels of Haitian authors is the omnipresent and terrifying violence. Torture, murder, rape, kidnapping, and arbitrary imprisonment are the everyday lot of the Haitian population under the dictatorship and its aftermath. Furthermore, people have to fear denunciations (be they well-founded or arbitrary) or being spied on not only by undercover *macoutes* but also by their own neighbours. In Péan’s *Zombi Blues* (1999), the opening pages immediately plunge the reader into the alienating atmosphere of Haiti. Port-au-Prince is at first described as a ‘bête blessée sur laquelle les ténèbres s’abattent telle une volée de vautours’ (ZB, p.17). Fear paralyzes the population and underlies all actions:

Les scènes quotidiennes - le désordre des gamins qui shootent dans leur ballon de foot, le boniment des marchandes ambulantes, l’exubérance des taps-taps bondés - ne sont que mardi gras, comédie burlesque interprétée sans conviction par des acteurs terrifiés. Dès la fin de l’après-midi, tous pressentent la tombée du rideau, ce moment redouté où la nuit réinstaura son régime. [ZB, p.17]

In a style that borrows the vocabulary of horror fiction, the narrator elaborates upon the fear of the population: anybody may be arrested and tortured by the *macoutes* for any reason; the police are not a source of relief either, as the officers are corrupt and obey the

⁹⁹ We have selected novels spanning from 1980 onwards. Most novels, therefore, refer to the current political regime - i.e. the Duvalier dictatorship - that forced the authors to leave Haiti. As most Haitian writers were unable or unwilling to return to Haiti before the fall of the regime, there is little trace of the political and social situation after that event. In Ollivier’s *Les Urnes scellées* (1995), the main character, Adrien, witnesses the violence and the climate of insecurity and fear even after the fall of Duvalier, which culminates in the death of a man and in Adrien being injured. Adrien comes to the conclusion that the end of the dictatorship has not improved Haiti’s situation, and that the country is under the siege of violent mercenaries. This turbulent climate is also echoed in Laferrière’s *Pays sans chapeau* (1999). It is maybe the lack of first-hand experience of the new regime that prevents Haitian authors from writing about it.

¹⁰⁰ Laferrière, however, has admitted to conceiving his whole literary output as his autobiography, of which each novel constitutes a chapter. In this sense, the Duvalier regime is tacitly there and originally responsible for the presence of the narrator in Montréal.

macoutes. The population is at the mercy of the government and its thuggish representatives, who seem to thrive on human sacrifice:

Avec la bénédiction de 'Notre-Doc-qui-êtes-au-palais-à-vie', les hommes de la nuit exigent des imprudents un tribut payable en argent ou en nature, s'ils ont de la chance, avec leur chair et leur sang, s'ils en ont moins. [...] Depuis une dizaine d'années, nuit après nuit, Port-au-Prince est livrée aux charognards. [ZB, p.17]

Further on in the narrative, the reader penetrates the atmosphere of fear that pervades Haiti and sets the tone for the whole novel. If Ollivier or Laferrière's childhood narratives mostly kept silent about the down-to-earth realities, this more politically aware type of novel, on the contrary, describes them in detail. The paralysis of the population imposed by the policy of terror of the government contributes to the acculturation process. People have little or no scope for normal activities let alone self-expression, art or any cultural activity. Few people are willing to take the chance to produce or voice anything that could be interpreted as subversive, as the sentence from the *macoutes* would be immediate and probably lethal. In addition to the fear of their own government, Haitians also feel that they have been abandoned by the rest of the world, from which they can merely expect token gestures of help from the 'developed world'. These previously colonialist countries – two of which caused the Haitian destitution in the first place, have lost interest (financially and otherwise) in Haiti, and do not wish to be seen dealing in any way with an alleged dictatorship:

Près du port, Christophe Colomb, pétrifié, tourne le dos au supplice de tout un peuple, préférant rêver des Indes inaccessibles. [ZB, p.17]

Isolated from other countries, there are few cultural exchanges possible, which contribute further to the strangulation of Haitian culture.

In Dany Laferrière's autobiographical novel *Le Cri des oiseaux fous* (2000), the author narrates his last day in Haiti, during which he is chased by *macoutes*. In his early 20s, he works as a journalist, reviewing art and literary events and, according to him, trying to steer clear of political matters as much as possible. The death of his friend Gasner and the threat of being arrested (or worse) by the *macoutes* force him to go on the run until his departure, arranged by his mother for the next day. During his last twenty-four hours, he tries to elucidate the circumstances surrounding Gasner's murder, and, in order to do so, he goes as far as braving the *macoutes* in the bar of their hotel, their usual meeting place. This event, lasting less than an hour, is narrated in four chapters - 'Le cinéma du pouvoir (3h42)', 'Éloge de la torture (4h07)', 'Un esprit subalterne (4h21)' and 'La mariée était en

rouge (4h27), (*COF*, p.285-319) - and gives the impression that time is suddenly stretching and slowing down under the pressure of fear:

Malgré le conseil pressant de Choupette, je n'arrive pas à me décider à quitter ce marécage nauséabond. Les crocodiles se croisent silencieusement. Des requins entrent. Des Léopards sortent. Des tigresses bâillent. [...] Cette ambiance fonctionne comme une bombe à retardement. Tic tac tic tac tic tac... Cela pourrait sauter n'importe quand. [*COF*, p.285-319]

Just as he did innocuously when sharing taxis, Laferrière now eavesdrops on the *macoutes* to solve the enigma of his friend's death. The narrator uses the same narrative technique as earlier: as a journalist, he observes in great detail the place, the people and their behaviour, but he is also very aware of his own reactions; he documents the chapters with his knowledge of the dynamics of the different groups of *macoutes*, and the intelligence that he gathered from Gasner. Borrowing the style of a wildlife documentary, Laferrière provides a vivid and realistic account of their words, thoughts and actions, which gives the reader the impression of a direct insight into the *macoutes*' world. He also mentions names and events, a feature that intensifies the feel of compelling realism in these four chapters. For the author, this episode looks like a rite of passage: like his father before him, in order to become a free man, he has to brave the *macoutes* and go into exile; he has to sever the link between himself and his culture by abandoning his mother and his country; he has to become a migrant. Like father, like son.

To the climate of insecurity, Émile Ollivier also chooses to add the denial of human rights and the disinformation process instated by the dictatorship, and pursued by the politicians who were 'elected' after the fall of the dictatorship. Zag, a hairdresser who appears in *Les Urnes scellées* (1995), first comments on the insecurity in the country:

Zag disait, avec son sens particulier de l'humour, qu'on avait inventé un principe inédit de gouvernement: la sécurité du pouvoir reposait sur l'insécurité des citoyens. [*US*, p.124]

Later, in chapter 17, Zag narrates to Adrien and some of his close friends an incident concerning nuclear waste. Some children have uncovered some radioactive stones and distributed them as a source of light, causing a massive epidemic. The government denies the reports at first and then forbids any studies or even any mention of the incident on pain of being arrested for crimes against the state. The conclusion to this 'anecdote' is worded by Zag as follows:

Regarder sans prendre c'est tenir là (en disant ces mots, Zag se martèlera la poitrine du poing droit), profond comme au fond d'un puits, le secret de la *survie*. En cette époque de haute insécurité où *vivre est une lutte incessante, un jeu permanent de hasard, un risque*, une mise dont on ne connaît pas l'enjeu, puisque perte et gain ne sont que différences passagères, *toute désapprobation ne peut être que silence*, mutisme criard à moins que l'on n'accepte de mourir. [*US*, p.160-61, my italics]

Through the mouthpiece of Zag, Ollivier underlines here how the government deprives the population of fundamental rights: living a normal life is replaced by barely surviving; freedom of speech, of opinion, and of personal expression are confiscated to prevent any opposition and, instead, one must submit in silence. The regime has ensured almost total control over the population, in the official as well as the personal sphere, suffocating any creativity.

In the same novel, Émile Ollivier illustrates, not without irony, this obsession with control in the character of Colonel Morland, who institutes the 'département des rêves' or the thought police. Striving to restrict the last vestiges of freedom left to the Haitian people, he hopes to discover their secrets by probing and controlling their intimacy and their very souls. This surreal idea¹⁰¹ - which at first looks absurd to the characters - proves to be a dangerous weapon in the hands of the government, incarnated here by the colonel, since it allows all kinds of abuse and unfounded condemnations.

Morland prétendait que ces manifestations de l'âme, ayant des supports de réalités, recelaient des cristaux d'informations dont le décryptage était indispensable à la sécurité de l'État. A cette époque, la peur atteignit des limites inimaginables. [US, p.145]

The 'département des rêves' embodies the absurdity and irrationality of the authorities, since even the most ridiculous idea cannot be questioned. The argument culminates when the colonel tries to incarnate the omnipresent all-seeing eye spying on each and everyone, but loses the sight of his other eye that he covers up in his representation. Through this character, Ollivier demonstrates both the obsession with control and the obtuseness of the government; the regime is ridiculed, but nevertheless presented as extremely dangerous because it combines power with lack of common sense and suppression of dissent.

Haitian writers use the image of the zombie to illustrate metaphorically the feelings of dispossession and mindlessness of acculturation caused by the dictatorship. In Haitian folklore, a zombie is a person believed to have been raised from the dead by the magic of Voodoo; once transformed into a zombie, the person loses his or her soul and becomes the slave of whoever raised him or her from the dead. Stanley Péan, for example, uses the image of the zombie in *L'Emprise de la nuit* (1993) and *Zombi Blues* (1999). In both novels, the image applies quite literally to characters over whom a malefic force (which is

¹⁰¹ Émile Ollivier has admitted that his work has been influenced by – amongst others – the work of Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Magic Realism; the 'département des rêves' can be seen as one of many examples of this influence. The 'département des rêves' also brings to mind George Orwell's futuristic nightmare, *1984*, in which one can be accused of 'crime thought' and is constantly watched by 'Big Brother'.

always related to the Duvalier regime in some way) has taken control; they appear normal but their behaviour tells otherwise. They have lost their ability to think freely, and they are the victims and prisoners of another mind to whom they have lost their souls. They no longer belong to themselves. Dany Laferrière also uses the image of the zombie. In fact, in *Pays sans chapeau* (1999), he applies it to the most of the population of Haiti. The author/narrator, who has gone back to Haiti in the early 1990s, a few years after the fall of the Duvalier regime, decides to investigate the rumours of the existence of zombies when he hears his mother telling the following anecdote:

J'entends ma mère raconter à la voisine avoir vu un bizango,¹⁰² il y a peine un mois, qui descendait la pente du morne Nelhio tout en buvant du sang et en gueulant des chants obscènes. Le corps couvert de cendres, nu, indécent, le sexe à l'air, les yeux rouges, la bouche crachant le feu, à la recherche d'une nouvelle victime dans la nuit opaque. [PSC, p.46]

The conclusion to the story is that most of the population have become zombies. Intrigued, the narrator interviews a professor and a doctor about the subject, and learns that a group of zombies/peasants have rebelled against their work conditions, and that the president himself is supposed to have recruited a group of zombies to fight against the American army. Doctor Legrand also tells him about the town of Bombardopolis, where Americans try to discover the secret of its inhabitants, who supposedly eat only four times a year! The theme of zombies in this book underlines dramatically the state of decay and desolation of Haiti and the imposed apathy of the population: implicitly, the Duvalier regime is compared to an evil force that has turned the Haitian people back into lifeless slaves. Starved by their own government and maintained in a state of perpetual terror, the population considers itself belonging to living dead:

On a l'impression d'être déjà mort, ici. Tout le monde, je veux dire les justes et les méchants. Tu vois, on trouve des charniers un peu partout. Les tueurs ne sont pas plus vivants que les tués. Nous sommes tous déjà morts. [PSC, p.102]

In *Le Cri des oiseaux fous* (2000), Laferrière also suggests this idea without developing it. The author/narrator, on an aeroplane about to leave Haiti, compares his imminent departure to leaving the world of the dead:

«Vous ne passerez jamais dans l'autre monde, disait toujours Da, si Legba ne vous ouvre pas la barrière.» C'est chose faite. Je peux respirer. A partir du moment où Legba¹⁰³ en personne est venu m'ouvrir la porte, j'ai été hors d'atteinte de tout mal. Je suis dans un autre univers. [COF, p.344]

¹⁰² A *bizango* is similar to a zombie, a living-dead creature controlled by the malefic magic forces of Voodoo.

¹⁰³ Legba is the god of the dead in the Voodoo pantheon.

The shocking image of the walking dead shows the devastation wrought by years of oppression, and the deprivation of basic rights and of the possibility of leading any sort of 'normal' life. This image of a defunct country reinforces the impression that, not only has Haiti been drained of its intellectuals, but its popular culture too has apparently been annihilated. Here, Laferrière suggests that exile is the only way to escape and survive the acculturation brought on by the Duvalier dictatorship. And yet, the effects of the dictatorship are only one aspect of acculturation for Haitian authors. Migration (or exile) is another and proves to be a double-edged sword.

The different stages in becoming a migrant

In their novels, migrant writers identify the process of departure and arrival in the new country as just one of many hurdles awaiting migrants on their way to resettlement. In an article published in 1993,¹⁰⁴ Marco Micone underlined the ambivalence of the procedure and the dilemma that faces any migrant:

Le deuxième volet de la culture immigrée concerne cette période charnière de l'émigration-immigration. Est-il besoin de réitérer que nul ne quitterait son lieu d'origine si la situation politique ou économique ne l'y forçait? Car, mise à part une minorité privilégiée, les autres n'en retirent – tout au moins au début – que de l'insécurité psychologique et matérielle qui les portera à accepter les pires conditions de vie et de travail. Ils se rendront compte rapidement qu'il n'ont pas laissé derrière eux que des difficultés, mais aussi une communauté, des êtres aimés et certaines coutumes dont ils ne peuvent se passer. Commence alors un mouvement oscillatoire et déchirant entre le regret et la joie d'avoir émigré, dont la durée et l'issue sont fonction autant de la façon dont s'est effectué le départ que de la qualité de l'accueil.¹⁰⁵

Most of the selected authors, when they do not describe their childhood country, choose this period of adaptation and changes as material for their novels, and their characters go through, successively or simultaneously, the stages that Ollivier describes in his article on transculturation, namely euphoric early days, crisis, respite from the stress of the process, and a catching up period.¹⁰⁶ Ollivier analyses what Micone calls a 'mouvement oscillatoire et déchirant' and takes it a step further by identifying four stages that can coexist at once in migrants' mental evolution during the early days of migration. In the first stage that he calls 'l'euphorie des premiers temps', migrants have just arrived in the coveted country and are busy with administrative processes, looking for a place to live and employment; everything is possible and all dreams and expectations appear to be within reach. This period also coincides – according to both Ollivier and Micone – with support provided by

¹⁰⁴ Mario Micone. 'Intégration et transformation culturelle', *Québec Français*, No90, 1993 (été), p.99-101.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* p.100.

¹⁰⁶ Émile Ollivier. *op. cit.* 1984. p.80-2.

the State and other organizations in order to ease the immigration process. The second step mentioned by Ollivier is 'la crise'. This usually occurs when migrants have begun to settle down and support has waned: they then become aware of the discordances between their hopes and dreams and the reality of everyday life, exemplified by the language barrier, economic hardship or simply homesickness. The crisis is brought on by the need for migrants to reassess their values and behaviour in order to adjust to their new lives:

A ce moment-là, le migrant rentre dans une phase où il abandonne certains aspects de sa culture, de sa tradition et se comporte avec un nouvel univers de valeurs.¹⁰⁷

Then comes 'le répit': the migrant has made the first adjustments to his or her situation according to the new codes or social rules of the host country, and makes the daily elements of the new culture his or her own. 'Le répit' is a satisfactory but usually temporary compromise that will see the migrant through the early stages of his or her settlement in the new country. The fourth stage described by Ollivier - 'le rattrapage' - is, for most migrants, the true beginning of acculturation. Ollivier specifies, however, that this last stage is not equivalent to assimilation. It is rather an intermediary stage, a temporary balance:

Le migrant ne s'assimile pas au pays d'accueil mais aussi il maintient de multiples liens avec sa société d'origine, s'approprie l'espace en le restructurant selon ses «habitus culturels», développe de façon autonome sa survie. Il ne se fond pas dans la population d'accueil.¹⁰⁸

Migrants acquire elements of the host culture that co-exist with their own; these elements remain foreign to migrants who familiarise themselves with them, reshape them to make them fit into their own views, but do not yet entirely 'reinvent' them, let alone, reinsert them under their new form into society, as authors later do. As Ollivier and Micone point out, these stages in the process of 'acculturation' do not necessarily happen consecutively or in any particular order for that matter: migrants might go through several stages at the same time. Most migrants authors have used the bipolar ambivalence of migration: on the one hand, they show characters who wish to discover and embrace the host culture ('euphoric early days', 'respite' and 'catching up period'); on the other hand, as we will see in the next chapter, they show characters who fall prey to the negatives aspects of migration ('crisis').

Despite nostalgic feelings depicted mainly in childhood narratives or a reluctance to leave one's country of origin, all migrant writers describe the excitement of arrival in the

¹⁰⁷ Émile Ollivier. *op. cit.* 1984. p.81.

¹⁰⁸ Émile Ollivier. *op. cit.* 1984. p.82.

coveted country, Québec. For most characters and narrators, it represents the land of a better life, presumably because it is affluent, carries no colonial associations, and, not least, is francophone. All are hopeful that their migration to Québec will mark the beginning of a fulfilling life. To a certain extent, some wish for the ‘American dream’ to come true: improvements in their material lives are enough to convince them that they have made the right choice in opting for migration. In Latif-Ghattas’s *Les Lunes de miel* (1996), Tante Eulalie, the main narrator, tells, with hints of irony, the story of Zelda who, on arrival, thinks that she has arrived in an earthly Heaven:

Tout l’émervillait. [...] Foi de Tante Eulalie, même si Zelda voit demain les petits cafards sortir du drain de la baignoire, elle n’en sera pas offusquée. Elle en a vu d’autres dans sa Haute-Egypte natale, à ailes et à moustaches, rampants ou volants, à quatre ou mille pattes. Zelda était au paradis. Un paradis où Dieu était Zohair et où Bertha semblait être pour l’instant une fée qui allait tendrement veiller sur leur amour. [LDM, p.147]

In Kattan’s work, the enthusiasm for resettling in a new country and expectations of success are underlying themes.¹⁰⁹ Kattan’s novel *Farida* (1991), depicts the society of Baghdad as closed, restrictive, secretive, and alienating, and the city itself is seen as a small, cramped place, in which everybody knows everyone else. By contrast, Canada and Québec are synonymous with open spaces and seem free from social constraint. In *Le Sable de l’île* (1981), for example, a character in the short story ‘Le Déménagement’ explains her choice to move to Québec:

«J’ai fui l’Europe», dit-elle à Ernest. « Je m’y sentais à l’étroit en Belgique. Tout était en modèle réduit et tout se répétait éternellement. On n’avancait ni ne reculait. On faisait du sur place. Il fallait que je bouge, que je me déplace. » [LSDI, p.111]

She hopes to ‘move forward’, to change her set way of life. The emphasis here is not so much on economic success, but on the possibility of living by different social – and geographical – standards. For her, the open spaces of the Canadian landscapes not only offer the promise of a certain freedom of movement; they are also synonymous with personal freedom and achievement. This is echoed in *La Fiancée promise* (1983). In this novel, the narrator, Méir, recounts his first year in Québec. Having just disembarked from the boat that brought him from Europe, Méir expresses his hopes of cutting out a life for himself in the new country, liberated from the weight of tradition and obligations.

J’étais seul, tout à fait seul. Tout était possible désormais. Seul et libre. [LFP, p.7]

¹⁰⁹ Kattan’s own life is a success story: he quickly became involved in the cultural and literary life of Québec. In 1967, he was appointed director of the literature department in the Canadian Arts Council and worked there until his retirement in 1992. He was also awarded the ‘Ordre national des Québécois’, and the ‘Ordre du Canada’.

Despite setbacks and discomfort, Méir remains optimistic and sees his situation as a temporary arrangement. He retains his faith in the promises of immigration officers and has no doubt that he will succeed:

Ma chambre au YMCA était minuscule, bruyante et surtout chère. Deux dollars par jour. Ma valise se trouvait toujours à la consigne. Je pris mon petit déjeuner à la cafétéria. A midi, je mangeai des fruits achetés au magasin du coin: Dionne. Mes cent dollars s'amenuisaient. Du travail, j'en trouverai. Le consul du Canada à Paris me l'avait affirmé en m'octroyant le visa d'immigration. «Le pays est vaste et nous avons besoin d'hommes honnêtes et de bras solides.» [LFP, p.12]

Méir sees Québec as a place to start a new life, a land of opportunities, and so do the multiple narrators of Régine Robin's *La Québécoise* (1993). The three narratives that constitute the book can be interpreted as three alternative lives, three possible experiences of immigration by one character. The idea that one can succeed socially, financially or emotionally, that everything is possible, underlies the three parts. All narratives have in common a frantic desire to discover the province of Québec, and to experience this discovery in all its chaotic diversity, as summarized in the leitmotiv:

Pas d'ordre. Ni chronologique, ni logique, ni logis. [LQ, p.15]

This implies that, on some level, the narrator(s) wants to incorporate everything indiscriminately: it is a bulimic experience of immigration; everything is worth remembering, including such trivia as television and radio guides, sports results charts, advertising slogans, etc. The above leitmotiv also suggests spontaneity, which contrasts with the rigidity of the *Parisianisme* that the narrator tries to escape. The puns, lists and other elements contribute to the deconstruction of the traditional structure of the narrative and derive from the desire to escape intellectual control. A similar thirst for new sensations and the discovery of every minutiae of the new country is also found among the Haitian group, and in Gérard Étienne's *La Romance en do mineur de Maître Clo* (2000):

Pourtant il éprouve le besoin de connaître à fond ce coin de l'Amérique du Nord où il vient de débarquer, connaître tout de suite les visages en relief dans le quartier, les raisons du plaisir de bouffer du spaghetti, une gorgée de bière après chaque cuillerée, la nature de la caboche des gens du pays qui manifestent tant de tendresse à l'endroit de leurs chiens en leur grattant la gueule au moment de pisser. Ce dont il est certain, c'est qu'il pense, rêve, ronfle en étranger, peut-être non-désiré, qui devra cependant livrer bataille à un paquet de forces contre lesquelles il ne possède pas encore des armes qui servent à la riposte. [LRDMC, p.12]

These details, that might seem trivial, constitute the daily routine of an individual, the thread of one's identity. There are hints here of a certain desperation to embrace the routine of 'natives' in order to fit in, to feel less of a foreigner, but this also reflects a mild criticism of a society that pressures newcomers into a lifestyle that does not suit them.

Through the mouthpiece of Maître Clo, the description of mediocre behaviour is ironically elevated to the rank of a culture that migrants should embrace.

A similar enthusiasm for life in Québec is found in Yves Navarre's *La Terrasse des audiences au moment de l'adieu* (1990). The book is in the form of a diary kept by Navarre from the moment he decides to emigrate. Tired and disillusioned by his life in Paris, Navarre thinks the perfect remedy is to move to Québec and keeps praising the Province and its people. In fact, the whole book is organized around the dichotomy Québec/Paris; the former is synonymous with purity, honesty, enthusiasm, simplicity and youth, and the latter means only corruption, hypocrisy, degeneration and meanness. If, for Latif-Ghattas's *Zelda*, Québec was Heaven, for the manicéan Navarre, Québec is the doorway to Heaven: Zelda discovers abundance, Navarre hopes to save his soul – and his skin:

Je vais sauver ma peau. Je veux sauver mon âme. [...] Alors, je serai libre. Et deux. Enfin deux. A nouveau deux: le pays nouveau et moi. Le fascisme parisien ne passe plus. Le lyrisme passera. J'aime. Je repars comme un aimant. [*TDA*, p.10]

Here, not only does Navarre tell of his hopes for spiritual salvation, he also expects to feel regenerated emotionally. The vocabulary in this quotation and throughout the narrative is that of love and bonding. Navarre's enthusiasm for the Province is close - if not equal - to feelings of a person in love. This assimilation between the new country and a 'native' is a common and recurrent topic amongst migrant authors who describe the 'euphoric early days' of immigration.

A passionate affair

In the narratives we have studied, starting a new life in Québec often coincides with starting an – often passionate and intense - relationship with a Québécois citizen. In fact, the relationship often foreshadows that between the migrant and the country, as in Latif-Ghattas's *Le Double Conte de l'exil* (1990). From inception, the encounter between Fêve, an illegal Middle Eastern immigrant, and Madeleine, a Native American originally called Manitakawa, is described as an embrace of cultures, languages and social behaviours. Again, the vocabulary employed by Latif-Ghattas is clearly that of love and passion:

Ils se sont aimés jusqu'à la fonte des neiges. Jusqu'au dégel de la plus fine pellicule de glace sur la chaussée. Ils ont vu l'irruption des bourgeons au printemps et le vert somptueux des érables en été. Il a aimé ce pays comme on aime la femme qui vous sort de l'enfance. Absolument. Il a appris sa langue et lui a transmis des fragments de la sienne. Il venait de si loin. D'un monde si vieux que ses phonèmes résonnaient comme les oracles qui hantent nos imaginaires en perpétuel devenir. Elle l'avait recueilli chez elle sans le moindre préjugé. Sans même lui demander l'origine de son nom. Émerveillée devant la beauté de sa peau d'acajou et le profond regard de ses yeux noirs qui perçaient son silence. Elle avait patiemment répété ces mots qu'il ne comprenait pas. Il les avait attentivement écoutés avec l'ardent désir de les inclure dans son destin. [*LDCE*, p.9]

In this passage, the development of passion between both characters is linked to a gradual and mutual understanding of each other's culture and language. The rapid, though symbolic, change of seasons reinforces the idea that the relationship between Fève and Madeleine blossoms and develops very quickly, but it also denotes a fervour to embrace everything. For Fève, the eagerness to learn about Québec and to be included in its culture coincides with the desire to be included in Madeleine's life:

S'il avait relégué son passé brûlant dans les zones du rêve, il comprenait timidement que le présent ne lui accordera ses lettres de créance et un certain repos du cœur qu'au moment où il lui aura offert en échange la trame de son passé aussi halluciné qu'il puisse paraître. Quand il pensait à Madeleine, sa passerelle magique vers le présent, il ne pouvait s'empêcher d'être saisi par sa confiance sans limite, et pourtant il s'étonnait à peine de l'intuition de cette femme qui semblait avoir tout deviné d'emblée, comme si dans son propre passé quelque chose l'avait prédisposée à accueillir l'impossible errance, à guérir les entailles du cœur. [LDCE, p.92]

By welcoming Fève and treating him with respect, Madeleine shows him that life is worth living and that Québec might welcome him like she does. She pulls him out of the violence of the past, by providing kindness and teaching him the knowledge of the new life and the new country; in his view, she represents an intermediate between the past and the present, and between 'here' and 'there'.

A similar idea is noticeable in Kattan's *La Fiancée promise* (1983). The title of the novel seems to suggest an arranged marriage, and one expects Méir to be joining his fiancée in Québec. But, it turns out that Méir intends to remain single and, far from settling with one girlfriend, he goes out with a succession of women. As we have seen previously, Méir hops between cultural communities without being tied to a particular one and, each time, he seems to be introduced into the community in question by a girlfriend. Louise Gauthier analyses this succession of girlfriends in *La Mémoire sans frontières* and proposes the following answer:

En porte-à-faux entre deux lieux et plusieurs cultures, Méir a peur du vide et s'accroche à toutes les femmes qu'il rencontre comme à des planches de salut: le visage change, mais la quête se poursuit.
110

As we have seen earlier, Méir's quest is, of course, to make a living for himself, to achieve a successful lifestyle. He becomes involved with a partner from each cultural group he comes across but, at the end of the novel, his choice seems to be set on the Québécoise Claudia, who, it seems, incarnates the country to which he has come to achieve success: her parents are from Europe – her father is Belgian, her mother French – but she was born in Québec; like Méir, she does not feel that she belongs to any ethnic group; she is

¹¹⁰ Louise Gauthier. *La Mémoire sans frontières*. Sainte-Foy: Presses l'Université de Laval. 1997. p.86.

Québécoise. The description of Méir's dream at the very end of the novel strangely recalls the beginning of the novel when Méir describes the landscapes that he can see from the boat and then the train, emerging out of the fog; the difference is that, at the end of the novel, what emerges is the depiction of a woman. The focus of his quest appears to have changed too: it seems that both Claudia and Québec have fused in Méir's mind and heart:

Hier, j'ai eu le même rêve. Je n'ai pas cherché à deviner ce visage des brumes. J'avais la certitude de le connaître. Je ne le regardais même pas. C'était toi, Claudia. [...] Je suis venu de loin Claudia et n'ai plus besoin de deviner les traits de ton visage. Nous allons sauter et courir. Nous savons que partout où nous serons, à l'une ou à l'autre extrémité il n'y aura ni pierre ni refuge. Un visage. Un seul visage. Il faut venir de loin pour le savoir. [LFP, p.231]

In this concluding paragraph of the novel, Méir has found the object of his quest; through a woman, he has found the key to his new country.

Lastly, this topic is also present in work by the Haitian group, particularly in Dany Laferrière's *Comment faire l'amour avec un nègre sans se fatiguer* (1999). In this novel, the narrator and his friend Bouba – who are living in the precarious conditions of newly arrived immigrants – also have a considerable number of girlfriends. These women do not have names as such, only nicknames given by the narrator, but each nickname corresponds to a trait of character or one aspect of Québécois culture. 'Miz Sophisticated Lady', for example, is a rich English girl from the well-off suburb of Westmount; 'Miz Littérature' is a student at McGill University. It seems that the narrator's knowledge of Québécois society and of Montréal's geography is directly linked to his relationships with these 'Miz'. Finally, the interview about his novel with 'Miz Bombardier', who works at Radio-Canada,¹¹¹ validates his success since she enthusiastically recommends his book and offers him the chance to advertise it to a large audience. Here again, the narrator's ambition is achieved thanks to his encounter with a woman: first, women become the material for his novel, then his talent as a writer is acclaimed by a renowned – female – Québécois critic. Here we see the culmination of the passionate relationship between the woman as the representative of the country and the migrant. However, no passionate relationship, as we will see in the next chapter, develops without crisis.

¹¹¹ This 'Miz' is clearly based on the journalist and author, Denise Bombardier, who is a well-known personality in Québec. Since 1970, she has hosted several public affairs television shows, as well as cultural programmes.

Conclusion

Separation from one's country and culture, often in a climate of violence, is a painful and complex experience. For personal, cultural, economic or political circumstances, some individuals become alienated, oppressed or are considered expendable within their own culture or country. Before even emigrating, they come to represent a figure of alterity within their cultural group and, for this reason, are excluded. Migration appears to be the solution, a temporary one for exiles who await the fall of the political regime that forced them out, or a permanent one for those who have hopes of better conditions of life.

Migrants' expectations are therefore high when they arrive in their chosen country of adoption. Some hope that it will be a safe haven in which to wait for the time to go 'home', others see it as a place where all their dreams can become true. Often, first impressions exceed their expectations because of the contrast that exists between 'there' and 'here'; the feeling of freedom and abundance is overwhelming and exhilarating, even though the underlying irony of narrators already hints everything is not what it seems to be. The novelty aspect of migration starts to wear out as soon as migrants realise that what they see as quirky 'novelty' will actually be their lot for as long as they stay 'here'. In other words, the crisis starts with their first encounter with the prospect of permanent Otherness.

Chapter 6: Coming to terms with alterity

Introduction

In the previous chapter, we have seen that going through the process of migration is an ambivalent experience. Although migrants feel the need and the desire to discover and learn about their country of adoption, they find it hard to let go of their past and their traditions. Émile Ollivier describes a moment of crisis for the newly arrived immigrants, which occurs when the euphoria of the early days fades and migrants have to deal with reality. Beginning to reflect on their losses, migrants can be subject to bouts of nostalgia about their country of origins, and disillusionment about their host country. As Émile Ollivier also points out, once immigrants have attended to their most urgent needs, such as necessary paperwork, finding a place to live and a job, and when support from governmental bodies and/or their communities has waned, they quickly become aware of the problems facing them:

[La crise] éclate au moment où les discordances s'accumulent. Quels en sont les éléments? Confrontation des valeurs, prise de conscience de la relativité des conventions sociales supposées universelles. Dans ce contexte, le migrant développe un sentiment de désenchantement, de désabusement.¹¹²

According to Ollivier, it is a combination of factors that triggers the crisis in migrants' lives, and migrant authors have included many of these factors in their novels. In addition to the possible factors listed by Ollivier, characters have to face financial hardship, prejudice, communication problems, and social and personal humiliation, all of which lead migrants to develop coping mechanisms ranging from a feeling of being invisible to personality disorders.

The causes of crisis

For migrant authors, the representation of crisis in migrants' lives is an important topic as it draws attention to the difficulty of the process of migration and contradicts all clichés of migrants as freeloaders. They indicate the psychological and material causes that contribute to the doubts migrants might have about their choices. An immediate cause of crisis is the realization of cultural loss. Immigrants are constantly confronted with a culture that is not theirs and are reminded of their loss. They have to learn new rules and new

¹¹² Émile Ollivier. 'Quatre thèses sur la transculturation', *Cahiers de recherche sociologique*, vol.2, 1984 (Septembre). No. 2, p.81

behaviour (both personal and social), to appreciate new food, to make new relationships, and somehow 'forget' everything that applied before. They become suddenly and painfully aware of their attachment to their country and culture of origin, and of how their previous way of life - that they had taken for granted - has modelled their personality and point of view. Dany Laferrière, for example, has captured the brutal suddenness of becoming a migrant, with all its implications, at the end of *Le Cri des oiseaux fous* (2000). About to leave Haiti, he suddenly becomes acutely aware of the price he has to pay for freedom:

Je serai donc seul pour affronter ce monde nouveau. Comme ça, du jour au lendemain. Un univers avec ses codes, ses symboles. Une ville nouvelle à connaître par cœur. Sans guide. Ni dieu. Les dieux ne m'accompagneront pas. L'ancien temps ne pourra m'être d'aucun secours. Au contraire, il me faut tout oublier de mes dieux, de mes monstres, de mes amis, de mes amours, de mes gloires passées, de mon éternel été, de mes fruits tropicaux, de mes cieux, de ma flore, de ma faune, de mes goûts, de mes appétits, de mes désirs, de tout ce qui a fait jusqu'à présent ma vie, si je veux continuer à vivre dans le présent chaud et non sombrer dans la nostalgie du passé dans moins de trente secondes, au moment où l'avion quittera le sol d'Haïti. Et Montréal ne m'attend pas. [COF, 344]

Although, migration is the door to freedom, it appears to be almost as great a shock as living under a violent dictatorship: as well as being a rupture with one's culture and social group, it is a leap into the unknown, a confrontation with a new geography and new codes, and a forced renunciation of the past and of everything that one has considered to be part of one's identity so far in one's life. Literally foreign to migrants' new lives, their pasts become frozen, if not obsolete. Disconnected from the past, migrants are condemned to live in a perpetual present.¹¹³

We have previously seen that Haitian writers - such as Dany Laferrière and Émile Ollivier - have devoted entire novels to the depiction of the past and their childhood;¹¹⁴ others, instead, drop hints of what they miss from their previous existence.¹¹⁵ The precise descriptions of places, tastes, colours, people, and atmosphere tinge the texts with nostalgia and regret: without criticising their new – better and safer – lives in Québec, narrators

¹¹³ Eva Hoffman, who emigrated from Poland to Canada in her early teenage years, expresses a similar idea in her autobiographical novel *Lost in Translation* (New York: Penguin Group. 1989. p.116-17): 'I can't afford to look back, and I can't figure out how to look forward. In both directions, I may see Medusa, and I already feel the danger of being turned into stone. Betwixt and between, I am stuck and time is stuck within me. Time used to open out, serene, shimmering with promise. If I wanted to hold a moment still, it was because I wanted to expand it, to get its fill. Now, time has no dimension, no extension backward or forward. I arrest the past, and I hold myself stiffly against the future; I want to stop the flow. As a punishment, I exist in the stasis of a perpetual present, that other side of "living in the present", which is not eternity but a prison. I can't throw a bridge between the present and the past, and therefore I can't make time move.'

¹¹⁴ See, for example, *L'Odeur du café* (2001) or *Le Charme des après-midi sans fin* (1998) by Dany Laferrière, or *Mille-Eaux* (1999) by Émile Ollivier.

¹¹⁵ See *Les Jardins de cristal* (1981) by Nadia Ghalem, *Les Feux de l'exil* (1991) by Dominique Blondeau, or occasional mentions of nostalgia by the French writers.

identify gaps in their life, caused by the abrupt separation from their culture rather than by their existence in Québec. These ‘gaps’ sometimes develop into feelings of emptiness, solitude, unhappiness and drab living. In Dominique Blondeau’s *Les Feux de l’exil* (1991), the character of Anastasia is torn apart by such a crisis. Her nostalgia for Morocco, the land of her childhood, haunts her, destroying the balance that she had found between ‘here’ and ‘there’, ‘now’ and ‘then’. In fact, it has such devastating effects that Anastasia’s friend, Chloe, draws a parallel between her nostalgic feelings and a cancer that is consuming her:

Anastasia appartient à cette race d’individus dont le pays natal s’incruste dans la chair, tel un mal sournois... Un cancer! Il y a des gens qui cherchent et ne trouvent pas. Ils s’éloignent de leur territoire naturel. Girouettes, ils tournent tournent sur eux-mêmes, se dirigent en aveugle. [LFDE, p.189]

Anastasia is doubly sick: a cancer is effectively destroying her body, and her cancer-like nostalgia spreads through her mind and drives her to the verge of insanity. In extreme cases like Anastasia’s, nostalgia becomes a destructive obsession. In the following passage of her novel *Lost in Translation*, Eva Hoffman offers an explanation as to why such fondness for one’s country of origin is so strong, and calls it an inalienable love:

No, I’m no patriot, nor was I ever allowed to be. And yet, the country of my childhood lives within me with a primacy that is a form of love. It lives within me despite my knowledge of our marginality, and its primitive, unpretty emotions. Is it blind and self-deceptive of me to hold on to its memory? I think it would be blind and self-deceptive not to. All it has given me is the world, but that is enough. It has fed me language, perceptions, sounds, the human kind. It has given me the colors and the furrows of reality, my first loves. The absoluteness of those loves can never be recaptured: no geometry of the landscape, no haze in the air, will live in us as intensely as the landscapes that we saw as the first, and to which we gave ourselves wholly, without reservations. [...] Insofar as we retain the capacity for attachment, the energy of desire that draws us toward the world and makes us want to live within it, we’re always returning.¹¹⁶

Hoffman underlines here the price to pay when one migrates: one has to renounce the world as one knows it. Living as an immigrant is living disconnected from not only a place and a culture, but also from oneself. Coming to terms with this separation becomes a daily battle for immigrants, a battle that they can surrender – like Anastasia – or that they can wage and eventually win. In this sense, we can interpret the representation of the past in the country of origin or the retention of old habits, foods or traditional clothing as an act of resistance to try to hold on to the past that is slipping away rapidly.

After a realization of cultural loss, language is a second factor to be considered. Referring to Ollivier and Kattan, Louise Gauthier in *La Mémoire sans frontières* speaks of

¹¹⁶ Eva Hoffman. *Op.cit.* 1989. p.74.

‘exil dans la langue’,¹¹⁷ but this notion could be extended to all authors. According to Gauthier, ‘exile within the language’ occurs when authors create a text in a language other than their mother tongue, borrowing images, myths, etc from their culture of origin, or imprinting some aspects of their mother tongue on the ‘foreign’ language. We have seen earlier how each author included these effects to assert his or her cultural identity. The writers from France note the slight lexical variations of Québécois French, for example, or remark on the different accent, and in so doing, they acknowledge their own foreignness. As for the Haitian or Middle Eastern writers, we have seen the introduction of Créole and Arabic words into the framework of the French text; some expressions seem modelled on Arabic, and sometimes, it is the whole narrative genre that is transposed.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, most writers and characters are already bi- or multi- lingual owing to their education. In Haiti, the language of education and administration is French (a legacy of colonial days), Créole being used for informal and familiar communication.¹¹⁹ For some of the Middle Eastern writers from Egypt or Iraq, learning French was a deliberate choice because of the prestige of French culture; but for Algerian writers, like Nadia Ghalem, French is associated with feelings of being subjected and persecuted as a result of colonization:

J’ai couru le monde, j’aurais voulu te dire comment on nous voit, comment ILS nous voient, les étrangers, ceux qui ne savent rien de nous. Ils savent que nous parlons leur langue, ils ne voient pas que nos pensées sont abîmées, tronquées, lourdes de mots inutilisés.[JDC, p.20]

Being in exile within the language is therefore not necessarily something caused by emigration but, in the case of migrants, it adds even more to their feelings of foreignness by destabilising the harmony between their languages. This idea is further developed in some of Naïm Kattan’s short stories and in the work of Régine Robin. As we have seen previously, these writers create characters that have changed countries several times and have become multilingual. As a result, the characters do not feel exclusively connected to one particular culture and language; they either do not invest any emotions into the languages or, on the contrary, their personality and emotions alter depending on the language that they use. The characters are caught at the confluence of several languages

¹¹⁷ Louise Gauthier. *Op.cit.* 1997. p.99.

¹¹⁸For example, Latif-Ghattas introduces elements that are in keeping with *Arabian Nights* and the oral tradition of storytelling by African *griots*, since *Les Lunes de miel* (1996) is a collection of short stories ‘told’ by Tante Eulalie to Christine, and *Le Double conte de l’exil* (1990) includes chapters that are a poetic dream sequence experienced by Fêve.

¹¹⁹ In *Mille-Eaux* (1999), an autobiographical novel, Émile Ollivier recounts that his mother forbade him to use Créole as she considered it to be for the lower classes. Conversely, in Laferrière’s *Le Charme des après-midi sans fin*, we see the gendarme Djo making an important and formal announcement in French to the population of the village but, as nobody understands French, he has to repeat himself in the vernacular (p.181).

and cultures, never fully belonging to any of them. Critics (including Louise Gauthier) call this in-between zone, *babélisme*: with several languages spoken at once, communication suffers from foreign interference, tampering with the meaning of words, the introduction of alien images and references, and the subversion of the quintessence of a given language. This *babélisme* reinforces the idea and feeling of precariousness in the mind of migrants. By becoming a migrant, the – often previously multilingual – individual becomes acutely aware that the part of identity encapsulated in language is as perishable as any other memory. This concern is expressed by young Alexis, the eponymous character of Marie-Célie Agnant's *Alexis d'Haïti* (1999): Alexis's cousin has emigrated to North America and is no longer able to communicate with his relatives in Haiti:

Il parlait une langue étrange. Ce n'était plus le créole, mais un charabia que personne ne comprenait. [AH, p.37]

Quand on quitte son pays, poursuit Alexis, dans un débit saccadé, on peut rencontrer d'autres mornes, mais ce ne sont plus les nôtres, on ne sait pas les reconnaître. Alors on peut tourner, tourner à l'infini jusqu'à oublier *qui on est et d'où l'on vient*. C'est ce que dit mon père et le père de Jérémy pense aussi la même chose. Ceux qui partent ne reviennent jamais et, au bout d'un certain temps, ils ne savent plus *qui ils sont vraiment*. [AH, p.55, my italics]

Losing or tampering with one's language becomes the equivalent of losing and alienating oneself from one's past and origins.

A third factor, namely the insecurity caused by a change in social status, contributes to the crisis that migrants go through. In the novels, there are three aspects to this factor, which can appear individually or in combination: racism, poverty and professional underestimation. In the four groups of novels, there are mentions of discrimination not only between people of different colours but also between people of different nationalities. In the novels by migrant French writers, characters are not victims of racism but they observe it. For example, Jules, a young man born in Québec and the main character in André Bossus's *La Tentation du destin* (1996), successively notes different forms of prejudice exhibited by his employers, acquaintances, or even himself. When he first meets Nora, the Haitian maid in his employer's house, Jules is taken aback by Nora's honesty: she tells him openly and quite ironically that she doubts his motives for accepting the position of secretary are truly sincere. But he assumes that she hates him on the grounds that a black woman cannot feel otherwise towards a white man:

Et elle avait dans les yeux une lueur qui ne trompait pas, celle d'un mépris ancestral pour le Blanc et l'intrus que j'étais. [LTD, p.28]

But Jules does not feel any differently towards her or other coloured people:

Et cette vision surgit de mon racisme. Je proférai à voix haute: «Espèce de maudit nègre, de sale bounoule, de con d'Africain!» Deux mille ans de civilisation blanche et chrétienne passaient par ma voix et me rappelaient que tout homme de couleur est inférieur. [LTD, p.105]

Bossus does not limit his depiction of racism to tensions between black and white people, he also shows that prejudice spans the different nationalities too by placing the following comments in the mouth of Prosper – a black man from Cameroon – and his Caribbean girlfriend Cloé:

-Et les Juifs? Cette putain de Floride est pleine de Juifs!

-Tu oublies les Cubains et les Haïtiens, a répliqué Cloé. [LTD, p.113]

In fact, racial tensions and prejudices seem to underlie all relationships between the characters of Bossus's novel: even though the characters keep interacting, they do so with ulterior motives; implicitly, all ethnic groups are prejudiced and have a profound disregard for other ethnic groups. All attempts to build relationships are undermined by this attitude. The discordance remains unresolved because characters keep to their prejudiced views. Bossus depicts here the competition that exists between communities, resembling survival instinct: they all want to be recognised and respected, without taking others into account. In his *Littératures de l'exigüité*,¹²⁰ François Paré analyses the relationship of power and submission between cultures of minorities and concludes that accepting comments and changes emanating from foreign elements means that they lose part of their uniqueness:

Pourquoi les 'petites' cultures ont-elles tendance à rejeter ce qui ultimement les ferait accéder à l'histoire? Car une culture qui n'est pas répertoriée et analysée formellement peut-elle se targuer d'être une culture? C'est que, dans les 'petites' cultures, le commentaire critique porte les marques de l'Autre. La critique, c'est cet Autre, adoré et abhorré; cet Autre, dont on n'arrive jamais à endiguer l'ouvrage de destruction, dont on n'arrive jamais à se débarrasser, car il est la part maudite de notre langage collectif.¹²¹

In the case of the minorities impersonated by Bossus's characters, they too feel the need to assert their power in order not to disappear. Jules appears to be aware of the cultural patterns and survival instinct ingrained in him, but he is unable to stop himself repeating them or to see beyond them. The same idea underlies Xavière Sénéchal's *Le Pays d'ailleurs* (1999). The narrator, from a wealthy white Québécois family, is planning to adopt a little orphan Indian girl, but the narrator's mother shows little enthusiasm for the project:

Bien sûr, elle n'était pas raciste. Comme des milliers d'autres, elle n'avait rien contre les gens de couleur à condition qu'ils n'entrent pas jouer dans sa cour. [LPDA, p.95]

¹²⁰ François Paré. *Les Littératures de l'exigüité*. Québec: Les Éditions du Nordir, collection Essai. 1992.

¹²¹ *Ibid.* p.80.

Here, Sénéchal reveals a 'passive' form of racism that is barely hidden under the denial of prejudice and the avoidance of the 'Other'; hostile behaviour is simply avoided by a non-confrontational attitude.

While migrant French authors portray prejudiced characters in action, the Haitian and Middle Eastern writers, on the other hand, show the victims of prejudice. As discussed earlier, among the Haitian group, this topic is mainly illustrated in the work of Marie-Célie Agnant and Gérard Étienne. These authors tell of the psychological damage to women caused by years of slavery followed and reinforced by a popular culture that repeats the patterns of slavery. But Agnant shows other aspects of discrimination too. In her novels *Alexis d'Haïti* (1999) and *Alexis, le fils de Raphaël* (2000),¹²² she sensitively demonstrates perfectly how 'coloured' migrants are made to feel undesirable and unwelcome (which is in total contrast to the experience of Yves Navarre, for example, whose character Camille in *La Dame au fond de la cour* (2000) befriends a North African couple), and that racism is not just found among isolated individuals, but within national institutions too. Fleeing Haiti, Alexis - a teenage boy - and his mother are washed up on the shores of the United States of America, and have therefore illegally entered the country. The scornful attitude of the coastguards sets the tone of their stay in the States:

Le mépris non dissimulé, les injures, mais aussi et surtout la honte qui sans ménagement l'avait cinglé lorsqu'il les avait entendus pester et jurer contre ces *boat people*, ces gueux, ces miséreux, ces gens sans terre qui, telle une marée noire indésirable, reviennent à intervalles réguliers hanter et souiller les plages de la Floride. [AH, p.115]

We note here that the coastguards remark on their physical appearance, but they also dislike their poverty; they de-humanise the immigrants by comparing them to a pollution of the system, an ecological disaster for their country. It does not get any better for the immigrants when they try to apply for a visa, as they have to endure the disdain of federal employees. They have to prove their honesty to these state employees who presume them guilty of lying even before they hear their story:

Nous devons démontrer aux juges, aux fonctionnaires de l'Immigration que nous sommes de véritables réfugiés, que nous n'avons pas quitté Haïti et risqué nos vies sur l'océan, attirés uniquement par la vie facile de leur pays. Leur attitude me fait penser parfois que je ne suis pas un être humain. J'ai l'impression de n'être qu'un numéro, celui qui est inscrit sur le dossier qu'ils exhibent à chacune de nos visites au Bureau de contrôle. Maman et moi, nous sommes le même numéro et nous attendons qu'ils nous donnent l'autorisation de devenir enfin des êtres humains. Tout comme ils le feraient avec une baguette magique, ils brandiront leurs stylos et leurs papiers et nous feront cadeau d'une identité, voilà! [AFR, p.26]

¹²² These novels have been published in a collection aimed at a younger readership, as have many of Stanley Péan's novels.

The administrative process deepens the migrants' feelings of being of no consequence, negligible and neglected: migrants are at the mercy of bureaucrats who have the power to grant or restore to them an identity and their humanity. Accusations of hypocrisy from the American government are implicit here, as this situation is reminiscent of the times of slavery, which is a preponderant topic in Agnant's work. With this in mind, the novel *Alexis, le fils de Raphaël* (2000) could be read as a bildungsroman in which the hero learns how to deal with racism and social prejudice. This goal is announced in the first pages of the narrative:

C'est le mépris et le dédain qu'ils affichent qui te blessent. Mais tu devras te forger une carapace, mon petit. Le monde est plein de gens semblables à ces fonctionnaires et il nous faut apprendre à vivre avec eux, malgré nous. [AFR, p.39]

At the end of the novel, Alexis and his mother have managed to emigrate to Québec with the help of an uncle, and have settled down. Even though Québec appears to be a much more hospitable country than the United States, Alexis has to face prejudice from members of the authorities and public sector yet again (such as an unwarranted arrest by the police, for example, or a bus driver refusing to take him on board), but these events do not appear to matter much to him as they remain isolated and do not seem representative of the whole society. (A few lines are dedicated to these episodes, as opposed to several pages when describing the dealings with federal employees in the States.) He is more shocked to find out that he can be discriminated against by members of his own community: Haitian migrants of the second or third generation convey all sorts of clichés and caricatures of the Haitian people passed on by their parents:

C'est d'elle [sa mère] que Sara tenait toutes ses idées sur Haïti, qui n'étaient rien d'autre que vaudou, magie, carnaval, farniente et ignorance sans bornes d'un peuple d'analphabètes. Madame Blanchot vivait dans une sorte de nostalgie d'une caste à laquelle elle avait appartenu avant le départ précipité de ses propres parents vers l'étranger. [AFR, p.168]

Here, Agnant shows how the ethnic community itself undermines the morale and confidence of its own members. Just as Étienne and Agnant demonstrate that the Haitian popular culture traditionally denies black Caribbean women empowerment, Agnant stresses a similar trend within the Haitian community in Québec: the community conveys negative images of the Haitian country and people, seemingly supporting the prejudiced views of the society of adoption.

The topic of racial discrimination is also developed by the Middle Eastern writers Dominique Blondeau and Mona Latif-Ghattas in their respective novels *Les Feux de l'exil*

(1991) and *Le Double Conte de l'exil* (1990). Blondeau, like Agnant, chooses to present this topic through a female Caribbean character called Chloé. If Chloé's awareness is not as acute as Emma's, it is obvious that she is embittered at being singled out and considered a second-class citizen on the sole ground of her colour. She reports on the comments made by one of her Québécois colleagues, Mme Dufresne, and on the behaviour of her employer, M. Bleau:

[Mme Dufresne] peste contre les gouvernements du Canada et du Québec qui laissent entrer les étrangers. Elle prétend que le Québec va devenir un dépotoir... [LFDE, p.190]

and further on...

Je n'imagine pas monsieur Bleau agir avec autant de bonté et de tolérance; il aurait eu vite fait de me remplacer par une femme blanche. [LFDE, p.213]

She is confronted daily with insinuations of her inferiority: she is not accepted but merely tolerated by the people with whom she works, and by the whole Province, if she believes Mme Dufresne. Chloé is indignant at having to endure such behaviour in modern-day Québec, and cannot bear to watch her son becoming a victim of it:

L'époque de l'esclavage n'est pas si loin où Blancs et Noirs s'entretuaient; certains essayaient de comprendre l'aberrance des horreurs dont mes ancêtres ont été les victimes. Victor Schloelcher a aboli l'esclavage en 1848. Au nom de la race ou de la religion, divers pays dits civilisés ne cessent encore de se déchirer. Cela me rend triste pour Éric; il n'est pas à l'abri des attaques sournoises ou directes de la part des enfants de son âge. On peut cacher un membre atrophié, une infirmité mais, pas une peau noire, une chevelure crépue, des lèvres négroïdes. [...] Dans son école, des bandes organisées se lient contre les enfants immigrants. [LFDE, p.177-9]

Here, she compares her appearance to a disability that cannot be hidden; later, she will put it on a par with cancer (p.219). But Chloé is not completely resigned to this situation:

Pourquoi du courage? A cause de la couleur de ma peau? Il faudra bien pourtant que les Blancs s'y habituent. Nous nous sommes bien habitués à ce qu'ils nous avilissent durant des siècles! [LFDE, p.230]

Allegedly, her colour is one of the causes of her isolation in a country where the majority of the population is white but, just like Emma and Flore, she is prepared to fight to be accepted for who she is, regardless of her colour.

In Latif-Ghattas's *Le Double Conte de l'exil* (1990), the main character (Madeleine/Manitakawa) is a Native American.¹²³ Herself victim of racial and cultural discrimination, she takes the decision to change her original name for a French one, and

¹²³ As a Native American, Madeleine cannot be considered as an immigrant because she was born in Québec, but the term of migrant - preferred by the critics - applies to her in the sense that she does not live within her own original culture.

transforms her appearance to blend in with the occidental population and to put an end to their mortifying remarks. But, despite this sacrifice, she still does not feel accepted. At work, in a laundry, three other women, all white immigrants, barely tolerate her; Madeleine witnesses them openly tearing newcomers apart, granting themselves the permission to pass judgements solely based on appearance and their own prejudice:

LÉGARÉ Clairette, LINDSAY Clarence, LEIBOVITCH Clara. Fortes de leurs similitudes et de leur ancienneté désormais irréfutable, elles s'octroyaient le droit de dévisager tout nouveau venu, de le scruter, de commenter ses comportements, de pointer du doigt sa différence, d'épier ses misères, de salir sa beauté si elle les poussait dans l'ombre, d'amoindrir ses qualités quand elles menaçaient de mettre à jour leurs lacunes, enfin, de bâtir sa réputation. De ce jeune Asiatique, Clairette Légaré avait déjà affirmé qu'il sentait l'"egg roll", Clarence Lindsay avait décrété qu'elle n'aimait pas les asiatiques et Clara Leibovitch, après qu'elle eût un peu hésité comme d'habitude, avait fini par renchérir en déclarant qu'il parlait mal et qu'elle ne comprenait rien de ce qu'il disait. [LDCDE, p.54]

For a while, Madeleine watches her colleagues passively, without interfering, but her encounter with Fêve gives her the strength to stand up against the 'three Clara':

Ce jour-là, à la pause-déjeuner, le moindre mot que pouvaient prononcer les Trois Clara lui paraissait suspect. Elle était d'humeur irritable. Elle décida alors de manger debout, près de la machine à café, avec le jeune Asiatique. Ils conversèrent longuement. Après la pause, il l'accompagna jusqu'à l'"ogresse" et l'aida même à fixer le gros sac de linge avant de reprendre son chariot en souriant à pleines dents. [LDCDE, p.122]

A common scenario seems to link the characters presented by Agnant, Blondeau and Latif-Ghattas: Flore, Chloé and Madeleine have been disconnected from their respective cultures (namely, Haitian, French Caribbean, and Native American) for a long time and are the victims – be they aware of it or not – of racial and cultural discrimination. Their encounter with an(-other) immigrant seems to act as a catalyst: as they become aware of their origin and cultural heritage again and realise that the cause of their victimisation is entirely based on prejudice, they feel empowered to fight back. It seems that they need to see themselves through foreign eyes to be able to understand that they were assimilated at their expense, insofar that they were forced to hide their differences.

The last factor playing a part in the crisis that strikes migrants is living in poverty. As we have seen previously, all migrants have hopes of improving their lifestyle, particularly if they are migrating for economic reasons, or at least they hope to maintain the same standards of living. The reality of migration may be quite different. The ability to find work is determined by the migrant's qualifications and skills. Haitian migrants whose country is hardly industrialised, or Middle Eastern women who have never been allowed to work, may not have any recognised skills that would enable them to find employment in a modern country like Québec, and consequently may only find menial jobs. But the

complaint raised in most of the novels studied is that, regardless of their qualifications, migrants have to accept jobs requiring only low or minimal skills.

G rard  tienne and Marie-C lie Agnant draw a parallel between these under-qualified, under-paid and labour-intensive jobs and slavery. Through the voice of Alexis's mother in *Alexis, le fils de Rapha l* (2000), Agnant points out that Haitians are filling the harsh and servile positions that nobody else wants:

Tu vois tous ces Ha tiens qui vivent   Little Ha ti? Il y en a davantage, dit-on, dans le New Jersey,   Boston,   New York,   Chicago, dans les grandes comme dans les petites villes. Tout comme nous, ils sont partis d'Ha ti, ils ont quitt  leur village, leur famille souvent, et tra nent leur exil, leur peine, leur col re, leurs d ceptions et leur mis re, partout dans le monde. En Europe, comme ici, ils soignent les gens dans les h pitaux, triment dans les usines, s' chinent comme domestiques. Dans toutes les petites  les des Cara bes, chez nos voisins, en R publique Dominicaine, ils sont trait s comme des esclaves, peinent comme des for ats dans les champs de canne. Est-ce parce qu'ils pr f rent vivre loin de chez eux? [...] Tous ces Ha tiens, ceux qui conduisent leur taxi du soir au matin, risquant   tout moment leur vie dans cette circulation inhumaine, ceux qui vont travailler, laver les toilettes dans les h tels o  les riches se pr lassent, ceux qui, tous les jours, sept jours sur sept, se tiennent derri re ces comptoirs dans les petits march s de la 54e Avenue, ceux qui passent leur vie   nettoyer les rues,   vider les poubelles, ils n'ont pas envie de retourner dans leur pays? [AFR, p.35-7]

With this long enumeration, Agnant insists on the harshness of migrants' lives, not solely because their activities are physically demanding, but also because they question the very reason why they left Haiti: they refused to live as slaves under the Duvalier dictatorship, so why should they accept another life of servitude now after sacrificing their attachment to their culture and relatives. G rard  tienne equally stresses the difficult and precarious aspects of migrants' lives. All the characters in his novel *La Romance en do de Ma tre Clo* (2000) work in a factory, regardless of their previous education. The conditions are described as harsh, even monstrous, particularly for women:

Un dr le de type, le plus vieux des contrema tres de l'usine, une machine qui bouffe les femmes, surtout les Ha tiennes, trait es comme des b tes par ce Blanc; il lui rappelle les exactions des commandeurs   l' poque de l'esclavage. Le bonhomme ne se g ne pas pour imposer une amende de dix piastres aux ouvri res qui arrivent en retard et dont le salaire ne d passe pas trente dollars par jour. Cette usine, pour les ouvri res, c'est de l'esclavage. [...] Alert  par le rapport d'un organisme sur les conditions de travail des femmes antillaises, une journaliste de la SRC avait rendu publique la situation intol rable de la bo te. Qu'  cela ne tienne. Pas de changement de politique du c t  des contrema tres. Que les Ha tiennes retournent dans leur pays si elles ne sont pas satisfaites, laisse-t-on entendre. [LRDMC, p.26]

In this passage, it is clear that  tienne is rebelling against the repetition of patterns of slavery. He also implies that women, and migrants generally, are powerless against the callous treatment to which they are victim, and he blames the aloofness of the authorities who prefer to turn a blind eye.  tienne uses the character of Adrienne to prove that these conditions not only alienate migrants, but also isolate them from the rest of the society.

Adrienne - like many others - has fled Haiti in the hope of a better life in Québec but, as an unqualified person, she is only able to find employment in a factory, which means long hours, low wages, and unrewarding tasks; it is an anonymous job in which migrants are merely – cheap – pieces of machinery. Adrienne seems to share her time between work and home, with no spare time or money for leisure. Even though she has been living in Montréal for a few years, she does not seem to know any of her neighbours, has no Québécois friends, and does not even know the town in which she lives. In a word, she lives on the margin of society, having little contact with the outside world. Even walking in town amongst people becomes an alienating experience for her: she feels that she does not belong. A usually anonymous if not invisible migrant, Adrienne suddenly has to face the inhabitants of the city and feels dispossessed of her dignity; what she experiences is close to prostitution or even rape.

Jamais la ville n'a paru si diabolique à Adrienne. Elle n'a jamais eu l'occasion de la visiter de fond en comble, d'explorer de long en large la rue Marie Blais, la rue Claire Brossard, le boulevard Paul Soulard, avec des édifices dans leur grand déploiement de verre, des gratte-ciel dont les cheminées lâchent une espèce d'odeur de mélasse, de goudron, de bière vieillot, avec une poussière de feuilles d'automne qui vous étouffe. [...] Habitée à traverser la ville en autobus, Adrienne ne connaît pas *le monde des trottoirs* où l'haleine ainsi que les parfums des piétons ajoutent à l'air une odeur enivrante. *Elle se sent trifouillée, contemplée, déshabillée.* [...] Adrienne se sent *dépouillée de sa vertu*, cette espèce de carapace qui vous rend invisible aux autres lorsque le soleil a trop mûri votre chair, qu'on se croit porteur d'une éternelle damnation, qu'on doute de l'incapacité d'attirer vers soi des regards poétiques, électrisants. [LRDMC, p.91, my italics]

Étienne seems to emphasize the fact that, despite several years in Québec, Adrienne has remained a foreign element because she has been confined to menial jobs, denigrated by Québécois people.

This idea was already present in *La Québécoise* (1983), but Régine Robin had chosen to put more emphasis on the precariousness of migrants' lives that often leads them to accept any working conditions:

Tu viens du Portugal. Tu as quatre enfants.
 Ton mari s'est calté peu après ton arrivée.
 Tu travailles dans une fabrique de vêtements
 au salaire minimum. Tu es une voleuse de job.
 Il n'y a pas de syndicats dans l'usine.
 Tu ne sais ni l'anglais ni le français.
 [...] et les Immigrants n'ont pas beaucoup de droits. [LQ, p.87]

Robin underlines here that migrants are easily deprived of their rights by unscrupulous employers because they are so dependent on the income – no matter how small – in order to survive. It is interesting to note that this description appears after the first occurrence of the word 'Québécoise' in the text. The term is made from the adjectives 'Québécois' and

‘coite’ (the feminine form of the adjective *coi*, which means ‘silent, mute’), and refers to the narrator who is a European immigrant; she feels deprived of her voice because she is under the impression that her political opinions are not valued or welcome in Québec. Here, ‘La Québécoise’ considers a situation worse than hers: she, at last, shares the language and cultural elements that allow her to find some sense of direction in Québécois society, but other immigrants are not so lucky; her voice is listened to, others do not even have a voice.

Mona Latif-Ghattas describes a situation even more precarious than that of unqualified migrants who do not speak the official languages of the country: the illegal immigrant. In *Le Double Conte de l'exil* (1990), Fêve has arrived illegally in Québec. Meeting Madeleine saves him from living on the streets or in some squalid accommodation but, without a work permit, he has to accept a menial job. He works underground and never sees the daylight:

Le contremaître pour lequel Fêve travaille s'occupe d'installer les tuyaux du nouveau gratte-ciel situé à quelques mètres du lieu où Fêve disparaît tous les matins. Une importante équipe a été engagée pour ce projet. Dans l'autobus gris, tous les matins, Fêve côtoie une armée de travailleurs venus des quatre coins du monde. Du Sud de l'Amérique, du Nord de l'Afrique, d'Asie ou du Moyen-Orient. Tous semblent portés par le même élan de survie. [LDCDE, p.135]

This ‘army of workers’ contributes to building a symbol of economic success, a skyscraper, and yet they are condemned to work underground; their contribution is ignored and, it seems, deliberately concealed and kept in the dark. More importantly, for Fêve, the denial of his official contribution signifies that this situation can only be a temporary arrangement: as long as he does not live ‘on the surface’ and his presence is not officially acknowledged, his new life can be snatched away at any moment:

Puis il pensa à son statut illégal et se sentit soudain d'une extrême fragilité. Que dira-t-il à l'agent lors de la première entrevue! Que devra-t-il inventer d'illicite afin de parvenir à le convaincre de sa bonne foi. Lui qui avait été éjecté de sa terre natale pour une cause tellement... inexprimable. Que racontera-t-il? Et qui voudra le croire s'il ne dit que la vérité? [LDCDE, p.137]

The dilemma for Fêve is whether or not to lie to the immigration authorities in order to preserve his newly established life and his relationship with Madeleine. But his honesty and Madeleine's efforts are not sufficient to help Fêve, and he is sent back to his country.

Qualifications and legitimacy do not seem to guarantee migrants a better fate and treatment by their employers. Dany Laferrière, who was a journalist in Haiti, recalls accepting inferior posts to make ends meet, in an interview with Robert Magnier:

J'aimais bien changer de travail parce que la chose la plus terrible, c'est la monotonie. On était très mal payés. Des jobs pour immigrants.¹²⁴

The character based upon Laferrière himself in *Comment faire l'amour avec un nègre sans se fatiguer?* (1999) lives in poor conditions too, having to share a single room with a friend. Here is the narrator's reaction when one of his girlfriends looks as if she is planning to stay:

Miz Littérature a aussi apporté avec elle son nécessaire de toilette. Danger. Que veut-elle? Entend-elle sous-louer l'unique pièce que nous partageons, Bouba et moi? Elle habite sûrement un immense appartement bien éclairé, bien aéré, bien parfumé, à Outremont, et c'est ici qu'elle entend vivre! En plein tiers-Monde. [CFA, p.27]

The contrast between the rich girl's flat in Outremont and the migrant's place is implied: they are the opposite. Furthermore, Laferrière accentuates the effect of poverty and shabbiness by using the metaphor of the 'Tiers-Monde' to refer to his part of town. As for Mona Latif-Ghattas, she shows the disappointment and bitterness of having to accept a job inferior to one's qualifications in *Les Lunes de miel* (1996). The short story 'Billy Kheir au pays des Balalour' (p.65-90) shows the frustration of Billy Kheir, a fully qualified chemist, when he realizes that his degree is not recognized in Québec:

Comme il était diplômé en chimie industrielle, il parvint à trouver un emploi de technicien dans un laboratoire de teintures pour tissus. Afin d'acquérir "l'expérience canadienne", il avait accepté des tâches secondaires qu'un simple ouvrier sans diplômes pouvait aisément accomplir. Cela l'humiliait mais il n'avait pas le choix. [LLM, p.78]

We detect again a certain irony in the expression 'expérience canadienne'. In the eyes of Billy Kheir, such inexperience is only an excuse given by employers to qualified immigrants so as to not offer them the position; employers can then employ them at a lower wage, and exploit their knowledge under the pretence of offering experience. With the character of Billy Kheir, we see the frustration of migrants resulting from their not being recognised professionally, and at being consciously exploited by their society of adoption. Again, this frustration contributes to the disillusionment of migrants when faced with the reality of migration. But just as the crisis can be triggered by many possible causes, migrants can also develop several symptoms or coping mechanisms.

¹²⁴ Dany Laferrière. *J'écris comme je vis*. Genouilleux: Éditions la Passe du Vent. 2000. p.113.

Symptoms of the crisis and coping mechanisms

As mentioned earlier, migrant writers choose to describe the different elements that cause migrants to have conflicting feelings about their new country and their decision to migrate, but they also indicate the symptoms indicative of the nature of the crisis. These symptoms are symbolically represented in the novels by topics ranging from quasi-invisibility to madness.

One of the first symptoms is quasi-invisibility. Individually or collectively, the factors that we have previously described undermine migrants' belief that they can contribute to their new society. As Marco Micone points out,¹²⁵ many migrants have come from dictatorships and regimes in which they were not allowed to voice an independent opinion, and have therefore never taken an active part in a democratic system. They may not realize that they are entitled to certain rights under the laws of their country of adoption and, even if they are, they may be reluctant to have them applied and respected. In our chosen novels, many of the characters are ambivalent about being seen or making themselves heard. Some would like to be heard and noticed, but are ignored, as is, for example, the narrator of *La Québécoise* (1993); on the other hand, and this is more generally the case, some characters try not to be noticed. We have seen earlier, for example, how, in Gérard Étienne's novel, Adrienne's experience of being surrounded by the Québécois population is close to rape: her lack of confidence is such that she feels vulnerable, at the mercy of strangers who do not even notice her. Invisibility is key also in the experience of Madeleine and Fève who, in *Le Double Conte de l'exil* (1990), only have each other, being isolated and without friends, trying to avoid being noticed by the rest of society. (Madeleine transforms her appearance and Fève has a job that renders him 'invisible' and denies him any status.) In the work of Kattan and Robin, the topic of the mask is very important: characters assume different identities or different languages so as to blend in, to disappear in the group that they wish to integrate with. Paradoxically, migrant characters feel that they need to hide the part of themselves that makes them stand out but, at the same time, they feel that they do not wish to give up that part entirely. It is not easy for them to accept their own foreign status and, similarly, it is not easy to adopt the foreignness of the host country. In Ollivier's *Les Urnes scellées* (1995), for example, Estelle, who decides to move back to Haiti permanently, explains her interpretation of this foreignness. In her view, material conditions or society in Québec are not the prime

¹²⁵ Mario Micone. 'Intégration et transformation culturelle', *Québec français*, 90, 1993 (été). p.100.

factors; she simply feels that her life is ruled by events and celebrations in which she does not feel involved or concerned. She would be welcome to participate in them, but she feels that they are meaningless to her, because they refer to a past that is not part of her cultural inheritance, and contribute to a future to which she does not want to belong. She misses the desire to be involved, but believes that she has no part or interest in the national identity of the country of adoption:

Elle n'aimait pas ces terres, non parce que l'été durait deux jours et demi et que le reste de l'année voyait un ciel en deuil d'oiseaux et d'étoiles filantes [...]; ni à cause de l'impossibilité de pénétrer le cœur des êtres; [...] mais parce que, à force de vivre une autre vie rythmée par d'autres fêtes, d'autres cultes, d'autres drapeaux, elle avait l'impression d'assister, quotidiennement, à l'écoulement de tout son être. [US, p.286]

For Estelle and the others, the symptom of 'invisibility' has led to a withdrawal from their new citizenship. Their migration has blurred all the previous cultural markers and social references by exposing them to a totally new and different – and therefore challenging – environment in which they do not (yet) feel involved. This leaves them in limbo between two worlds. At best, this will only be temporary; at worst, one's identity is permanently confused.

Another symptom of the acculturation crisis is that which finds expression through behavioural problems and personality disorders related to a split personality. This is a topic common to all writers. For some, it appears in terms of hints dropped by a character. In Laferrière's *Pays sans chapeau* (1999), for example, it looks as though the real self of the narrator has been dormant for years while in Québec, and that he finally feels himself again when he returns to Haiti for a visit. His self wakes up to his old life again. Despite the fact that he has been away from Haiti for over twenty years, his memory is so vivid that he is able to pick things up where he left them.

Je reconnais, ici, chaque son, chaque cri, chaque rire, chaque silence. Je suis chez moi [...]. [PSC, p.11]

The expression 'Je suis chez moi', which is repeated three times in the first paragraph of the book and recurs repeatedly thereafter, emphasizes his statement. Chapter after chapter, the narrator rediscovers - or revives? - his old ways, his customs, his accent and language:

Je plonge, la tête la première, dans cette mer de sons familiers. Un air connu qu'on fredonne aisément, même si ça fait longtemps qu'on n'a pas entendu la chanson. Bousculade de mots, de rythmes dans ma tête. Je nage sans effort. La parole liquide. Je ne cherche pas à comprendre. Mon esprit se repose enfin. On dirait que les mots ont été mâchés avant qu'on me les serve. Aucun os. Les gestes, les sons, les rythmes, tout ça fait partie de ma chair. Le silence aussi.

Je suis chez moi, c'est-à-dire dans ma langue. [PSC, p.84]

This ease or, rather, this effortlessness is in contrast to the attitude of the narrators of *Comment faire l'amour avec un nègre sans se fatiguer?* (1999) and *Éroshima* (1998).¹²⁶ In each of these novels, the narrator is reluctant to talk about his origin. His being a black Caribbean young man and having tastes for music and literature are the only details that he concedes. The past and close family are never mentioned. The focal point is the present and the society in which he lives. The concern is not so much with forgetting the past as with keeping it at a distance to stop the painful memories from haunting one's life; one's past has to be kept under control so as to be able to live in the present and construct an identity to face the new country. We can interpret changing one's name as an attempt to do exactly this. Manitakawa, in *Le Double Conte de l'exil* (1990), decides to hide her Native American identity under the name of Madeleine to put an end to the racial discrimination and to disappear into society. Similarly, in Blondeau's *Les Feux de l'exil* (1991), Anastasia abandons her 'desert' name, Sarah, when she is forced to leave never to return; her new name marks the beginning of her new life.¹²⁷

One of the strategies to cope with the crisis caused by acculturation consists of adopting a temporary identity, with consequent images of mask and disguise. This is evident, for example, in Kattan's *La Fiancée promise* (1983), in which Méir only unveils the aspects of his identity that will open the door of the community, or in Robin's *L'Immense Fatigue des pierres* (1999), in which the narrator assumes several identities and seems to take pleasure in mixing up any elements that would help identify him, her or them, and blurring the limits between invention and reality. The subtitle, 'Biofictions', certainly gives away the intention of the project. Another way to hide one's identity is to adopt a disguise. Esther, in Kattan's short story 'Mon nom est Esther',¹²⁸ does just that: she regularly transforms her physical appearance, which allows her to fake a different gender and social circumstances. Esther is able, like Méir, to hop from one community to the other without belonging to any of them but, more importantly, she is able to experience things that are not allowed for her gender (like independence and freedom, for example) or her

¹²⁶ According to the interview *J'écris comme je vis* (op.cit. 2000.), all of Dany Laferrière's books are autobiographical. We can then suppose that all narrators are the same and one person. Even though it is not necessarily clear from the novels, the narrators share identifiable details with the author: physical appearance, gender, an old Remington typewriter on which they type their novels, and his taste in literature, music and food.

¹²⁷ Etymologically, the name 'Anastasius' (of which the name 'Anastasia' is a feminine form) is the Latin form of the Greek name *Anastasios*, meaning 'resurrection'. See <http://www.behindthename.com>

¹²⁸ LR, p.223-233

religion (mixing freely with the rest of the population or eating pork, for example).¹²⁹ Similarly, Stanley Péan's migrant characters adopt a costume for each aspect of their double identity, one for home, one for outside:

A l'heure du branle-bas qui précédait le départ vers le monde extérieur, tandis que Jacky et moi mangions nos céréales ou nos toasts, Herbert et Locita enfilaient leurs costumes de Nord-Américains typiques. J'avais l'impression qu'ils cessaient d'être mon père et ma mère pour devenir un ingénieur et une employée de banque en tout point identiques à leurs collègues de travail...

Dès qu'ils rentraient du boulot cependant, le tailleur seyant et le complet trois-pièces ne tardaient pas à prendre le chemin de la penderie.

Ils étaient alors remplacés par ces vêtements amples, légers et colorés que Herbert et Locita affectionnaient tant.

Leur métamorphose ne s'arrêtait pas là; le français qu'ils avaient utilisé toute la journée cédait la place au créole. [MEN, p.12-3]

Not only do they alter their physical appearance to fit the part, they also adopt a different language. They create the illusion of a well-integrated personality, just like Vava in Latif-Ghattas's *Les Lunes de miel* (1996). Vava, who always likes to impress her community, has identified a few clichéd elements of Québécois life and uses them to create the illusion that she and her family are well adjusted in their new lives:

Elle tentait d'impressionner la société alexandrine en exil en montrant combien elle était intégrée au milieu canadien. Elle allait faire du patinage sur glace avec ses filles, tondait le gazon, organisait des épiluchettes de blé d'Inde et des parties de sucre. [LLM, p.128]

Of course, Vava herself has to admit that this is indeed more than a mere illusion when she realizes that the appearances she has put on have become in effect her daughters' culture.

Migrant authors suggest that migrants have to disguise themselves to live and work in their society of adoption. The ability to lead a double life seems to be the key to balancing the influence of both cultures. Migrants make a show of integration for Québécois society but, in the privacy of their homes or community, they revert to their previous cultural habits. In the early days of their migration, they do not yet seem to have found any alternative. No dialogue - and no desire to start one, it seems - exists between the two worlds. Leading a double life, however, may put a great strain on the individual.

The last symptom probably represents the far end of the acculturation crisis, and shows the failure of coping mechanisms: it is a form of insanity. Taking the decision to migrate puts migrants under emotional pressure: not only do they have to leave their family and culture behind, but they also have to deal with the new rules of a society that might not

¹²⁹ According to Nicholas De Lange (*Atlas of the Jewish World*. Oxford: Phaidon Press Ltd. 1984. p.54.), 'the segregation, although brought into being and maintained by the non-Jewish powers, was generally accepted by the Jews themselves.' Jews were kept separated from society in Europe and elsewhere until at least the beginning of the nineteenth century.

even welcome them. They attend to such issues in the short term, as we have seen above, by preserving their culture whilst simultaneously learning the rudiments of the new one. But, for some characters, this juggling act proves impossible to maintain for very long and they succumb to depression or worse.

In Nadia Ghalem's *Les Jardins de cristal* (1981), the main body of the narrative, apart from the first chapter, consists of the reproduction of Chafia's manuscript, a sort of long letter to her mother in which she explains her life and her inner turmoil. Chafia, who now lives in Québec but who was born and raised in Algeria, has been in psychotherapy to try to come to terms with her relationship with her parents, but mainly with her culture. In the manuscript (and her therapy), she explores the development of her personal and cultural identity, she tries to retrace the past and understand the events and her choices that lead her to emigrate to Québec. In the end, she identifies the cause of her breakdown in her failure to adapt to changes, to recognise that her self is in constant evolution:

Je suis intimement convaincue que la peur de l'autre, c'est plutôt la peur de cet autre soi-même qu'on n'ose pas regarder en face. On serait prêt à le tuer plutôt qu'à l'affronter, quitte à éliminer une part de notre propre vie. [LJDC, p.137]

Chafia eventually realizes that migrating does not mean the disappearance of one's self, but its continuation in a different time and form – a view endorsed by more academic proponents of identity theory.¹³⁰

Unfortunately for Maître Clo in Gérard Étienne's novel *La Romance en do mineur de Maître Clo* (2000), the outcome of his depression is not as positive. On his arrival in Québec, Maître Clo is keen to discover the new country but, as others in his position, he cannot let go of his culture of origin. This ambivalent position is the beginning of his turmoil. He tries – almost desperately – to hang on to his old self (symbolised here by his obsession for the Voodoo goddess Erzulie Fréda). After a short while, Maître Clo begins to see migration as a disgrace, a corruption of his identity. Even though he sees the need to embrace society in order to be successful in it, he also refuses any compromise that might taint his culture and change his standards:

Le courage, le dépassement de soi, l'accomplissement d'un acte qui soit l'expression de mon honneur, de ma dignité. Oui, foutre le camp avant de perdre mon âme dans un style de vie aux

¹³⁰ According to Geoffrey Maddell (*The Identity of the Self*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. 1981. p.3 & 102), 'the essence of personal identity through time [...] is provided by the continuity of consciousness itself, of which by far the most important element, and for many thinkers the only crucial element, is memory'. He later argues that 'our ability to imagine ourselves in a whole range of utterly different situations is simply due, it is suggested, to the hospitable nature of the concept of identity, to the fact that all sorts of different connections are possible, and that it is just up to us to decide what sort of connection or relation to give weight to'.

antipodes de ma culture. Je ne suis pas fait pour jouer le rôle de l'étranger modèle qui accepte bêtement les règles du jeu d'une société trop matérialiste. [LRDMC, p.18]

The emotional pressure is so strong that Maître Clo is disoriented, loses sleep and hallucinates. He falls ill, physically and mentally:

J'étouffe. Je perds mes dents, mes cheveux, mon esprit. [LRDMC, p.18]

The psychologist, Docteur Hillel, who has been recommended by his sister's employer, is taken aback by this strange case of culture shock, and he is only able to utter platitudes about it, failing to come up with a treatment:

- On ne change pas la culture d'un homme en lui en imposant une autre d'où seraient prohibées ses pratiques religieuses, laisse-t-il tomber sur un ton convaincant. [LRDMC, p.97]

In the end, Docteur Hillel suggests that Maître Clo should see a doctor sharing his cultural background. This passage can be interpreted as a metaphor for the attitudes of the Québécois authorities towards migrants. Here, the author suggests that communication between the migrant community (represented by Maître Clo) and the recipient society (Dr Hillel) is non-existent. The latter is unable to provide help and, instead, relies on the migrant's community to act as the intermediary and assume the task of easing the transition between cultures. Those migrants who have already settled in Québec are implicitly given the job of teaching the basics of survival to the newcomers. In the novel, the psychologist, whose job is to analyse, is unable to understand the other culture and, more importantly, he makes no visible effort to try; he gets rid of his uneasiness by passing on the problem and hiding behind truisms.¹³¹ This attitude proves fatal for Maître Clo, who becomes further confused and finally dies without even recognising his own sister. He has been failed by the system.

In the cases of André Marois and Marie-Célie Agnant, the pressure on characters is such that they commit violent acts against others. In Marois's *Accidents de parcours* (1999), two of the main characters, Pierre and Matthias - respectively Québécois and French - can be described as migrants, even though they have not changed countries: as orphans, they are disconnected from their family history, and feel dispossessed from a part of their identity. Living on either side of the Atlantic, they invent a family connection between themselves and, in the process, reinvent their personalities. In order to achieve

¹³¹ We will develop the metaphor of the doctor and the social criticism it conveys in the novels in the next chapter.

their project of reunion, they plot to rid themselves of their spouses who, they believe, stand in their way. As part of their plan, Pierre is due to spend a holiday in France. When he and his wife arrive in the Breton village, Pierre undergoes alterations in his identity: his wife notices that he adopts some conspicuously French characteristic behaviour – like an accent, for example - and the violent attack against her ironically leads him to his own death.

A violent response to the identity crisis is also described in *Le Livre d'Emma* (2001) by Marie-Célie Agnant. Flore, the narrator, meets Emma in a mental institution, to which she has been committed for the murder of her young daughter. The doctor in charge of Emma's treatment calls for Flore's services to translate Emma's words since she refuses to speak French. Flore interprets Emma's refusal to use a language other than her native Haitian Creole as a symptom of her suffering:

«La femme, Emma, connaît bien le français. Non pas cette connaissance approximative de ceux qui hochent la tête en reconnaissant des sons familiers; elle sait tout des nuances, mais, » déclare-t-elle au médecin, alors qu'il s'apprête à la quitter le mercredi suivant, «les bêtes qui hurlent n'empruntent jamais la voix des autres».[LLE, p.16]

The narrative unravels in detail the identity struggles that torment Emma's mind. As we have seen earlier, she has to deal with her cultural inheritance as a black Caribbean woman and with the prejudices against her based upon this. Living in France for a while, and then in Québec, Emma is convinced that prejudices are perpetuated over time and that the descendants of slavers, who do not want to face up to their guilt, prefer to keep this part of history concealed to the detriment of the black community. Emma sees no future for her or her daughter as long as her past and family history are so evidently denied. Lies rob her of her identity and existence, hence the cause of her turmoil. In her view, she and other women in her condition are already dead:

Elles ne suscitent aucun intérêt, les négresses. C'est pour cela qu'elles sont mieux mortes. C'est pour cela que beaucoup d'entre elles sont mieux mortes. C'est pour cela que beaucoup d'entre elles naissent déjà mortes, voilà! [LLE, p.26]

The novel ends with the abrupt death of Emma, whose identity and cultural struggles lead to suicide. This extreme behaviour seems to be the last resort to put an end to the migrant's crisis. If not very common in the novels studied, suicide epitomises the peak in the suffering of an individual, literally torn between his or her own culture and the culture of adoption. Chloé in *Les Feux de l'exil* (1991) comes to the same conclusion when Anastasia disappears. The latter was deeply unhappy after she was made to leave Marrakech and has since lived in geographical and temporal exile. Her disappearance suggests a suicide,

which recalls that of her grief-stricken friend ('la fille du vent') who let herself die when Anastasia was taken away:

La fille du vent a disparu dès qu'Anastasia a quitté Marrakech. Certains ont prétendu l'avoir croisée dans le Sahara; certains l'ont vue assise au pied d'un acacia, dépouillée de tout, les vêtements déchirés et brûlés par le violence des intempéries. D'autres ont raconté que des moines la recueillirent dans leur monastère; ils l'aidèrent à se lever, la moitié de son corps avait pris racine dans le sable. Elle ne put déplier ses jambes et mourut. [LFDE, p.34]

Resembling a legend, the death of 'la fille du vent' can be seen as the death of Anastasia's past; part of her identity died when she was forced to leave Morocco. Anastasia's obsession with her past – like Maître Clo's and Emma's – overpowers her life and keeps interfering with the present. This is indicated by the structure of the narrative itself, as flashbacks in the form of small paragraphs are inserted in a seemingly erratic or spontaneous manner, resembling an exercise in associative memory. In Chloé's opinion, the pressure from the past was too much to bear for Anastasia because it was an unsolvable problem:

Pourquoi Anastasia n'aurait-elle pas agi ainsi de cette manière? Montréal, ville nocturne nourrie de sa maladie, de son exil, de sa solitude, de l'échec de son amour. Marrakech, ville rose, orange, rouge à l'orée du désert, des mirages, des projets inaccomplis. Anastasia et Sarah, tels les lutins et les elfes du pays de Birgitta.

Anastasia-Montréal. Sarah-Marrakech. [...]

Nastasia n'a pu s'adapter. Exilée, elle a cherché ce qui lui allait le mieux. Elle évoluait dans un cercle étouffant. Un cercle n'ayant pas de bout, elle l'a fait éclater. Nastasia s'est déshabillée de ses larmes, de ses excès, de sa souffrance. [LFDE, p.231]

Paradoxically, suicide represents both the tragic acme of some of the characters' identity crises and, perhaps ironically, the rebirth of others. The deaths of Emma, Maître Clo or Anastasia are not tragedies in the logic of the respective novels in which they feature. The characters that disappear are maladjusted because they are unable to change, unable to live in the present. For them, time and the world crystallised or froze when they became migrants.¹³² They are now prisoners of an endless loop in time. Their deaths, however, make the characters around them aware of the importance of 'moving on'. Maître Clo, for example, had become a liability for his community and his sister who both wanted to start a new life in Québec without antagonising their fellow citizens. Emma teaches Flore the history of their origins and helps her to refocus on the important things in her life. And, last of all, Anastasia's fate convinces Chloé that she has made the right choice in emigrating to Québec, and that her future is there rather than living an unrewarding life on her Caribbean

¹³² This idea is one possible interpretation of Nadia Ghalem's title, *Les Jardins de crystal*.

island. All have clearer objectives for their lives in Québec and know that migrating was the right decision for them.

Conclusion

The process of acculturation is violent, complicated, and one for which there is no easy fix. All migrant characters are submitted to it at different levels, and develop different strategies – not always successfully - to cope according to personal experience and feelings, the support they receive, etc. Faced with the realities of separation and migration, this is a testing time, during which migrants have to decide what is worth preserving, what is worth adapting, and what is worth discarding. Coming to terms with otherness and accepting - at least partly - the consequences of the process of acculturation are necessary steps in the process of becoming a successful migrant, and mark the end of the process of acculturation as they enable migrants to start building a new and stable life in their country of adoption. It is only when this period of reorganisation is over that they are able to commence the next step of living in another culture, and start the process of 'ré-enculturation'.

Chapter 7: The process of 'Ré-enculturation'.

Introduction

In the previous chapter, we have seen how migrant writers depict their experience of becoming dis-located, and we have focused on their feelings of inadequacy at having to adapt to a new culture, which were the cause of a personal crisis. In their fiction, the 'successful' migrant characters are those able to detach themselves from the now obsolete elements of their own culture, and incorporate new features belonging to the culture of adoption.

Expatriation, with its dis-location of cultural knowledge, forces migrants into a degree of introspection. Not only do they re-assess their position towards their own culture, but they also envisage their position in and towards the culture of adoption: they redefine the boundaries of their identity, which allows to successfully adapt. Migrant characters who are able to manage elements of Otherness are, in turn, more free to move from one culture to the other. They evaluate new experiences, make a conscious choice to accept and embrace them, and are able to acquire more control over their lives. They appropriate and transform some of the new elements and, in doing so, re-invent both cultures.

Questioning one's culture and embracing changes

Of the three selected nationalities, the French – apart from Régine Robin and Nathalie Petrowsky – stand out because they start questioning their culture before they leave their country; and this is the main factor in their decision to emigrate. We have shown previously how they become alienated, migrants within their culture of origin, which they consider corrupt; they believe that the values that they once shared with their compatriots have been eroded. In their books, it is clear that they imagine that these values have been exported to the province of Québec with the first French settlers and have been preserved there ever since. Migrating to Québec for them does not signify carving out a new life as such, it is rather a - maybe unconscious - attempt to restore the past or, rather, to live a fantasy based on a nostalgic idea of the past; they hope to find a sort of cultural innocence and purity that contrasts with the French society from which they wish to distance themselves. As a result, they, or their French characters, do not seem to undergo the crisis that we described earlier, nor do they seem to question or attempt to change their country of adoption. Their migration is an act of free will: unhappy in their native country, they

select Québec for specific reasons and, consequently, they assume without a moment's hesitation that they will fit into its society. Also, the French believe themselves – however misguidedly – not to be plagued with the same stigma as other migrants: we have seen that the crisis was often triggered by factors like poverty or race, but French authors (and their French characters), like Yves Navarre for example, often have comfortable means and adequate professional qualifications. Moreover, they are not coloured. Consequently, they blend in faster or, at least, they are not singled out for demeaning and prejudiced reasons.

The conditions of other migrants presented in the novels studied in this thesis are considerably different from those in the French experience of displacement, and as we have seen, migration can be a stressful and often humiliating process, during which their cultural behaviour and beliefs are put under scrutiny and strain. Nevertheless, the painful process of reassessing their cultural identity produces a transformation that often proves to be liberating for individuals. In fact, in migrant writing in Québec, extreme cases like Anastasia (*Les Feux de l'exil* – 1991), Emma (*Le Livre d'Emma* – 2001) or Maître Clo (*La Romance en do mineur de Maître Clo* – 2000) prove to be rare occasions of failure: these characters have not overcome the trial of two of the four stages of migration as defined by Émile Ollivier,¹³³ the initial euphoria and the subsequent crisis, and have not been able to move on to the following stages - 'le répit' and 'le rattrapage' - which are the first steps to 'ré-enculturation'. The characters that are presented as 'success stories', on the other hand, have accepted the changes required passing through the crisis, and by doing so, most of them seem to 'find' themselves, to fulfil their personal goals.

Often, authors have identified professional and material success in the adopted country as a stepping-stone for successful integration. Some migrants chose specifically to migrate in the hope of improving their material conditions of life; building a career or, at least, making a comfortable living is therefore a frequent topic in migrant writing. We have seen that characters like Chloé in Blondeau's *Les Feux de l'exil* (1991) or Fêve in Latif-Ghattas's *Le Double Conte de l'exil* (1990) derive great satisfaction from their work, even though the tasks that they perform are not particularly rewarding: they nevertheless have the feeling of finding their own path, of achieving a relative autonomy or independence of which they never thought themselves capable before they left their country of origin. Chloé embraces the changes that occur in herself: she welcomes the influence of her country of adoption, even though her original motivation was purely economic:

¹³³ Émile Ollivier. 'Quatre thèses sur la transculturation', *Cahiers de recherche sociologique*, vol.2, No.2, 1984 (Septembre). p.75-90.

[Mes frères] ne veulent pas quitter la Guadeloupe et répètent, méprisants, que je ne suis plus la même qu'avant, que notre sœur va suivre mon exemple. Ont-ils raison? On n'adopte pas un pays sans en accepter les contraires, ni en partager les bonheurs. [LDCE, p.226]

Chloé, unlike Anastasia, lives in the present and accepts the transformations that ensue from it; she sees these as the way to succeed in Québec: in her view, financial independence leads to personal independence, which, in turn, leads her to free herself from the restraints of the traditional lifestyle that Chloé's brothers would like her to lead.

This observation is certainly true for some of Naïm Kattan's characters, like Habiba for example:¹³⁴ in the first instance, she appears weak and self-effacing, but she grows stronger and more self-confident from the moment that she takes over her husband's business. As she discovers that she is capable of professional achievement outside her traditional role of housewife and, as her business sense is recognised by fellow professionals, Habiba's personality starts to blossom. Similarly, the eponymous heroine of *Farida* (1991) unforeseeably manages a career as a singer in the Baghdad of the 1940s: although one would expect her to live on the margins of society, she acquires a reputation based on her talent and derives fame as well as financial security from it by cleverly managing her interests.

It is also important to note that some authors have used their personal success as material for their work and have written autobiographical narratives. Naïm Kattan, for instance, wrote a cycle of three novels inspired by his experience from the moment he left Baghdad until the end of his first year in Canada.¹³⁵ Through Méir - Kattan's narrative alter ego - the author recalls the itinerary that led to his successful career, first in the Canadian Arts Council from 1967 and then as a writer after his retirement. Émile Ollivier follows the same path with *Mille-Eaux* (1999). This autobiographical narrative retraces the formative years of his life from which he claims that his career as a writer stems, and depicts the influential people who surrounded him when he was a child: the author, who has been teaching for years in Québec, is now a respected critic and an acclaimed writer, but he stresses that he was brought up by an impoverished, even though bourgeois, mother in Haiti. This narrative, while depicting the budding career of Ollivier, allows his readership to measure the distance between the time of the author's childhood and the present and, indeed, the apparent unlikelihood of his current professional success. Similarly, in *J'écris*

¹³⁴ Naïm Kattan. *La Reprise*. Québec: Éditions Hurtubise HMH. 1985. p.107-22.

¹³⁵ This cycle of novels inspired by Kattan's autobiography chronologically comprises *Adieu Babylone*, *Les Fruits Arrachés*, and *La Fiancée promise*.

comme je vis (2000), Dany Laferrière claims that his novels are all instalments of a single autobiographical work, his 'American autobiography':

C'est dans cette ambiance assez éprouvante que j'ai eu un jour l'illumination. L'idée que je pouvais écrire un seul livre en plusieurs volumes. Et qu'il était possible d'insérer *Comment faire l'amour avec un nègre sans se fatiguer* et *Éroshima*, dans cet ensemble. L'idée de raconter cette longue autobiographie relatant ma dérive sur le continent américain. Il fallait que je pose les fondations de cet édifice. La question de l'origine, du début. Je me suis trouvé un coin dans la maison et j'ai tapé pendant un mois, comme un fou, *L'Odeur du café*, qui raconte mon enfance à Petit-Goâve. J'ai profité de cette fièvre pour faire le plan général des dix livres, que j'ai suivi pas à pas, ou presque, puisque les livres ne sont pas parus dans l'ordre. [...] Aujourd'hui, les dix livres sont parus. Et ces dix volumes forment un seul livre, j'y tiens, c'est ce que j'ai toujours voulu, un seul livre qui porte ce titre général: «Une autobiographie américaine».¹³⁶

We recall that in *Comment faire l'amour avec un nègre sans se fatiguer* (1999) - chronologically one of the last novels in Laferrière's conceptual series - the narrator's success as a writer is confirmed when he receives an accolade for his very first novel from 'Miz Bombardier', a renowned Québécoise critic. Later, his long-lasting success is mentioned by the narrator's mother and aunt in *Pays sans chapeau* (1999): even though they remained in Haiti, they have seen the narrator on television and have read his books. Having to follow his father's footsteps into exile and moving to Québec was, clearly, the move that launched his career, but he also seems to orchestrate his own success: in his first novel, it looks as though he predicts his achievement and reality proves him right, giving the impression that his words are prophetic and may themselves have an influence on the course of events. Like Kattan and Ollivier, Laferrière describes his unpromising upbringing only to highlight his later success and fame. And, like Kattan, Laferrière admits to using fiction to enhance reality and to making it more attractive by leaving out certain negative elements.¹³⁷

The selected migrant authors may use their personal lives as material for their novels, but they also seem to extend their experience and portray any migrant's success; they absorb and appropriate others' experiences. When asked in *J'écris comme je vis* (2000) about the narrator of his 'American autobiography', Laferrière describes him in the following terms:

Il est toujours un peu en retrait. C'est le même qui traverse tous mes romans. Il peut être tendre, cynique, violent, passionné, sec ou mouillé. C'est un être déroutant. Il est à la fois ce que je suis, ce

¹³⁶ Dany Laferrière. *J'écris comme je vis*. Genouilleux: La Passe du vent. 2000. p.154.

¹³⁷ Laferrière does not emphasize the fact, for example, that his father was persecuted by the Macoutes because of his political opinions and forced to live in hiding and then in exile. This is the reason why the little Dany was sent away from his mother to live with his grandmother, for fear for his safety. The political terror is kept very low key in his novels, which gives a sense of normality to his memories of Haitian childhood.

que je ne suis pas, et ce que j'aimerais être. La seule constante, c'est qu'il n'est jamais tout à fait au premier plan. Il peut l'être mais de manière détournée.¹³⁸

And further:

C'est vrai qu'il m'est arrivé de piquer ça et là des moments de vie des autres dans le dessein d'enrichir mon 'je'. J'ai tendance à dire, afin d'esquiver le problème de la stricte biographie qui ne relate que des faits véridiques relatifs à un individu, que mes romans sont une autobiographie de mes émotions, de ma réalité et de mes phantasmes.¹³⁹

We note here the absolute freedom of 'being'. No other migrant writer among those studied expresses this absolutely carefree attitude to life. Being an author, Laferrière believes he can become anyone through his narrator; and, similarly, his new life in Québec gives him the opportunity to do so. Like other Haitian writers, Laferrière has emphasized the fact that the Duvalier regimes robbed not only thinkers and artists, but also the whole Haitian population, of their political and personal freedom, of their creativity. With *Comment faire l'amour avec un nègre sans se fatiguer* (1999) – his first novel to be written and published ten years after his arrival in Québec – Laferrière and his narrative double seem to be free from any rules: they discover freedom in every form. 'They'¹⁴⁰ live a bohemian life, work little, drink and go out a lot; it is also a time of sexual liberation as 'they' accumulate girlfriends (or 'Miz'). 'They' discuss literature, politics, religion, and sexuality, subjects that would have been forbidden in Haiti. Lastly, the narrative itself does not seem to follow the traditional patterns: there is no plot, no storyline; the reader witnesses the acclaimed success of the book that he supposedly is reading; and even the titillating title of the book does not keep its promises. In *J'écris comme je vis* (2000), Laferrière explains his intentions:

On a l'impression que c'est jeté sur le papier comme ça, par un type qui sait à peine lire. On commence par le feuilleter, tiens, il connaît ça, on continue, et on s'aperçoit qu'on se trouve devant un écrivain raffiné (selon sa conception de la culture) qui peut goûter Keats, Virginia Woolf, Baudelaire, Leonard Cohen. Tiens, ce qu'il dit du sexe a l'air intéressant! On regarde le titre à nouveau, on pensait faire une blague à une copine en lui envoyant ce livre. On poursuit sa lecture un peu plus attentivement que tout à l'heure, et brusquement on a l'impression que même la phrase que l'on croyait déjantée était tout à fait classique. D'où cette sensation assez frustrante de s'être fait avoir quelque part, là où on ne s'y attendait pas. Mon but est de faire réfléchir sur la notion de culture.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ Dany Laferrière. *Op.cit.* 2000. p.46.

¹³⁹ Dany Laferrière. *Op.cit.* 2000. p.161.

¹⁴⁰ *CFA*, p.113. Laferrière recalls his life in Montréal before his career took off, when he shared a small flat with other Haitian intellectuals, all making a living by accepting underpaid menial posts for which they were overqualified, but being free to discuss politics, arts and literature between their long shifts.

¹⁴¹ Dany Laferrière. *Op.cit.* 2000. p.119-20.

We note here Laferrière's desire to always avoid clichés and conventions; he considers himself a freethinker and his exile in Montréal seems to have allowed him to be one.

Freedom and the discovery of feminist theories

In the case of female migrants, the discovery of freedom in the country of adoption often translates into the discovery of new ideas and new rights as they encounter feminist ideology. Even though this is not one of the major topics in *La Québécoise* (1993), it is nevertheless described as one of the most surprising but rewarding aspects of migration:

Ce pays t'était apparu comme un *lieu de parole féminine*, un lieu où les femmes s'exprimaient peut-être même un lieu où elles seules avaient quelque chose à dire, à crier. Tu avais dévoré cette littérature, en avais aimé la hardiesse revendicative, la hardiesse de ton, le bonheur d'écriture. L'écriture, sans doute le véritable pays de ces *femmes en quête d'un pays*. Ici, en dehors des hiérarchies pesantes de la France, *tu serais plus relaxe dans ta peau de femme – à part entière – égale – toi-même. Les femmes d'ici avaient un air de liberté inconnu de toi, un autre rapport à leur corps.* [LQ, p.138, my italics]

Here, we note that the narrator finds liberation at different levels. First of all, she seems to take possession of her own body; she claims control over it, suggesting that she was previously alienated from it, that it did not belong to herself. Secondly, in Québec, she finds her voice and is allowed to express herself. (After all, she is known to the reader throughout the novel as *La Québécoise*, suggesting that she did not have a voice or that she was forced to remain silent.) Thirdly, she finds a community, 'ces femmes en quête d'un pays'. Here, Robin - like many critics¹⁴² - draws a parallel between the migrant voice and the women's voice: they are both in search of an identity; migrants and women alike feel that they do not belong in society, they do not accept the role of second-class citizen that they have traditionally been allocated by society and its male-dominated conventions. They also feel the need to define their own voice in fear of being absorbed by this phallogocentric society.

For Haitian and Middle Eastern characters, discovering one's right to freedom remains more of a gradual process and it may be some time before they actually grasp the full extent of this newly found liberty. We have seen in the previous chapter that Marie-Célie Agnant and Gérard Étienne have similar views on the representation of black

¹⁴² We refer here, for example, to Pierre L'Hérault's article 'Pour une cartographie de l'hétérogène: dérivés identitaires des années 1980' in Simon, Sherry et al. *Fictions de l'identitaire au Québec*. Montréal: XYZ Éditeur, collection études et documents. 1991.p.53-114. In this article, L'Hérault looks at the work and influence of Ghila Benesty-Sroko's magazine *La Parole métèque*, whose main objective is to ally the Québécois feminist voices to those of the migrant women as they fight for the same rights and the same recognition. The magazine emphasizes the plurality of women's voices, regardless of their origins, implying that all women are in the same 'métèque' position, i.e. stuck between their true self and the identity conferred by the society around them.

Caribbean women. In their view, the status of black women is consistently undermined by a tradition of depreciation in Haitian culture, and by prejudice that leads to racism in occidental cultures like that of Québec. In Gérard Étienne's novels - *La Romance en domineur de Maître Clo* (2000) amongst others - the author consistently points to this debilitating opinion and representation of women in Haitian culture, but he does not portray a single character able to break its oppressive patterns. In Dany Laferrière's work, Haitian female characters are as courageous and strong as those of Étienne, but they nevertheless remain in the very traditional roles of carers and centres of the family. With the new generation of writers like Marie-Célie Agnant, we observe that this topic is addressed differently. For example, when Flore meets Emma in *Le Livre d'Emma* (2001), she does not seem fully aware of the limitations of her life. It is Emma's narrative and suicide that open Flore's eyes to what is available to her, but also to the opportunities that she is denied. At the end of the novel, Flore sets out to find her own voice, rejecting the tradition of submission and cultural lies that she has unthinkingly assimilated until her encounter with Emma. Women finding their own voices appears to be a budding concern in Haitian novels but, for Middle Eastern writers, it seems to be a major topic despite their describing it as a slow process.

It is important firstly to note that most of the writers of Middle Eastern origin featured in our study are women. Apart from Naïm Kattan and Bernard Andrès, it is mainly women who have adopted the narrative genre as a form of expression. Secondly, we note that there is a larger number of female main characters than male. Even in Kattan's novels and short stories, women occupy centre-stage; we recall here that his largely autobiographical novel is called *La Fiancée promise* (1983), again suggesting that a female character is the main protagonist of the novel. Most storylines of the Middle Eastern novels concern women's achievement in their new lives. Earlier, we saw that Kattan's characters Farida and Habiba find independence through their careers but, more importantly, Kattan shows two women who initially appear to be at the mercy of men's will, but who manage to break free from the framework of traditional rules and set their own. In Farida's case, becoming a singer in Baghdad should have compromised her reputation and would normally have landed her in a grim life of prostitution; instead, she secures the protection and fortune of a powerful man, which provides her with relative independence for a woman in the Baghdad of the 1940s. For Habiba, the illness and then death of her husband force her to become involved in the society on the edge of which she has been living: now middle-aged, she discovers the financial and sexual freedom enjoyed

by her female Québécois contemporaries. In Blondeau's *Les Feux de l'exil* (1991), Chloé too seems to have a low opinion of men and denies them any power or influence over her. She ignores her brothers who criticise her for renouncing traditions; she refuses to have a permanent partner who – she believes – would try to impose his rules on her; but more importantly, she raises her son on her own, and decides to have another child without a father (by leaving her partner before he knows that she is pregnant). It is as though Chloé wishes to give a feminine education to her son; she is teaching him equality and tolerance of others, beyond their colour or their gender, which is in contrast with her family's opinion, traditions and behaviours: even though she is denying her son elements of his masculinity and identity, in her view, she is bringing up a new type of man.

In Nadja Ghalem's *Les Jardins de cristal* (1981), Chafia, the narrator, analyses her difficult relationship with her mother. In her view, her mother incarnates everything that Chafia tries to escape from: an identity that has been shaped by submissiveness, a culture that considers women as property and not as independent human beings. Chafia's narrative gives the impression that these cultural traditions are transmitted genetically from generation to generation, from mothers to daughters. One's place in society is primarily determined by one's gender:

J'ai apprivoisé la déchirure de l'éloignement. Mais je souffre encore de ce lien qui me rattache à toi, ma mère, toi et ta féminité-victime. [*LJDC*, p.21]

But Chafia refuses to adopt a fatalistic attitude. Her fight eventually brings her to Québec where she finds a support group:

Personne n'est condamné d'avance dans la vie. Croire le contraire c'est signer un pacte avec la mort, et le sentiment de l'inutilité de l'existence vient de ce qu'on s'est laissé piéger sans s'offrir une voie d'évitement. Je sais que d'autres femmes vivent des situations semblables ou pires que la mienne, mais je sais aussi que jamais autant d'espoirs n'ont été aussi près de se réaliser. [...] Nous sommes bien obligées, nous les femmes, de travailler à ce que ce monde-là devienne meilleur, si nous voulons que nos accouchements et notre travail aient un sens. [*LJDC*, p.79]

Like Régine Robin, Ghalem suggests that women can provide a community for other females in conflict with their cultural community, allowing them to work together at improving their social and cultural conditions and future. Her character, Chafia, goes on to describe the process - now possible in Québec - of building a new identity or, rather, of allowing one's identity to bloom, transcending the constraints of traditions:

Au bout de toutes ces années de labeur et de dépression, je me récupère, toute surprise d'être encore valable. Je n'ai plus honte de mon narcissisme, j'ai fait ce qu'il fallait pour avoir enfin le droit de dire 'moi' sans penser à mes parents, mon milieu, ou à tous ces liens qui me sécurisaient parfois et d'autres fois m'entravaient. Je suis sortie de la domesticité. Me voilà libre. Peureuse, mais libre. [*LJDC*, p.103]

Like Robin's narrator, La Québécoise, Chafia finds her individual voice and, just as importantly, she is allowed and encouraged to express it. Migrating to Québec is a step towards independence and claiming one's identity.

Mona Latif-Ghattas's collection of short stories, *Les Lunes de miel* (1996), explores migrant women's relationships with traditions and culture through the social institution of marriage. The stories are all set in the Egyptian community of Montréal, and each introduces a marriage and the sets of cultural choices and implications attached to it. With two notable exceptions (to be considered shortly), most marriages presented by Tante Eulalie, one of the expatriate Egyptian narrators, end up in failure. First of all, there are cases of traditionally arranged marriages, for example, in which women are confined to the traditional role of carer, looking after the family and house. In an extreme case ('Le Cirque de famille', p.181 – 199), the main character is enslaved and abused by her husband and his family. In certain cases, migrating to Québec may also make things worse as women have to add full-time employment to their traditional chores. It feels as if women are doubly prisoner: they are restricted by their cultural traditions, and burdened by financial hardship in their country of adoption. In 'Le Cirque de famille', Marie Maccabe – the main character – also remains captive of her 'old ways' after her arrival in Québec but, with the help of her daughter, she frees herself by finding out about her rights and entitlements, and eventually divorces her husband, putting an end to the abuse of which she has been a victim for many years. In other cases ('L'étonnante Vava', p.111-36), it is only the semblance of traditions that is kept: Vava is decision-maker within the couple; she guides her husband's every move and decision but it seems essential for her to maintain the façade of a devoted housewife who looks after her children and throws sumptuous parties to impress the members of her community. Arranged marriages maintain a clear and traditional division of tasks between men and women, and suppose a certain submissiveness on the part of women, even though this may be only for the sake of appearances.

The second type of marriage presented by Tante Eulalie is one in which women are able to choose their partner. Having the choice, however, does not always prove to be a better option for those women who end up with men that do not suit them. In 'Monsieur "je sais tout"' (p.201-14), Farida marries a man from outside her own culture. He impresses her, but does not know her and does not allow her to express her personality: she has to fit the mould that he has chosen for her. Again, her arrival in Québec is a revelation: not only are her teaching qualifications recognised so that she is allowed to work, but also she feels

encouraged to express her cultural identity and self. Needless to say, in keeping with Tante Eulalie's cynicism, her marriage ends in a divorce. In 'Liette et Raouf' (p.215-23), the cultural differences within the marriage have tragic consequences. Liette and Raouf get married in spite of their families, religions and cultures: she is a Jewess and he is a Muslim. Due to pressure from their communities, they simply cannot get married in a Middle Eastern country so they migrate to Québec where they hope to start afresh. But their respective families and cultural differences soon catch up with them and wear them down, even leading eventually to their death. Tante Eulalie concludes:

Pense alors qu'il faut savoir fermer la porte d'où vient le vent. Mais pour la fermer, il faut avoir des muscles aux bras. Sinon, foi de Tante Eulalie, elle se referme sur toi. [LLDM, p.223]

The narrator suggests that the union of Liette and Raouf defied common sense because it denied each party's inherited past and culture, and prevented them from expressing part of their identity. Latif-Ghattas seems to propose that, in both types of marriage, the fundamental error is to negate one's identity: in arranged marriages, women are maintained in a role that they have not chosen; when they choose their partner, women seem to forget their own self to please the man whom they love. There are, however, two promising unions in the novel: Martine and Stéphane who have chosen each other within the same cultural background and have decided, against their cultural traditions, to live together before marriage; and Christine and Jean-Pierre who have benefited from Tante Eulalie's experience as a matchmaker in the Middle Eastern tradition, but who have grown to know and respect each other before marriage. Both couples have found the balance between personal aspirations and cultural constraints without compromising any aspects of their identity; and the women in these relationships appear to be equal to their partner. It is interesting to note also that the stories of these two weddings are told by Christine. Tante Eulalie, the narrator of the old generation, passed on her stories of failed unions to Christine, the new generation, before dying. Christine, now solely in charge of the narration, tells stories of successful compromise between past traditions and present lives.

Children as intermediary to change

We have seen that most authors and characters find their voice and discover the extent of their freedom either on their own or, occasionally, through an intermediary in the form of a friend or acquaintance. There is, however, another way to access freedom: it is through the intermediary of children. Unlike their parents, children are not yet set in cultural ways and traditions. Even though they seem able to differentiate between both cultural systems - that

of their parents and that of the adoptive country -, they assimilate new elements as part of their learning process. They combine elements of both cultures. In novels by Québécois writers of Middle Eastern extraction, children are a source of worry and tension between parents and their children: parents expect their children to behave according to the rules that they themselves followed, but the children have grown up in a society that does not have the same values. In the Middle Eastern group, this topic is addressed, for example, by Naïm Kattan in short stories like 'Le Sommeil' or 'Les Rêves de la mère'.¹⁴³ In both stories, mothers lose sleep over the behaviour of their daughters who act like Canadian young women, go out on dates, work and lead independent and separate lives from those of their parents, in defiance of their traditions. In 'Les Rêves de la mère', the daughter, Joyce - whose name reflects her mother's ambitions of emancipation from her cultural background -, rebels against her father's admonishment:

Déconfite, malheureuse, il fallait qu'elle s'excuse. "Nous ne sommes plus dans le désert et je ne suis pas une bédouine." Elle croyait l'insulter et le faire taire.
-Les bédouins, eux, ont le sens de l'honneur. [LR, p.160]

In this extract, Joyce mocks her parents' origins by using a cultural cliché, but her father's reply is serious and exhibits pride in his culture of origin and the values that he has retained after he migrating. Joyce's father sums up his frustrations and disagreement in one sentence: 'Elle se croit canadienne.' (LR, p.161). This concern is particularly developed in Latif-Ghattas's *Les Lunes de Miel* (1996), in the short story called 'La complainte de Madame Aspasia' (p.229-48). This short story is in the form of a dialogue between Madame Aspasia and her friend Rose Antoun. The two old women discuss their daughters who have been transformed by their lives in Québec. They conclude that there is now a cultural gap that separates generations beyond what was once the normal evolution within one culture:

Ici, c'est une autre mentalité.
C'est mieux que chez nous et pire que chez nous. Ça dépend.
Mes trois filles mariées se sont dégourdies un peu depuis qu'elles sont à Montréal. [...]
Si ce n'était que de nous, nous serions restées au Caire.
Mais les enfants se sont tous installés ici. Nous avons dû suivre. [LLDM, p.238]

Rose and Aspasia discuss how their daughters have smartened up since their arrival, that they are more independent and take responsibilities for their own choices. They now base their lifestyle on that of other Québécois women rather than that of their parents. Contrary to Aspasia, however, Rose is influenced by - if not a little envious of - the lifestyle that the

¹⁴³ See Naïm Kattan. *Le Rivage* (1979) p.103-14, and *La Reprise* (1985) p.159-80.

daughters have. She admits, for instance, that values have moved on in comparison with her own youth, even in her country of origin, thanks to recent globalisation:

Hier [Rose] m'a dit que, de nos jours, personne ne choisissait personne pour personne.
Même au Caire, il paraît que les choses ont changé. [LLDM, p.241]

To Aspasia's chagrin, even Rose's personality is altered under the influence of her children: she adopts the new vocabulary of her daughter, and her views are influenced by feminist concepts gleaned from her daughter:

[Rose] m'a même dit l'autre jour qu'elle aurait préféré que sa fille vive en concubinage avec un homme.
Elle a dit "concubinage".
Je ne reconnais plus Rose Antoun. [LLDM, p.243]

With Rose and Aspasia, Latif-Ghattas presents characters who reluctantly accept the influence of their children but, in 'Le cirque de famille' (p.181-99), she portrays a more positive response. Marie Maccabe's emancipation from an abusive husband and family is brought about through her daughter, who has been brought up in the Canadian way. In opposition to the traditional self-effacing manners of Middle Eastern women, she stands up for herself and her mother:

Il paraît que le père Trix, quand il reçut la première lettre d'avocat, devint si enragé qu'il mit la maison à sac. Il proféra à leur égard de grosses menaces auxquelles sa fille lui répondit: "Dans *mon* pays, il y a des lois qui protègent les femmes. Ici, tu es au Québec. *Réveille-toi*. Tu n'es plus sur la rue de l'Aéroport militaire secret à Héliopolis." [LLDM, p.197, my italics]

Although the first generation of migrant women of Middle Eastern origin is generally unsure of the options available to them in their country of adoption, the subsequent generations are better informed and more assertive,¹⁴⁴ easing up the process of 'réenculturation' for their parents by passing onto them their knowledge about the 'new' country.

In the Haitian group, children are definitely ascribed the role of translators between cultures, or even spokespersons for their people. For example, Alexis, the main character of Marie-Célie Agnant's *Alexis d'Haïti* (1999) and *Alexis, le fils de Raphaël* (2000), 'translates' his family's lives, feelings, history and traditions for the civil servants who assess their case for asylum; he later does the same thing in Québec and manages to convince his friends to help him take action in the liberation of his father. In Stanley

¹⁴⁴ Often, the first generation of migrants do not speak the language(s) of the adopted country very well and still use their traditional scale of values to deal with events, whereas the following generations are more likely to be bilingual and are exposed to the other culture (or the culture of the Other) as soon as they go to school, for example. They are soon better equipped than their parents to understand the values of the country of adoption, which is now theirs.

Péan's *La Mémoire ensanglantée* (1994), *Quand la Bête est humaine* (1997) and *L'Emprise de la nuit* (1993), children again play the role of translators between cultural groups because they have an understanding of both. They explain to their Québécois friends the meaning of various elements and behaviours from their inherited culture; they translate Creole words for them. The characters of *La Mémoire ensanglantée* (1994) know that they belong to two separate worlds, which have no connection other than that embodied in themselves:

D'aussi loin que je me souviens, j'ai toujours vécu à cheval sur deux mondes. [...] Le jour, on allait et venait dans Montréal, entre le métro, l'école, les boutiques et fast-foods du centre-ville. Mais sitôt le seuil de la maison familiale franchi, on passait en quelque sorte dans un univers parallèle. [*MEn*, p.11]

And, in *L'Emprise de la nuit* (1993), the young hero clearly knows that his culture might be unknown or difficult to grasp for an outsider:

Je comprenais sans peine que pour quelqu'un de l'arrière-pays québécois, certains aspects de la culture haïtienne ressemblent à du merveilleux. Ayant vécu plus de la moitié de mon existence ici, je n'étais moi-même pas toujours certain d'avoir une bonne compréhension de mon pays natal. [*EDN*, p.27]

Young migrant characters are obviously seen as more malleable than their older counterparts, and act as 'double agents' in novels. They are the characters that have no prejudice; they are not judgemental of other cultures. For them, it is usual to have friends whose origin is different from theirs. In Stanley Péan's *La Mémoire ensanglantée* (1994), for example, the young heroine mocks her father's prejudiced opinions in these terms:

Mais oui, papa: les Jamaïquains sont comme ci, les Québécois sont comme ça, et mieux vaut ne pas parler des Italiens, des Grecs, des Arabes, des Juifs, ou même des Haïtiens. Ce qu'il pouvait m'agacer avec ses préjugés idiots, des fois! [*MEn*, p.32]

For the Middle Eastern and Haitian authors that we have mentioned, children represent the future of cohabitation and understanding between cultures, and it is interesting to note that some of these authors have judged this role of 'double agent' important enough to address children - Québécois and allophones alike - directly and write novels and stories for a young readership. Authors like Nadia Ghalem,¹⁴⁵ Marie-Célie Agnant¹⁴⁶ and Stanley Péan¹⁴⁷ put into practice what they depict in their books: they treat children as interpreters;

¹⁴⁵ Nadia Ghalem. *La Rose des sables*. Québec: Hurtubise HMH, collection plus. 1993.

¹⁴⁶ *Alexis d'Haïti* (1999) and *Alexis, le fils de Raphaël* (2000) are both published in the 'Collection Atout' by Hurtubise HMH, which is aimed at a young readership.

¹⁴⁷ *L'Emprise de la nuit* (1993), *La Mémoire ensanglantée* (1994), *Treize Pas vers l'inconnu* (1996), *L'Appel des loups* (1997), *Quand la bête est humaine* (1997), *Le Temps s'enfuit* (1999), are published in the 'Collection Roman +' by La Courte Échelle publishers, which is aimed at youngsters.

they present them with heroes who are from a different cultural and racial background (Agnant and Péan's characters are often Black Caribbean, and Nadja Ghalem portrays a European girl brought up in the desert by a nomadic tribe in *La Rose des sables* (1993)¹⁴⁸); they show them that there are other ways to apprehend the world. (We have seen that Péan introduces a fair amount of Voodoo legends in his work, for example) In short, they open the mind of Québécois children to Otherness, and in doing so, they presumably hope to facilitate the integration of future migrants.

Returning to one's (place of) origin

Finally, the last step to achieving 'ré-enculturation' for migrants is to let go of the nostalgic dream of returning to their country of origin. In the French and Middle Eastern groups, nostalgic feelings are a rare occurrence. The French writers/characters leave home and settle in Québec because of nostalgia: they long for a long-lost past and hope to find it in Québec; there is no evidence in their novels, however, as to whether they are satisfied with what they find. In the case of Middle Eastern writers/characters, this topic is not greatly developed because migration is often the consequence of a straight financial choice induced by a change of political regime. There exist a few cases in which the characters were forced to leave for personal reasons, like Anastasia (in Blondeau's *Les Feux de l'exil*), Fêve (in Latif-Ghattas's *Le Double Conte de l'exil*) and Chafia (in Ghalem's *Les Jardins de cristal*). These three characters share the experience of a departure amid violence: Anastasia feels that she has been abducted by people who call themselves her parents but whom she rejects; Fêve's country was a battlefield and he has fled persecution; Chafia has run away from traditions that do not allow women to be free, and from a country devastated by a war for independence. For them, there is no going back or nothing to go back for. Fêve's family was killed by soldiers and his house destroyed; even his official identity dissolved when he lost his documents and was not recognised by either of the fighting parties. As for Chafia, she knows that her country is now closed to her unless she submits to traditions and customs that she sees as a form of slavery. When Anastasia tried to return to Marrakech, she found only sorrow and estrangement, thus fulfilling her earlier premonition that she would lose part of herself if she left:

Quand [Anastasia] s'était exilée du Maroc, sa compagne avait chuchoté: "C'est ton ombre que tu emportes. Ici, de toi, tout est lumière. Où tu iras, tu vas mourir un peu..." Anastasia n'avait rien répondu. Seul, son regard emplí d'eau dans le regard noir de la fille, et qui prophétisait. [LFDE, p.33]

¹⁴⁸ Nadia Ghalem. *Op.cit.* 1993.

In Latif-Ghattas's short story 'La couleuvre des sarcophages',¹⁴⁹ two characters return to Egypt, only to realise that they no longer have a place there. The first one is Zohair, who went to Québec in the 1970s to study and has been influenced by Québécois customs so much so that he forgets appropriate behaviour in his country of origin. During a visit to his parents in Egypt, he meets Zelda with whom he has an affair. In Québec, this conduct would not be an issue, but there, it contravenes social rules and morals. Zohair, therefore, feels obliged to marry Zelda to comply with local customs, not only for her sake but also for that of his own family. Of course, Zelda follows her husband Zohair to Québec but, after a while, she misses her family and wishes to return home for a visit. But Zelda, like Zohair before her, measures the changes that have taken place in her and realises that she no longer fits in her society of origin:

Elle s'était, malgré tout, habituée à la mentalité d'ici et ne supportait plus l'état dans lequel elle était retombée subitement dès son retour chez ses parents. [LLDM, p.55]

In novels by Middle Eastern authors, characters realise early on that the distance between 'there' and 'here' is not only geographical, it is also personal: migration has a direct impact on their behaviour; they are less bound by social rules. This prevents them from ever re-assuming their previous place in their original society. Going 'home' convinces them that their place and personal happiness are in Québec.

For the Jewish group of authors, nostalgia rather translates into coming to terms with a loss. Their inherited collective memory is the cause of a gap, of an uncertainty of identity for the generations who have not witnessed the Holocaust. The difference with the other groups is that, out of respect for those who perished or out of guilt from those who survived, Jewish characters can never allow themselves to let go of the past, so they decide on a compromise in an attempt to have it both ways: instead of putting their collective past behind them, they bring it into the present. Kattan, for example, explores this topic in the short story 'Le Pacte'¹⁵⁰. The Jewish-American narrator has never really connected with his family's sense of loss concerning the relatives who disappeared in concentration camps during the Second World War. For him, someone too young to have any memory of his European origin, the past has remained vague, somehow intangible. He seems to have inherited from his parents nostalgic feelings about a past that he does not personally know. When given the opportunity to go to Europe and to Germany in particular, the narrator makes his way to Dachau; this proves to be a revelation for him:

¹⁴⁹ LDM, p.37-66.

¹⁵⁰ LR, p.93-105.

Ici, nous étions dans le passé, dans l'histoire et je me retrouvais dans ma mémoire. Les pleurs de ma mère éclataient soudain dans la réalité. Cette famille inconnue emportée dans le tourbillon était réelle. Mes lointains oncles et tantes avaient des visages. Et un après-midi d'automne, ils étaient réduits à un souvenir. [LR, p.103]

Suddenly, the past - his family's legacy - becomes immediate, tangible, real. By returning to his family's homeland, the narrator reconnects past and present, and by doing so, his present acquires more weight, more body and, more importantly, he now understands his place in it and in the Jewish community as a whole.

The similar thing occurs for most characters of Robin's *L'Immense Fatigue des pierres* (1999), who try to piece their elusive past together. In fact, this is a major topic throughout the novel. All characters and narrators are Jewish, and all appear to be enclaves within time and culture(s), disconnected from any form of community. They are either survivors or descendants of survivors of concentration camps where, in their eyes, the past – as they or their parents knew it – was destroyed. Their knowledge of their past, origins and culture remains fragmented, vestigial and intangible. To describe it, they all talk of 'scraps', 'traces', not even memories. In 'Manhattan Bistro' (p.173-220), the narrator who is also a writer, tells of her obsession with memory:

Obsession de la date, de la trace du petit morceau, de la brique, du fragment, du document, du monument, du souvenir, du récit de vie, de la photo, du dos d'une carte postale. Monde enseveli, paroles mortes.

Hier ist Kein Warum. Le savoir aurait toujours vacillé.

Comment représenter cette absence? Pourquoi la représenter? Texte fait d'absence, sans lieu, sans image, sans arrimage. Indicible, impensable à dire, à penser. Dessaisie radicale de tout. [IFDP, p.199]

Patchy memory is problematic to deal with as one cannot even nurse the thought of going back to one's place of origins. For these Jews, unlike Haitians, French or Middle Eastern characters, places merely reinforce the feeling of absence. But letting go is equally unthinkable - not least because it would resemble a betrayal, a second death for all those who died in the Holocaust-, but also because it would evoke the feeling that part of one's identity is slipping away. The narrator wonders about how to manage her memory:

Construire des reliques? Déconstruire des reliques? Pétrifier, muséifier sa propre histoire? Retour du refoulé. Ce qui fait retour dans le réel, ou au contraire historialiser sa propre mémoire. Des reliques, des bouts, des restes, à peine des souvenirs. Quelques listes, l'arbre, quelques dates. Faire avec? Faire quoi? Avec quoi? [IFDP, p.206]

No answer to these questions is forthcoming either in this short story, despite an initial tongue-in-cheek promise in the previous narrative 'Journal de déglingue entre le Select et

Compuserve' (p.127-71), in which the narrator – who ironically calls herself Régine Robin amongst other pseudonyms – imagines a system to administrate and preserve memory:

Ce qui compte, après tout, ce ne sont pas ces restes, mais la mémoire. On imagine alors que chaque individu recevra à sa naissance une boîte de telle et telle dimension. Tout le monde aura la même, genre boîte à chaussures. L'individu aura toute sa vie pour la remplir de la façon qu'il voudra, car ce qu'il y mettra sera l'image de ce qu'il voudra laisser de lui-même, une trace. [...] Le document fouille l'idée d'une administration et d'une gestion de la mémoire. [IFDP, p.131-2]

This imaginary system, however, is predictably flawed and results in part of the memory being destroyed, while the remainder is mixed up and damaged by civil servants' negligence. Furthermore, people react differently to this new requirement in their lives: some do not care at all, while, for others, the need to fill the box is overwhelming and memory dictates their lives. With this story, Robin illustrates the impossibility of memory being preserved pristine and compartmentalised: memory is shaped by individuals but is equally influenced by others; it cannot be contained in boxes because it does not belong to anyone or, rather, it belongs to everyone (and as such, it can be borrowed, stolen, misplaced, etc). In the end, all characters in *L'Immense Fatigue des pierres* (1999) seem to come to the same conclusion: attempting to 'manage' memory and its traces only slows but never halts the process of wear and tear exerted by contamination, distortion, and forgetfulness.

For Haitian writers/characters, the situation is different altogether because the Duvalier regime eventually did fall in 1986 and, from then on, they have had the option of going back. After several years in exile claiming that they are waiting to return to their country, Haitian exiles are suddenly confronted with the choice of severing the often fragile links that they have formed in Québec and facing the unknown in their own country. In other words, they have to consider going through the agonizing process of migration all over again. So far, they have only dreamed of doing so, now dreams can become reality. With regards to the issue of returning to Haiti, writers are divided into two camps: either migrants decide to return and rebuild a life in their country of origin, or they realize that there is too great a distance between their memories and present reality and that their lives are now elsewhere. We have seen that the Haitian group is more prone to nostalgic feelings because they have been forced into exile. Unlike the French or Middle Eastern migrants, all authors are unanimous about the fact that they did not choose to leave. Most novels are either set in Haiti or tell about the longing for people, traditions or social and culinary traditions that they have had to abandon. *Mille-Eaux* (1999) by Émile Ollivier and *L'Odeur du café* (2001), *La Chair du maître* (1997) and *Le Charme des après-*

midi sans fin (1998) by Dany Laferrière are meticulous accounts of the authors' childhoods. They describe at great length not themselves exactly, but their memories of Haiti, its geography, its people, its traditions and beliefs, its food and smells. With the fall of the Duvalier regime, some authors take the opportunity to return to their native country, thereby 're-rooting' themselves or confronting their memories with reality, and have consequently used their experience as material for a book: Émile Ollivier produced *Les Urnes scellées* (1995) and Laferrière *Pays sans chapeau* (1999).

Re-inventing 'home'

In the published interview *J'écris comme je vis* (2000), Laferrière recalls his first impression when he revisits his grandmother's village, Petit-Gôave, in which he spent some of his early childhood:

La ville n'avait pas beaucoup périclité. Je m'y suis promené durant des heures. Je n'y avais pas mis les pieds depuis plus de trente ans. J'ai rencontré des gens que j'avais connus dans mon enfance. Et surtout, j'ai vu que la description que j'ai faite de la ville coïncidait, à part quelques erreurs mineures, avec l'original. Je ne savais plus, à un moment donné, si j'étais dans la vie ou dans le rêve, dans la réalité ou dans le roman. J'avais l'impression de me promener dans mon propre roman.¹⁵¹

It is interesting to note here that the distinction between reality and fiction has become blurred for Laferrière. His memories are accurate, yet, with the passing of time and in exile, they seem to have acquired a fictional quality, as though reality was Laferrière's creation, a product of his imagination. Furthermore, Laferrière and other migrants who return cannot help but compare between 'now' and 'then', 'here' and 'there, just as they did when they arrived in Québec. This repetition of the feeling of acculturation can, in some cases, contribute to a sense of rootlessness and of perpetual nomadism. Émile Ollivier points out that, at first, going back triggers feelings of guilt in that, by comparison to 'local' Haitians, migrants are relatively wealthy. They return with a large number of presents in an attempt to bridge the gap that separates them from their relatives and friends:

Ils voudraient tout transporter, combler, en un seul voyage, parents, amis, restés là-bas au pays de la rareté, alors qu'eux, ils reviennent du monde de l'abondance. [US, p.37, my italics]

But, among the non-migrant islanders, there exists a kind of resentment against them as exiles who are coming 'home'. In *Les Urnes scellées* (1995) for example, Adrien notices the expression of the hotel manageress:

¹⁵¹ Dany Laferrière. *Op.cit.* 2000. p.173.

Quand Adrien et Estelle pénétrèrent dans le vestibule de l'hôtel, la patronne, une femme opulente, la soixantaine largement entamée, d'un coup *d'œil habituée à identifier les proies faciles* les reconnut: des «diasporés». Son visage absent, presque fantomatique l'instant d'avant, s'éclaira d'une paire d'yeux brillants. Leur *lueur cupide* n'inquiéta pas outre mesure Adrien. On l'avait averti. [US, p.53, my italics]

Some 'local' Haitians exploit the exiles' nostalgic trip and consider them to be targets from whom money may be extracted. Generally, however, exiles quickly reconnect with relatives and people they knew, and this contact makes them realize that they have forgotten and missed out on more than they think: at first, they assume that their memories are indeed perfect because things and people seem to match the mental image that they had as exiles, yet they soon discover that they have to re-learn their old ways. When Laferrière visits his mother, for example, his behaviour leads her to believe that he is ill, but her neighbour explains to her the true cause of her son's strange attitude:

- Il lui faut simplement réapprendre à respirer, à sentir, à voir, à toucher les choses différemment. La voisine ajoute quelle connaît un remède qui pourrait m'aider à retrouver un rythme normal. [PSC, p.13]

Here, the author undergoes the reverse process of when he left:¹⁵² he slowly revives all the sensations and feelings (tastes, colours, sounds, etc.) that have been dormant until then.

Adrien and Estelle of *Les Urnes scellées* (1995) go through the same process of re-learning the simplest things:

Sans hâte, ils déambulent, s'imprègnent du paysage, de ses senteurs, de ses formes et de ses signes. Pas à pas, attentifs à l'infime, ils longent les ruelles que les voyageurs ne regardent jamais. [US, p.66]

But, while Estelle enjoys the process, Adrien cannot overcome the differences that he notices in Haiti, and also in himself. His disappointment is symbolically accompanied by sickness too:¹⁵³

Au début de son séjour, Adrien avait connu quelques ennuis de santé. Il pensait avoir un estomac de béton, capable de digérer des pierres. Malgré les avertissements de l'Agence et d'Estelle, il avait bu l'eau non distillée, mangé, à même les bacs de fritailles au coin des rues, poissons, griots, bananes pesées, avalé, avec gloutonnerie, des jus de toute succulence. Il resta cloué au lit, durant une bonne semaine. Une diarrhée dont une tonne de nitrate de bismuth n'avait pas réussi à endiguer le flux diluvien. Et cette colique tord-boyaux qui augmentait à chaque poussée de fièvre. Et cette humiliation, cette douloureuse humiliation de devoir si souvent baisser et remonter son pantalon. [US, p.118]

¹⁵² We remember the last pages of *Le Cri des oiseaux fous* (2000), in which the author recounts his departure: 'Il me faut tout oublier de mes dieux, de mes monstres, de mes amis, de mes amours, de mes gloires passées, de mon éternel été, de mes fruits tropicaux, de mes cieux, de ma flore, de ma faune, de mes goûts, de mes appétits, de mes désirs, de tout ce qui a fait jusqu'à présent ma vie, si je veux continuer à vivre dans le présent chaud et non sombrer dans la nostalgie du passé dans moins de trente secondes, au moment où l'avion quittera le sol d'Haïti.' [COF, p.344]

¹⁵³ These physical symptoms of maladjustment recall the illness that Maître Clo develops in Gérard Étienne's *La Romance en do mineur de Maître Clo* (2000) - a migrant's illness due to a different lifestyle.

This bout of sickness obliges him to measure the distance that now exists between who he is now and who he was before he left Haiti, and to admit the change that has occurred in him as a result of his migration. From that moment on, Adrien knows that he no longer belongs in Haiti and that he is only a visitor. The trip that was supposed to reinforce the links with his culture of origin has achieved the opposite effect and has decisively confirmed the fracture in Adrien's cultural identity. He no longer tries to get involved in the life of the people surrounding him, as he understands that there is no future for him in Haiti and that his life is now in Québec.

Aussi préféra-t-il adopter l'attitude du spectateur qui regarde tourner la roue, défiler les godets, les uns pleins, les autres vides. [US, p.119]

As for Estelle - who intends to stay in Haiti -, she rediscovers her country of origin and is ready to re-start a life there, in spite of changes and probable difficulties that she might encounter:

Estelle avait retrouvé le pays et découvert son côté attachant. Adrien n'a eu ni le courage, ni la force, ni la volonté de le faire. Elle, elle était prête à vivre avec les conséquences, et était déjà en attente de fêtes et de liesses éclatantes. [US, p.286]

Unlike Estelle, Adrien is unable to foresee any sort of future for himself on the island; he cannot ignore the violence, the corruption and the poverty that still seem to be the norm in Haiti; he no longer feels able to face the harshness of life that awaits migrants who decide to go 'home'. After years of dreaming of settling back in Haiti, Adrien is ironically overwhelmed by the reality of living in a Third World country:

Ville-mouroir où les enfants en guenilles, petits corps squelettiques agrippés aux seins fripés de leur mère, meurent d'indifférence, les yeux mangés de mouches. Ville qui ne connaît que des départs, et jamais de retours. [...] Ville poubelle du temps, avec ses ruines, ses maisons de style colonial flottant sur des vagues bleues. Villes de queues! Partout, la misère des queues: queues pour le riz, les pois et l'huile qui viennent de la Food Care et que les mafieux et leurs parrains pillent: ils font main basse sur l'aide d'urgence et revendent les produits; queues à la devanture de la banque pour encaisser le chèque qui vient de parents vivant à l'étranger; queues soudain meurtrières quand l'impatience rend fou; queues pour l'eau; queue devant l'officine où l'on délivre les passeports. Ville d'éternelles queues! Ville-marge, ville de bidon-villes, ville-rébus, ville de l'écart, ville-misère pleine de consommation, d'étoiles filantes et de ténèbres. Ville en passe d'extinction, ville éclatée, en deuil d'aube. [US, p.283]

This passage encapsulates Adrien's new feelings about Haiti: his enthusiasm and hopes of a new life have been replaced with disillusioned visions of gloom, the struggle for bare necessities and death. Staying would amount to a dire and uncomfortable life. As an archaeologist, Adrien had hoped that he would be able to rebuild the past, but he has only found havoc and meaningless ruins. Laferrière expresses similar views, yet they are not as

pessimistic and dark. It is interesting to note the parallel between Émile Ollivier's image of Haiti as a 'mouroir' and Laferrière's ironic stories of *zombies* fighting for the government, for example, or American scientists studying the inhabitants of Bombardopolis, who, supposedly, have the ability to live without eating [*PSC*, p.194-5]. But more important is the title of the book itself, *Pays sans chapeau*, which is the translation of the Creole expression to describe the realm of death. We also note that the novel is divided into chapters called 'Pays réel' and chapters called 'Pays rêvé'. The 'Pays rêvé' chapters are dedicated to Laferrière's reunion with family and friends, his rediscovering of the simple pleasures of life in Haiti. The 'Pays réel' chapters are more intent on giving facts and figures, on the reality of life amid poverty and violence. But these chapters, increasingly detached from reality, reach a pinnacle of strangeness when the narrator visits the realm of death, the *Pays sans chapeau*, and meets the gods of the Voodoo Pantheon. The final chapter probably gives the key to Laferrière's fairly optimistic position when representing Haiti:

- Ce que je peins, c'est le pays que je rêve.
- Et le pays réel?
- Le pays réel, monsieur, je n'ai pas besoin de le rêver. [*PSC*, p.276]

In other words, Laferrière prefers his own version of Haiti to reality because he can edit it to leave out undesired elements. A few years later, Laferrière reformulates his feelings of going 'home' in *J'écris comme je vis* (2000):

Quand on est resté si longtemps à l'étranger, je ne crois pas qu'on puisse retourner aussi facilement, sauf pour mourir. Au fond, on ne retourne jamais à un endroit qu'on a quitté. On fait semblant mais, au fond de soi, on sait bien que ce n'est plus le pays qu'on a connu, et qu'on est complètement différent de ce jeune homme qui a fui un matin son pays. [...] Comment peut-on envisager de vivre, comme on le faisait à Montréal ou à Paris, dans un pays ou n'importe qui peut vous assassiner sans raison? Cette sensation presque absurde de n'être nulle part. Comme s'ils étaient suspendus dans l'espace, entre Montréal et Port-au-Prince.¹⁵⁴

Both Laferrière and Ollivier express feelings of great disappointment at the inability to go back and settle in Haiti. In this respect, they are typical of one of the attitudes mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

Supporting the attitude of staying in the country of adoption after spending years of dreaming of going 'home', some migrants simply realize that they do not really want to do so. The country may not seem to have changed much, but they have; they have become –

¹⁵⁴ Dany Laferrière. *Op.cit.* 2000. p.150.

to quote Julia Kristeva – ‘strangers to themselves’.¹⁵⁵ This is the fundamental difference: after years of living in Québec, they are still considered foreigners by others and by themselves. In other words, the emphasis is on their differences with the dominant cultural group, and little emphasis is actually put on the resemblances that they share with it or have acquired after a while. When they return to Haiti, they expect to fit in because they believe that they share the same culture as the dominant cultural group, but they are faced with the same dilemma: their differences are depressingly placed under scrutiny, despite all that they have in common. In the end, aware that they do not fit anywhere, they feel somehow ashamed and disillusioned to have been excluded from what they felt was previously their culture and people. In Ollivier’s *Les Urnes scellées* (1995), these feelings are translated again into a physical symptom: when Adrien finally accepts defeat and decides to go home, his body suddenly seems to droop and he looks aged, broken:

Estelle un moment ralentit le pas. Elle regarda Adrien de dos et il savait qu’elle le regardait. Elle reconnaissait difficilement cette *démarche alourdie, ces pas qui traînaient des années d’errance et de fatigue*. A cet instant précis, elle sut qu’elle ne retournerait pas à Montréal avec lui; elle sut, *il avait honte* de l’avouer, qu’il était plus de là-bas que d’ici. Il marchait avec une lenteur de chameau vers le vieux port, seul *comme un orphelin*. [...] Il savait qu’Estelle le regardait, de dos, qu’elle le voyait comme un étranger qui s’en va. Pourtant, c’était le même homme, *un peu abîmé seulement*. [US, p280, my italics]

We note here the comparison with a camel, which not only dehumanises and ridicules Adrien, but also reinforces the idea that he is out of place. For Adrien, going back to Haiti has confirmed his separation from Haiti and its culture. He finally understands the implications of his original departure: he has become a new person, a migrant. Time has gone by and going ‘home’ is now impossible because ‘home’ is not just a place, it is also a precise period in time.¹⁵⁶ The Haiti that he left behind also represents the time of his youth, of particular cultural and political conditions. He and Haiti have matured and grown apart. Estelle has grasped this concept perfectly and she is ready to go through the re-learning process; as for Adrien, his visit to Haiti is a final closure with regard to the past: it is both an acceptance that he has changed and a refusal to change yet again.

¹⁵⁵ We have based this expression on Kristeva’s title itself, *Strangers to ourselves* (New York: Columbia University Press. 1991.)

¹⁵⁶ Kristeva suggests this idea: migrants are eventually forced to give up all claims of belonging when they leave their country, because their personal culture is no longer anchored in the present time; they – and their cultural references – become outdated, irrelevant, something of the past: ‘Not belonging to any place, any time, any love. A lost origin, the impossibility to take root, a rummaging memory, the present in abeyance. The space of the foreigner is a moving train, a plane in flight, the very transition that precludes stopping. As to landmarks, there are none. His time? The time of a resurrection that remembers death and what happened before, but misses the glory of beyond: merely the feeling of a reprieve, of having gotten away.’ [*Ibid.* p.7-8].

This topic is also mentioned in Laferrière's *Le Cri des oiseaux fous* (2000). In this book, the author explores his last day in Haiti and, with the benefit of hindsight, he lists people and things that he will have to give up upon his departure. Laferrière uses his experience of exile to show, quite dramatically, that his Haitian life is about to become obsolete, that this period now belongs to the past:

Ce présent que je vis encore et qui deviendra passé dans moins de trente secondes, au moment où l'avion quittera le sol d'Haïti. [COF, p.344]

Just like Ollivier's Adrien, Laferrière ascribes the reason for the discomfort of going back 'home' to being exiled in time as well as space. For each of them, to leave Haiti was to close a chapter in his life, with the hope of opening it again in the future; despite their intentions, they were unable to maintain the link between themselves and their cultures entirely alive because there was no longer any reciprocal exchange. In a way, they kept the idea of their culture alive artificially. Julia Kristeva analyses this attitude as follows:

Melancholy lover of a vanished space, he [the foreigner] cannot, in fact, get over his having abandoned a period of time. The lost paradise is a mirage of the past that he will never be able to recover.¹⁵⁷

Kristeva suggests further that this attachment to 'a vanished space' and time acts like a life support system for those who live in exile; it is a sort of guarantee of identity, a certainty amidst the confusion of the new standards and rules of their culture of adoption. Going 'home', therefore, forces to migrants face up to the reality of changes and the transformations wrought by time, that have occurred. No longer able to rely on their virtual and personally edited memory, they must evaluate once more their own standards and values. For them, it is accepting that life has gone on and that there is no way back. Ollivier's *Les Urnes scellées* (1995) concludes with Adrien going back to Montréal, to a new 'home' but also to a new perspective on living away from one's country of origin. Until now, he had considered himself an exile who, one day, would go 'home'. Now, however, he sees himself as a migrant, with no roots to tie him down:

Il retourne à Montréal. Il revient à la case départ et rejoint ainsi le cortège de tous les errants, des sans-patrie, des déracinés en rupture avec leur passé, culpabilisés d'avoir survécu à tant d'holocaustes. Ils ont souvent perdu leurs points de repère, vivent tant bien que mal, connaissent à la longue de grandes joies, créent de nouvelles familles, poussent de nouvelles racines et puis, un beau jour, non ils ne meurent pas, ils s'absentent à pas feutrés. [US, p.293]

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p.9-10.

It is also interesting to note Adrien's change of career: when he arrived in Haiti, he was an archaeologist, looking for traces, evidence and artefacts of the past and of a lost society; when he leaves Haiti the second time, he decides to become a writer. This new profession allows him to play with the past, to manipulate it, to re-invent it or to forget it if he wishes to do so – as do the narrator(s) of Robin's *L'Immense Fatigue des pierres* (1999), for example. His new choice of profession also allows him to break the silence imposed by the Duvalier dictatorship for so long; it is a way of taking charge of the narrative, of expressing oneself, rather than enduring events passively. How can one not draw a parallel between Adrien's attitude and that of all migrant writers?

Conclusion

We have studied here the final phase in the process of becoming a migrant, namely that of acknowledging the changes that occur as a result of migration. 'Successful' migrants have avoided the traps of acculturation (such as behaviour or identity disorders) and have found ways to achieve a career or a personal life (or indeed both) by taking advantage of the new cultural and social opportunities offered by their adopted country. Living in Québec has presented them with the possibilities of putting into perspective their occasionally oppressive traditions, of finding personal freedom and expressing themselves.

Often, children are seen as intermediary to help migrants to understand and fit into the society of adoption. They facilitate the process of 'ré-enculturation'. Authors have identified and emphasized this role by addressing youngsters directly, and by making their heroes the links and interpreters between cultures. By introducing the younger generation to their migrant culture and by depicting for them a pluralistic society, they help to prepare the future for a more harmonious multiculturalism in Québec.

For some migrants, mainly those forced into exile, the re-enculturation process cannot be complete without the elimination of the desire to go 'home'. Of course, exiles have learned to live in their country of adoption, but some of them have always maintained the dream of going back and, therefore, never consider themselves totally part of the new country. Faced with the daunting reality of returning 'home', however, most of them eventually realise that picking up where they left off is impossible and that their life is now in Québec. They understand the extent of their adaptation to their new country, which has made them no longer equipped for life in their country of origin. Without realizing it, they have become Québécois. Following their new awareness, they are able to explore the new boundaries of their identity.

Chapter 8: Representation of Québécois society: Underscoring problems and redefining landscapes.

Introduction

In previous chapters, we have seen that migrant writers in Québec have used their cultural identity and their experience – good or bad - of migration as material for their work. Transforming their experience into narratives not only works as a catharsis for their angst at not being able to return home, for example, or at facing challenging cultural changes, it is also a way of making their readership aware of their cultural origin and identity,¹⁵⁸ and of the hurdles that a migrant faces when settling in Québec. There is, however, another more ambitious, and probably controversial, topic present in migrant writing: the migrants' vision of the Québécois.

This is not a major topic, like memory for example, but rather an underlying one as it appears through small, intermittent touches in the novels. Rather than write long diatribes against Quebeckers, migrant writers tend to sketch the stereotypes that are circulated by their hosts about migrants. They also present a vision of a society blinded by its own concerns about the past, and not yet prepared to acknowledge the contribution of migrants to Québec today. Migrant writers condemn this nostalgic attitude and propose their own vision of Québécois society: in effect, they reject the traditional representation of the 'Québécois pure laine' and replace it by a multicultural vision where the minorities are really 'visible'.

¹⁵⁸ Where migrant writing is concerned, the classic question of readership is even more problematic than normal. Do migrant writers address a general Québécois readership, since their work is published and recognized in Québec? Do they address their cultural community in Québec, since most topics are based on a shared experience of migration? Do they address readers in their country of origin or, on the contrary, do they aim at a universal, or at least francophone, readership? Migrant writers have partially answered these questions in interviews or articles. Haitians, for example, are aware that 80% of the Haitian population are illiterate, and that, despite French being one of the official languages, Creole remains the mother tongue of the majority of people. The same goes for Middle Eastern writers in Québec, who have chosen French over Arabic as their language of expression. This seems to partially exclude a readership in their country of origin.

Some clues point to a francophone Québécois readership: French has been the preferred language of expression of the novels; we have seen earlier that migrant novels often include explanatory notes to help the reader understand foreign words and allusions to events, people and places. Sometimes, the narratives themselves include explanations of cultural behaviour or mentality. As for youth literature, it seems that migrant authors are determined to educate Québécois youngsters by including a subtext of open-mindedness towards different cultural behaviours and skintones.

We have seen in previous chapters that there exist several elements, which concur to create a crisis in migrants' lives. One of them is prejudice. The consequence for migrants translates into isolation and humiliation. Here, we propose to explore the Québécois attitude to migrants as it is presented from an incomer's point of view, in other words not so much the consequence of prejudice on migrants as its manifestations in Québécois society.

In Néo-Québécois writing, few Québécois characters are represented that we could classify as 'Québécois de pure laine'. These few, therefore, are noticeable. Unfortunately, the portraits of Québécois people are not often positive ones, mainly because their interaction with migrant characters shows their prejudices. One of the points made by migrant writers is that most Quebecers do not take the time to know them as individuals and use stereotypes to deal with them. This attitude is annoying for migrants, because it shows a certain lack of interest from their fellow compatriot. Migrants are a faceless entity; they only seem to exist as a group, and their personal and cultural identities are resumed in a few clichéd attributes. This is well demonstrated in Naïm Kattan's *La Fiancée promise* (1983). When Méir arrives in Québec and starts looking for employment, he runs into a series of misunderstandings about his origins, his nationality and religion. Prejudice and stereotypes preside over all his job interviews and his potential employers are little inclined to find out about his personal history, as they cannot place him under any recognizable category. Later, Méir gets used to changing cultural groups by adopting some of the clichéd attributes that allow him to fit in. Near the end of the novel, however, he is sent away to represent the Jewish community at an annual conference where Canadian people from different professions and origins meet to exchange and discuss social and cultural news. Amongst the delegates, there is a social worker who makes no effort to really meet Méir and go past the idea that she has formed about him and his race. Her question to him not only shows her ignorance, but also her lack of effort to rectify it:

-Moi? Sursautai-je. Je travaille à la communauté juive.
-Alors, vous êtes de nationalité juive.
-D'origine, de religion, rectifiai-je.
-C'est ce que je dis. Je ne vois pas la différence. En tout cas, ce que je peux vous dire c'est que j'admire les juifs. Ils commencent avec rien et puis vous les voyez en peu de temps, propriétaires de commerces, d'immeubles. Ils sont travailleurs. Pas comme nous, les Canadiens. Nous aimons trop nous amuser et nous sommes paresseux. [LFP, p.199]

This complacent character does not realize that her use of clichés may be offensive to Méir. She reduces his personality, his personal history, and his professional ambitions to

cultural stereotypes and is unable to detach her opinion from them. In the end, Méir is frustrated because he cannot communicate with her and reach her beyond these preconceived ideas. Méir is also appalled at the shallowness of his Québécois interlocutors. Not only do they use stereotypes to apprehend any subject regarding other migrants, but they also seem hardly interested in increasing their knowledge about them. It appears to him that his foreignness is merely a topic of an entertaining anecdote at social gatherings. It seems that the Québécois people that he meets are more interested in his being different or Other than in knowing him:

Je vais te dire pourquoi je t'ai raconté cette histoire. Souvent je me demande si cela fait une différence d'être de Punta del Este ou de Bagdad. Pour moi c'est inimaginable d'être né ailleurs qu'à Bagdad, mais ici si je disais que je suis un descendant de quelque conquistador, on me croirait sur parole. Et cela ne ferait pas de différence. L'idée même m'effraie. C'est terrible, tu ne trouves pas? [LFP, p.151]

In this extract, Méir realizes that his nationality and his personal history are seen as a momentary exotic distraction that nobody wishes to know further. As a foreigner, he is assimilated in Québécois's mind to all other foreigners, with an obvious lack of differentiation. Méir feels that his contribution to Québécois society is irrelevant to others, that his cultural legacy is neither valued nor wanted: he is expected to blend in the existing society – in this case, he should blend in the newly arrived group of migrants; his cultural difference is not as much respected as overlooked.

Dominique Blondeau and Dany Laferrière also express their general impression of superficiality on the part of the Québécois. In Blondeau's *Les Feux de l'exil* (1991), for example, Chloé, the Guadeloupean immigrant, lives a solitary life, sharing her time between her son, her work and, occasionally, her friend Anastasia. To make ends meet, Chloé dances in a club:

Je suis la seule Noire dans ce groupe de filles-femelles, plus excitantes les unes que les autres. L'attrait exotique émanant de mon corps me vaut un relatif succès que m'envient mes compagnes. [LFE, p.195]

It seems that Chloé becomes visible only because of her colour, which, in the environment of the club, is the representation or incarnation of a sexual stereotype, exoticism. Otherwise ostracized in a work environment for being different, Chloé suddenly becomes the centre of attention. We can draw a parallel here with Dany Laferrière's *Comment faire l'amour avec un nègre sans se fatiguer* (1999). Laferrière has obviously come to the same conclusion as Blondeau's character: he plays with the sexual stereotypes associated with being black to trick his white Québécois readers, as we already mentioned in chapter 7

when discussing the titillating title of his first novel.¹⁵⁹ Laferrière identifies the prejudices and stereotypes that his 1985 title targeted:¹⁶⁰ coloured people are believed to be uneducated (*un type qui sait à peine lire*), and ‘sexually experienced’. To these preconceptions, Laferrière opposes his own literary knowledge, and his reflection about cultural domination underlying interracial relationships. Furthermore, Laferrière argues that interracial sexual relationships challenge the relations of power and domination between social and racial groups as they contravene taboos and prejudices inherited from Eurocentric occidental culture. What is interesting to note here, is that Laferrière insists on the surprise effect: it is a shock for the reader – as far the author is concerned - to realize that he has been tricked into thinking about his or her own prejudice. The schoolboy joke, vaguely obscene, alluded to in the title of the novel, is turned against his or her lack of open-mindedness. Of course, Laferrière tackles prejudice in the novel itself by analysing with great irony some of the clichés about black people and black men particularly - namely, they are liars (p.31), primitive (p.162-3), cannibals (p.43-4), etc. Through his relationships with the ‘Miz’, the narrator explores some of the irrational fears underlying the relations between black and white people and stemming from ignorance. Interracial relationships are seen as a war of domination because communication represents a danger of contamination for the white person. The narrator’s theory about his superficial relationship with the ‘Miz’ is that they are in search of entertainment and excitement, but refuse any personal involvement that would compromise their education and their view of the world:

Si une minuscule souris la panique, que dire d’un Nègre alors? Ce n’est pas tant baiser avec un Nègre qui peut terrifier. Le pire, c’est dormir avec lui. Dormir, c’est se livrer totalement. C’est le plus que nu. Nu plus. Qu’est-ce qui peut bien se passer durant la nuit, pendant le sommeil? Peut-on rêver l’autre? Peut-on pénétrer le rêve de l’autre? L’Occident dit: territoire inconnu. Attention: danger. Danger d’osmose. Danger de véritable communication. [CFA, p.84]

Clearly here, for Laferrière, taking refuge behind clichés is refusing an honest communication that would challenge one’s view of society; it is refusing to acknowledge Otherness. In Derrida’s view, clichés prevent from understanding the *différance*;¹⁶¹ they maintain an appearance of Otherness to justify exclusion towards people who behave or

¹⁵⁹ See Dany Laferrière. *J’écris comme je vis*. Genouilleux: La Passe du vent. 2000. p.119-20.

¹⁶⁰ The first edition of *Comment faire l’amour avec un nègre sans se fatiguer* dates from 1985.

¹⁶¹ Jacques Derrida first used the term *différance* in the collection of essays, *L’Écriture et la différence* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil. 1967.), but did not explain the term that he coined in an introductory way. To simplify, *différance* is the awareness of a set or pattern of differences that stops the identification of other sets. There is no hierarchy of sets/patterns of differences, as their identification is subject to individual variable factors such as history, culture, age, sex, etc.

look differently. Accepting the *différance*, i.e. alternative ways of existence beyond the stereotypes, would – if we believe Derrida – challenge society's rules, as it would imply equality between all. For Laferrière, maintaining clichés is retaining a situation of power between races.

Racism is the culmination of this attitude of exclusion towards others. Stereotypes maintain a distance between people, and become the justification of a self-proclaimed power over others. This is quite clear in Latif-Ghattas's *Le Double conte de l'exil* (1990). Madeleine/Manitakawa, who is Native American, works with three women, all called Clara, who can be interpreted as representatives of the European (French, English, and Eastern European) white settlers in Québec and who think their seniority in the company gives them privileges over other employees who have recently immigrated:

LÉGARÉ Clairette, LINDSAY Clarence, LEIBOVITCH Clara. Fortes de leurs similitudes et de leur ancienneté désormais irréfutables, elles s'octroyaient le droit de dévisager tout nouveau venu, de le scruter, de commenter ses comportements, de pointer du doigt sa différence, d'épier ses misères, de salir sa beauté si elles les poussaient dans l'ombre, d'amoindrir ses qualités quand elles menaçaient de mettre à jour leurs lacunes, enfin, de bâtir sa réputation. De ce jeune Asiatique, Clairette Légalé avait déjà affirmé qu'il sentait l'"egg roll", Clarence Lindsay avait décrété qu'elle n'aimait pas les asiatiques et Clara Leibovitch, après qu'elle eût un peu hésité comme d'habitude, avait fini par renchérir en déclarant qu'il parlait mal et qu'elle ne comprenait rien de ce qu'il disait. [LDCE, p.54]

The three women feel threatened by the unknown incarnated by the young man. His *différance* is unbearable to them, because they cannot find in him any common feature to would make him 'familiar'. Their position and their number give them the strength to bully the young man and either to mould him into what they want to see or to make him disappear. The objections of the three Claras to the new influx of non-white, non-European migrants produce a situation very similar to the one described in Blondeau's *Les Feux de l'exil* (1991): Chloé, and her fellow migrant employees, feel that they have not been selected for their abilities for the job, but rather as a result of the lack of any other suitable, i.e. Québécois, candidate. Chloé's employer frequently complains about immigration laws:

[Mme Dufresne] peste contre les gouvernements du Canada et du Québec qui laissent entrer les étrangers. Elle prétend que le Québec va devenir un dépotoir... [LFDE, p.190]

And Chloé herself can observe the difference of treatment between herself, for example, and Anastasia (who is white):

Je n'imagine pas monsieur Bleau agir avec autant de bonté et de tolérance; il aurait eu vite fait de me remplacer par une femme blanche. [LFDE, p.213]

As we have seen earlier, for Chloé, people interpret the colour of her skin as an external and visible marker that encapsulates her *différance*.

This is confirmed by Jules, the narrator of Francis Bossus's *La Tentation du destin* (1996), who analyses his racist behaviour.

Et cette vision surgit de mon racisme. [...] Deux mille ans de civilisation blanche et chrétienne passaient par ma voix et me rappelaient que tout homme de couleur est inférieur. Ma conscience (on dit qu'elle est une sorte de mère) me reprocha cette bouffée de haine [...]. [TD, p.105]

Here, the observation of such behaviour does not come from the point of view of a migrant, but of a Québécois 'pure laine'. Jules realizes that his behaviour has been conditioned by his education that portrayed Caucasians in a position of power over coloured people. But the twist introduced by Bossus is that his character Jules also realizes that he is himself in a subordinate position as far as his social status is concerned. Jules is poor, and has had to accept positions that he finds degrading - a feeling shared by migrants, as we have seen in previous chapters:

Nègre blanc! Je me traitais de nègre blanc, d'esclave, de laquais, de valet, de larbin, et même de ganache, un vieux mot qui, dans mon esprit, sentait le moisi et la pourriture, dépeignait ma décadence et me défigurait. Je ne méritais plus le titre d'homme. [TD, p.61]

This shift of position – represented by the expression 'Nègres Blancs' - brings to mind the position of the Québécois 'pure laine' themselves, that brought the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s and the movement for the independence of Québec. For Pierre Vallières, the Québécois were the 'Nègres blancs d'Amérique'.¹⁶² The dominant rich English classes had a poor opinion of the francophone Québécois and were circulating discriminating stereotypes about them too: they were poor and uneducated, had large families, did not speak a correct French, etc.¹⁶³ Laferrière also alludes to the Québécois's past as a downtrodden minority and suggests not without irony that – contrary to their slogan 'Je me souviens' – they have, when it suits them, a short memory of their past and that they lack solidarity with other minority. According to the narrator of *Comment faire l'amour avec un Nègre sans se fatiguer* (1999), his novel will fill a gap in Québécois literature: for the first time, a book is published about "les Nègres noirs d'Amérique" [CFA, p157], which implies that, before, literature was only about the 'Nègres blancs d'Amérique'.

¹⁶² This is the title of Pierre Vallières's book, written in 1966, which reflected his anger at injustice and became the terrorist FLQ's call to action.

¹⁶³ This is echoed in Naïm Kattan's *La Fiancée promise* (1983). Méir has spent a few years in Paris to perfect his French, which induces an anglophone acquaintance to request French lessons:

-Vous devez être déçu. Après Paris, je veux dire. J'aimerais beaucoup apprendre le français parisien, vous devriez me donner des leçons.

-C'est le même français qu'ici.

-Mais non. [LFP, p.119]

If migrant authors show the prejudiced attitude of (some) Québécois people, they also try to remind them that, not so long ago, the Québécois themselves were the victims of similarly discriminating behaviour. It is also a way to remind them that they now all belong to a nation of migrants (or a migrant nation) even though they have settled in Québec for longer and that they are united by a common language – French – in a predominantly anglophone continent.

Love it or Maple Leave it

The above expression has been coined by Régine Robin and is repeated in the narrative of *La Québécoise* (1983).¹⁶⁴ It seems that, for the narrator, this expression encapsulates another Québécois attitude to Otherness: a stereotypical crystallisation of difference disconnected from the reality in which it was originally based:

L'oubli commence par le goût des aliments, après la couleur du ciel, le son des voix, l'odeur des rues. Qui se souvient de la piazza Navona, des remblas de Barcelone, des ruelles d'Athènes? Qui se souvient du ghetto de Varsovie? Et d'avant le ghetto de Varsovie? D'avant le temps, d'avant l'Histoire? LOVE IT OR MAPLE LEAVE IT – étrangers indésirables, tous communistes, tous subversifs, tous révolutionnaires. [*LQ*, p.82]

Robin discusses here the Québécois policy of multiculturalism. Even though migrants are encouraged to preserve their own culture, they are under pressure to fit in: their option is then either to 'Love it', i.e. to assume clichéd cultural identity, by which they retain all the visible 'attributes' if their memory somehow fails, or to 'Maple leave it', i.e. to choose to forget, to live in an unsatisfying limbo:

Dédales étrangers, dépits, déroutes. Love it or leave it. Love it or maple leave it. Ces points d'ancrage, dans les bribes murmurées de souvenirs anciens. Désormais le temps de l'ailleurs de l'entre-trois langues, trois alphabets dans la même journée. Télescopage de passages des grandes plaines de Russie aux toits de Paris, de l'East-End de Londres au lower est side new-yorkais, la Vistule, la Volga, la Volgule, la virgule, coma. L'oubli – l'amnésie. Collages. Tout se chevauche et se mêle. [*LQ*, p.133-4]

The expression 'Maple leave it' suggests indecision, a non-commitment. The Maple Leaf covers a mishmash of different things, without priority, and as such, avoids addressing individual stories and memories. For the narrator of *La Québécoise*, this muddle of emotions and memories seems to lead to a collective amnesia at a national level, rather than preserving individual cultures. From the previous extract, we can also infer a certain apathy, a lack of curiosity on the part of those of older Canadian stock. All foreigners are 'indésirables, tous communistes, tous subversifs, tous révolutionnaires'; in other words,

¹⁶⁴ Régine Robin, *La Québécoise* (1993).pp.82, 133, etc.

migrants pose a challenge, produce a confrontation, start a dialogue at least about traditions and customs, and want their share of the land and power. It seems that the policy of 'Maple leave it' is a way to avoid opposition by creating the appearance of tolerance; in that way, everybody can go on ignoring everyone else under the guise of respecting people's difference.

Dany Laferrière also remarked on this form of hypocrisy in *Comment faire l'amour avec un nègre sans se fatiguer* (1999) when noting the separation that exists between the narrator's situation and the 'Miz'. Laferrière creates a narrator that seems to move between different social positions with ease: rich or poor, intellectual or lowbrow, he does not appear judgemental about the way that others choose to lead their lives; at most, he is surprised by it. The 'Miz', on the other hand, clearly have carefully partitioned lives. None of them allows the narrator to infringe on any part of her life that she has allocated to her studies, friends and family (her WASP life, to use the narrator's term). Furthermore, the 'Miz' are depicted as faceless characters (only defined by a detail of their interests or appearance) that do not seem to notice – or choose not to notice – the contrast between their wealthy lifestyle and the poor one of the narrator. It is as though they deliberately avoid the embarrassing confrontation. Laferrière calls this Canadian attitude of non-interference 'politeness' and, for him, it underlies cultural relationships and is an obstacle to true exchanges. He resumes this idea in the following terms in *J'écris comme je vis* (2000):

C'est tout à fait mon genre de donner mon opinion à propos de ceci ou de cela. Les autres ne voyaient en moi qu'un jeune ouvrier, alors que je me sentais la capacité d'un analyste social, je pourrais aussi faire des incursions dans la vie culturelle et, pendant qu'on y est, rien ne m'empêcherait de lancer quelques réflexions pointues sur l'avenir du Québec. Tout cela avec le sourire, car les gens d'ici n'aiment pas les prétentieux.¹⁶⁵

For him, his novels are a showcase for his opinions and a way to break the habit of polite indifference between the 'pure laine' and the migrants.

In other novels, the 'Maple leave it' attitude as described by Régine Robin, is epitomized by the character of the doctor (who is often a psychoanalyst). This type of character is a figure of authority who is empowered to help others through his knowledge of the human body or mind and who predictably appears at a time of crisis in migrants' lives. We have seen in previous chapters that migrants are in great turmoil or under considerable stress when confronted with the culture of their country of adoption. The

¹⁶⁵ Dany Laferrière. *Op.cit.* 2000. p.134.

obvious choice for them is to turn to a Québécois doctor to help them through this difficult moment. The nationality of the doctor is important, because, in the novels, he symbolizes Otherness for migrant patients: both in terms of the culture of adoption and, often, gender. (Most doctors are male in the novels studied, apart from Olivia in Sénéchal's *Le Pays d'ailleurs*, who, as we will see shortly, stands out by her personal experience of Otherness) The doctor's understanding of the needs of the patient, as well as his will to comprehend, are key elements in the cure and recovery of the patient, although this is not obvious to all characters.

The doctors presented by some of the Haitian writers – namely Gérard Étienne, Marie-Célie Agnant and Stanley Péan – are no help at all to the migrant patient. First of all, doctors are puzzled by their physical symptoms, and are unable to provide a diagnosis. In Stanley Péan's novels, for example, some of the characters have been cursed by voodoo magic, which is supposed to explain their illness within the narrative. The doctor is without recourse because he does not understand the situation, and occidental medicine seems ineffective as a way to treat the symptoms. In Étienne's *La Romance en do mineur de Maître Clo* (2000) and Agnant's *Le Livre d'Emma* (2001), the mental illness that affects Maître Clo and Emma respectively is presented as a real one, with psychosomatic symptoms; the doctor, however, is still powerless. The doctor who 'treats' Maître Clo asks Adrienne to explain her brother's obsession with the voodoo Goddess Erzulie, but soon feels inadequate:

Le docteur Hillel s'éponge le visage, complètement bouleversé. Moins par le fait d'apprendre l'existence d'un esprit vénéré dans une religion, que par la place qu'il occupe dans la vie quotidienne des Noirs d'Haïti. [LRDMC, p.95]

As a doctor born and trained in Québec, the doctor seems ill at ease that he does not share the same culture as his patient, and is disturbed by his different beliefs. Having different values, for him, is insurmountable in the process of helping Maître Clo. His professional advice is in the form of clichés about cultural misunderstanding:

On ne change pas la culture d'un homme en lui en imposant une autre d'où seraient prohibées ses pratiques religieuses, laisse-t-il tomber d'un ton convaincant. [...] Les cultures sont extrêmement complexes. On ne peut pas porter un jugement sur une question religieuse. [LRDMC, p.97]

We note from this extract that the doctor reproduces the patterns of behaviour that we have described in the previous paragraphs: he is reluctant to be involved in any judgement or decision about Maître Clo and remains as neutral and vague as possible. The doctor

concludes that Maître Clo is suffering from culture shock, and he discounts any form of serious mental illness that could have been triggered by his migration:

Le Docteur Hillel semblait attribuer le dérèglement de Maître Clo à une question de culture, une culture qu'il ne connaît pas, qu'il ne peut pas juger, expliquer, commenter, une culture qui paraît produire des langages incompréhensibles, qui attribue aux phénomènes des pouvoirs mystiques, une culture qui produit des esprits à mesure que la réalité impose des problèmes aux membres d'une société. [LRDMC, p.133]

In this extract, the doctor admits to his lack of knowledge and describes, at great length, what he cannot do. His passivity and narrow-mindedness are striking: not only does he make no effort to begin to understand what his patient is undergoing, but he also refuses to extend his knowledge. This is crucial, considering that Maître Clo is not an isolated case. Others have been brought in for treatment and are ignored in the same manner:

C'est par dizaines en effet que des malades comme Maître Clo sont amenés à l'hôpital. Pour lui, pas mal de nouveaux arrivants semblent avoir perdu la boule, surtout dans la vieille ville où l'on commence à côtoyer des clochards-immigrants noirs. [LRDMC, p.132]

The doctor's attitude is representative of that previously observed by Robin and Laferrière: he avoids seeing and acknowledging Otherness, despite his professional duties and obvious social realities. In the end, he gives up any attempt to help Maître Clo and recommends that he sees a doctor of same cultural background. In his view, Maître Clo suffers from

une espèce de déséquilibre dû à un déracinement, un exil forcé, le mal de vivre dans un pays étranger. Dans ce cas, l'individu a toutes les chances d'en sortir, pourvu qu'on lui fournisse les moyens, qu'on l'écoute au plus fort de ses crises, qu'on le confie surtout à un médecin de son pays, familier à son langage et à sa culture. [LRDMC, p.163-4]

Again, his advice is to keep cultures separate and clearly segregated: each community should look after its own members and provide the necessary moral support to go through the process of migration. No cross-cultural intervention is conceivable. For Maître Clo, tragically, the uncommitted attitude of his doctor results in death. With this dramatic ending to his novel, Étienne stresses that migrants can become victims of their negligent adoptive country who overlooks them.

In Agnant's *Le Livre d'Emma* (2001), Emma's psychiatrist does not manage to communicate with Emma, even though she is as fluent in French as she is in Creole. He hopes that employing a translator will enable him to understand and treat his patient efficiently. While Emma describes the root of her illness as the non-recognition and oppression of black Caribbean women, her doctor concentrates on what he has been trained to do and, like the practitioner in Gérard Étienne's novel, he is not seen making any effort

to reach towards Emma. He discounts her cultural background and her personal and ancestral history as irrelevant to the causes of her illness, and makes no attempt to understand Emma, to learn more about her culture or her history personally. Instead, he seems to delegate this task to the translator and only bases his opinion on this second-hand information. He tries to apprehend Emma superficially and in his own terms, which, in turn, prompts Emma to remain within her own space. We note, however, that neither Emma nor Maître Clo challenge their doctor's opinion and behaviour, and seem to accept this situation as a punishment or a curse that they have called upon themselves. Furthermore, their indifference and refusal to cooperate lead Emma and Maître into further isolation and alienation.

Nadia Ghalem and, to a certain degree, Xavière Sénéchal present a similar portrait of the medical profession, but the difference is that they introduce the beginning of a solution to both patient's and doctor's attitude. We have earlier described Nadia Ghalem's *Les Jardins de cristal* (1981) as a long letter addressed to the narrator's mother. The narrator explains her reasons for leaving her country and migrating to Québec. She tells her hopes of finding a place where she will be allowed to be independent, and to express herself. In the meantime, like Gérard Étienne's character Maître Clo, Chafia needs to deal with the issues that so drastic a decision has raised in her life, and turns to psychoanalysis for help. She reports that the first doctor she met was not helpful because he did not allow a dialogue between himself and Chafia, who felt put off by this one-way system of communication:

Je n'ai jamais eu peur à Alger, c'est maintenant que la vague me revient et me submerge. J'ai peur du matin au soir. J'ai peur au point que l'on me croit coupable. Quand je le dis au docteur, il ne comprend rien. Il ne comprend pas que s'il me soigne, je vais tomber en poussière parce que la peur est plus grande que moi. [LJDC, p.43]

Rather than accepting this situation, Chafia challenges the doctor's authority and finds somebody else to help her. She undertakes to make the second doctor understand her history and her life experience, to which he seems ready to listen. Unlike the previous medical characters that we have seen previously, Chafia's analyst does not try to pass the problem onto someone else, or to change her:

Le docteur est incapable de me procurer la pilule qui me donnerait une autre enfance, la pilule qui me referait un père et une mère comme dans les films et moi je serais une petite fille qui saute à la corde et qui n'aurait jamais vu les chairs noueuses des anciens torturés... [LJDC, p.44]

Chafia and her analyst work together towards understanding the causes of her illness and allowing her to conquer her fears so that ultimately she can say:

Je suis intimement convaincue que la peur de l'autre, c'est plutôt la peur de cet autre soi-même qu'on n'ose pas regarder en face. On serait prêt à le tuer plutôt qu'à l'affronter, quitte à éliminer une part de notre propre vie. [LJDC, p.137]

At the beginning of the narrative, Chafia admitted that she was in fear because of her past experience during the war in Algeria; for her, this was the cause of her uneasiness. Her psychotherapy, however, shows her that she is in fact afraid of Otherness. Here, her insecurity is identified and addressed by herself but also by her doctor. Her 'treatment' is a collaboration between both parties.

Xavière Sénéchal also suggests this necessary interaction between migrant patients and their doctors. The narrator of *Le Pays d'ailleurs* (1999) is a Québécois physician, who lives a comfortable wealthy, but unfulfilling life in Québec. After working for several months in India as a volunteer, she returns to Québec to put in practice what she has learnt during her time abroad. She has experienced the feeling of being a foreigner, an outsider; in other words, she can relate to migrants' experience because she knows the feeling of being, to use Derrida's term, *différant*:

Chaque rencontre, chaque croisement d'un regard bouleversait quelque chose en moi en ébranlant toutes mes certitudes. J'étais comme un nouveau-né. Ce que je connaissais ne me servait plus à rien. Toute neuve et malhabile, c'est ainsi que j'amorçais mon noviciat dans Calcutta. [LPA, p.31]

Living in a foreign country has made her aware of different rules, customs, and ways to live one's life. This experience has changed her, altering her culture-centred view:

Fallait-il que l'Inde m'ait métamorphosée pour que je ne reconnaisse plus rien, ne ressente plus rien d'identique, ne perçoive plus la moindre onde de reconnaissance à laquelle me raccrocher? Plus rien qui me ressemble. Plus rien qui me rassure. Étrangère dans ma propre maison, tout me semblait bizarre, terne, vide. J'étais arrivée depuis trois heures et je n'avais qu'une envie, fuir, repartir, aller rejoindre cet ailleurs qui m'avait permis de me trouver. [LPA, p.96]

Olivia – the narrator – has become 'other', and, subsequently, is able to apply this experience of Otherness so as to put herself in others' place. As a result, she accepts a position in a hospital situated in an underprivileged area, because she feels the need to work in an environment that allows her to be in touch with a multicultural crowd. She wants to escape the uniformity of her own cultural and wealthy background to be part of a society that exists at different levels, financially and culturally, a society that shows behavioural diversity, and in which she feels that she is allowed to be herself:

Je ressortis à l'angle de l'église Saint-Nicolas, dans un quartier populaire et multi-ethnique où les gens n'aiment pas s'aventurer seuls le soir. J'y venais souvent. [...] J'aimais de plus en plus ce quartier. Des familles d'origines et de couleurs différentes s'entassaient dans des conditions peu reluisantes, dans des immeubles mal entretenus dont les façades me rappelaient les murs lépreux de Calcutta. Beaucoup d'enfants à jouer dans les rues. J'étais bien, je me sentais plus libre que jamais. [LPA, p.104-11]

Here, compared to the Haitian writers, Sénéchal reverses the situation. It is no longer the patient who expects the doctor to provide an answer, but the other way around. Both sides see an improvement in their situation. It is interesting to note that in this case, the Québécois doctor is female, which recalls the parallel drawn by Sherry Simon and other critics (see chapter 7 footnote 142) between feminist and migrant voices, both being able to cross or move cultural borders.

Using the image of doctor and patient, migrant writers have thus proposed different versions of the relationship between the country of origin – symbolized by the figure of the doctor – and migrants, some more successful than others. Migrants, in this image, are presented as vulnerable, at the mercy of the doctor, because they are unable to deal with their adaptation to the new country. The doctor is called in, because of his – or exceptionally her - knowledge, in the hope that he or she will facilitate the transition between both worlds, provide help and care, and in any case, improve the migrant's situation. The Haitian writers, who have already showed a certain fatalism when dealing with topics like the oppression of the black Caribbean woman, for example, interestingly describe failure of communication between both parties, and denounce a general apathy on the doctor's part. On the contrary, change and challenge are (implicitly) advocated by writers who belong to groups who have questioned the authority of men, in the case of Middle Eastern female writers, or the sclerosis and narrow-mindedness of their own culture, in the case of the French writers. In their novels, they sketch the beginning of a communication between migrant and country of adoption, based on sympathy and respect.

American debate

While pointing out the stereotypes and prejudiced attitudes that they endure, migrant writers raise another problematic subject, that of Québécois identity. As we know, the term 'Québécois', first attested in 1754,¹⁶⁶ began to be used more widely in the 1960s, in the wake of the Quiet Revolution, and is now preferred to the expression 'Canadien français'

¹⁶⁶ Josette Rey-Debove et Alain Rey. (eds.). *Le Nouveau Petit Robert*. Paris: Le Robert – VUEF. 2003. p.2136.

(French Canadian) to assert the independent identity of francophone Quebecers with regard to France on the one hand, and the rest of Canada on the other hand. The Québécois have constructed a cultural identity whose originality and independence are expressed in terms of linguistic resistance to the process of assimilation to Anglo-Canadian and American language and culture, and of preserving their European origin and their local particularities through the preservation of the French language. With the years, Québécois have institutionalised their linguistic difference and have made it the stronghold of their national identity. Migrants, however, do not feel included or represented in this identity, despite often sharing the same language. For them, these issues have become inadequate because they do not reflect the new economic and demographic realities of modern Québec. In *Le Goût du Québec – l'après référendum 1995*,¹⁶⁷ the editors stress that the failure of the referendum for Québec's independence was due to the obvious lack of consideration for allophone and anglophone communities on the part of the francophones:

Tout le dilemme du Québec est là. Son taux de natalité est trop faible et il a besoin d'y suppléer par l'immigration. Mais les immigrants, les autochtones et les anglophones lui font problème. D'où une volonté, plus ou moins affichée, plus ou moins consciente, de pratiquer une politique d'assimilation plutôt que d'intégration des groupes minoritaires. [...] La seule chose qui importe, c'est que les minorités ethniques provenant de l'immigration s'intègrent, le mieux possible, au bassin linguistique et culturel d'expression française et renforçant ainsi l'élément fondamental sans lequel il n'y aurait plus de nation québécoise, au lieu d'aller grossir la minorité nationale anglophone et de menacer, par voie de conséquence, l'identité et la survie d'un Québec principalement français.¹⁶⁸

In this extract, it is clearly implied that Québec's policy towards allophones is forceful because its survival depends on it. By trying to neutralize foreign elements, however, the Québec government risks alienating itself entirely from the allophone communities and failing to retain their support. The authors conclude their analysis of the post-referendum period by predicting that the survival of Québec now depends on a change of policy and an attitude that would allow a multilingual and multicultural society to develop which would nevertheless retain the traditional Québécois values.

As early as 1983 in *La Fiancée promise*, Naïm Kattan was remarking on a kind of stagnation and outmodedness within Québécois culture due to the dead hand of the Church:

Le problème des Canadiens français, c'est leur Église. Elle les a tenus sous le verrou. Ils sont dépassés, ils ne sont pas de leur époque. D'où le malaise, l'insatisfaction. Le danger serait qu'ils tombent dans l'indifférence religieuse. [*LFP*, p.123]

¹⁶⁷ Marc Brière (ed.). *Le Goût du Québec - L'après - référendum 1995*. Québec: Éditions Hurtubise HMH. 1996.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.* p.225-26.

This extract refers to Méir's arrival in Québec in the 1960s, but is still relevant in 1983 when the novel is published. It expresses the view that, despite the changes that occurred during the Quiet Revolution, Québécois remain turned towards the past, and are prisoners of their own traditions and memories. This opinion is still echoed in a somewhat wider context, twelve years later, by Émile Ollivier in *Les Urnes scellées* (1995). Adrien and Estelle are returning to Haiti for a visit after many years of exile. At the airport, they notice the grandiloquent Commandant Mollo-Mollo, who is returning to Haiti too. When asked for identification, the Commandant starts a diatribe against Québec and Canada as a whole:

Provisoirement, Commandant Mollo-Mollo, pour vous servir. Provisoirement car, avant de déterminer qui je suis, il faudrait savoir où je suis. Ai-je immigré au Québec ou au Canada? Les Premières-Nations écrivent Canada avec un K. Et pourquoi pas un double K pendant qu'on y est? *Un pays constipé, un pays qui pousse, qui pousse sans parvenir à pondre son œuf d'unité.* Déjà le pays d'où il vient se mourait entre misère et désespoir et voilà que sa migrance l'avait placé dans un *flottement assaisonné de tracas administratifs* et de «petits malheurs». Il a un passeport canadien, une carte d'assurance maladie québécoise et produit des rapports d'impôts à deux paliers de gouvernement. *Quels pays! En proie à d'incessantes querelles de juridiction, à en perdre sa chemise, son latin et l'escampe de son pantalon.* Ajoutez à cela que lui, Mollo-Mollo, *ne peut échapper, quoi qu'il fasse, aux images de porteur de SIDA, d'agent de contamination, de passeur vaudou, de voleur de job, de mangeur de coquerelles, qu'à l'envi on lui a accolées.* Heureusement, les loas de ses ancêtres, eux, ne l'ont jamais abandonné. [US, p.38-9, my italics]

Mollo-Mollo expresses here the frustration of probably most migrants: along with experiencing a generally prejudiced attitude from Québécois, he feels that he is caught between two powers, in a battle that is none of his concern and in which he will not gain anything. Mollo-Mollo's ironically mocking tone shows his contempt for the battle over jurisdiction that resembles a pointless Kafkaesque enterprise. In his view, it only makes the process of migration more complicated and more confusing for newcomers. We note too the slightly scatological humour about Canada's search for unity and Québec's search for independence, that seems to diminish the seriousness and official aspect of the whole process.

Dany Laferrière is another writer who reports that, when he arrived in Québec, he felt somewhat oppressed by the atmosphere of seriousness and dissatisfaction with regard to political life in Québec and the associated identity crisis, which were reflected in the literature of the country:

Au début, j'étais assez allergique à la littérature québécoise qui me semblait malade de gravité. Une lourdeur morale. Une angoisse sourde travaillait les œuvres. Les écrivains se méfiaient de tout ce qui pouvait rappeler le plaisir. Venant de quitter une dictature étouffante, j'espérais une sorte de récréation. On semblait vraiment prendre la chose au sérieux. Malgré tout, j'avais beaucoup de respect pour un Victor Levy-Beaulieu qui faisait un travail de fond, ou un Ferron (mon préféré) à l'intelligence acide...¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁹ Dany Laferrière. *Op.cit.* 2000. p.63.

In fact, Laferrière describes the literature that existed when he arrived in Québec in 1976 as 'une littérature qui avait plutôt tendance à se mordre la queue'.¹⁷⁰ The Québécois hold on to their past and identity so fiercely as to stop their normal evolution and almost transform them into stereotypes. According to him, this is the case because Québécois refuse to acknowledge their 'americanity'.¹⁷¹

Je voulais quelque chose qui soit plus proche de la culture américaine que de la culture française, après tout je suis en Amérique. Il n'y a que les Québécois qui croient qu'ils sont en Europe, tous les immigrants savent que le Québec se trouve en Amérique du Nord. D'ailleurs le livre lui-même (*Comment faire l'amour avec un nègre sans se fatiguer*) était écrit à l'américaine.¹⁷²

Trying to preserve their European, or more precisely their French heritage, is done at the expense of present and future time. It stops Québécois from fully acknowledging their own individuality and originality, and realizing the potential offered by their unique position in Québec. This is also Pierre Monette's opinion, in an article published in *Le Devoir* in 1992:

Les autres nations de l'Amérique réussissent aujourd'hui à faire peser de leur côté le poids des cultures hispanophone, portugophone et anglophone; ce n'est plus en Europe que se produisent la littérature et le cinéma de langue espagnole, portugaise ou anglaise, mais en Argentine, au Brésil, aux États-Unis, etc. Le Québec, lui, n'est pas encore sorti des jupes de sa mère-patrie et continue à s'engluer dans une fidélité à la culture française aussi infantile que stérile.¹⁷³

In his article, Pierre Monette expresses ideas similar to those of migrant writers: not only has Québec - as other previous colonies - not totally emancipated itself from its original mother country, but also it is oblivious to the conflict of expectations between Québécois and neo-Québécois that is developing within its borders.

Except for the French writers/characters who, apparently, move specifically to Québec to find a piece of old France, migrants move mainly to Canada, with no particular province in mind at first. Their choice to settle in Québec seems secondary and is often language-driven, since French is the official language in France and officially bilingual Haiti, or the language of education for other migrant writers/characters. They all migrate to Canada, an American country that will hopefully provide them with a better, safer life. This is very clear, for example, in Kattan's *La Fiancée promise* (1983). Méir's adventure starts off like that of many other migrants, with a dream of success, the American dream. He hopes to build himself a good comfortable wealthy life, starting with a hundred dollars

¹⁷⁰ Laferrière's first novel, *Comment faire l'amour avec un nègre sans se fatiguer*, was published in 1985.

¹⁷¹ As we will see in the following paragraphs, Régine Robin's position is slightly different from that of Laferrière. For her, the issue does not so much lie in the lack of acknowledgement of their 'americanity' on the part of the Québécois, but on their unwillingness to share their wishful cultural monopoly over Québec.

¹⁷² Dany Laferrière. *Op.cit.* 2000. p.119-20.

¹⁷³ Pierre Monette. 'Nous sommes tous des immigrants', *Le Devoir*, 10 juillet 1992, B-8.

in his pocket and a knowledge of both official national languages. His goal has little to do with Québécois issues. Migrants like Méir and Commandant Mollo-Mollo are frustrated because they see the Québécois agenda as an impediment to their dreams of success, as irrelevant in the American context: they all, to some degree, have left their past and country behind to build a new country, a new future; they all proceed with their project and so should the Québécois!

In her postscript to a new edition of *La Québécoise*,¹⁷⁴ Régine Robin, after ten years, reflects on the impact of her novel in Québec, but also on its main topics. In her view, *La Québécoise* was emblematic of the migrant experience because it encapsulated all the emotions and vicissitudes encountered by newcomers, and mainly identified some of the hurdles presented by Québécois society itself:

Choc culturel s'il s'en fut, parce que, francophone au départ ou pas, il [l'écrivain immigrant] est confronté à quatre entités qui ne sont en rien superposables. Comme tous les émigrants, il vient au Canada, et si ce terme n'a pas toujours une signification émotive pour les écrivains québécois, il en a toujours une pour le nouvel arrivant, même pour le nouvel arrivant cultivé, pas aliéné, au courant des plaines d'Abraham, de Speak White et du martyre du père Brébeuf, Il s'aperçoit très vite que le Québec n'est pas une province comme les autres, qu'elle a bien sociologiquement parlant une spécificité, une identité distincte dont la langue et le code civil ne sont que la pointe de l'iceberg; qu'en réalité, il va se heurter à la fois à une sociabilité éminemment ouverte et sympathique [...] et à une fermeture due au poids de mémoire que l'imaginaire québécois entretient sur sa propre identité [...]. [*LQ*, postscript, p.208]

In effect, resistance from Québec to any new minority is an assertion of power. The Province has had to withstand the pressure of English domination for two centuries and preserve its identity and language. Québécois people are not yet prepared to share their power with newcomers:

Partie du peuple-classe, de la petite nation dominée, la société québécoise se retrouve avec une vraie bourgeoisie, de vrais pauvres, et des Amérindiens qui lui contestent sa place dans la hiérarchie du malheur et sa place dans le mythe de la fondation de ce lieu. Les Québécois deviennent des immigrants comme les autres à cette différence près, qu'arrivés au XVIIe ou au XVIIIe siècle ils ont eu le temps de se forger un imaginaire collectif et des mythes de fondation, de se constituer un vernaculaire qui n'appartient qu'à eux et qui est la marque identitaire par excellence, le stigmat qui sera retourné en valeur suprême; ayant eu le temps de se forger un imaginaire de «peuple» et non pas de «minorité». [*LQ*, postscript, p.212]

For her, the second referendum on the independence of Québec in 1995 acted as a catalyst in the evolution of Québec's mentality. It marked the beginning of the realization that Québécois will have to deal with migrants, and will have to share their status and privileges within the borders of Québec:

¹⁷⁴ Régine Robin. *La Québécoise*. Montréal: Editions Typo. 1993. p.207-24.

Les interrogations [sur l'identité] se sont problématisées, une nouvelle conscience de l'américanité s'est déployée, une nouvelle interrogation sur le passé et sur la mémoire. Une véritable reproblématisation de l'identité. [LQ, postscript, p.213]

This is corroborated, as we have seen earlier, by the findings of Marc Brière's team in *Le Goût du Québec - L'après - référendum 1995*, which predicts that Québec will give more leeway to minorities, overtly welcoming the advent of a multilingual society. And Laferrière, who considered Québécois literature 'malade de gravité' in the late 1970s, also notices, twenty-five years later, the beginning of change in the Québécois literary scene, which stems from the inclusion of migrant writers, despite their *différance*:

C'est la littérature la plus dynamique en ce moment et sous peu, dans moins de vingt ans, elle éclatera sur la scène mondiale. [...] L'apparition massive des écrivains de diverses origines [donne] une vigueur nouvelle à une littérature qui avait plutôt tendance à se mordre la queue.¹⁷⁵

This evolution seems to suggest that migrant writers, by addressing and questioning their position within Québécois society, have started to shift the focus from a defensive and exclusive Québécois identity to a more open and varied one.

*Nous sommes tous des immigrants*¹⁷⁶

To manage this shift, migrant writers have also used another element: the representation of minorities, other than their own. We have seen, in previous chapters, that migrant writers have often depicted their communities, via the intermediary of autobiographically inspired narratives, detailing their origins, their childhood, or their experience of the migration process. They also have presented their vision of Quebecers, as we have seen above. By representing other minorities, migrant writers form an alliance between all minorities: not only do they speak for their own group, but they also give a voice to others. They try to include the views and perspectives of other communities to their own narratives, and, this way, show that their claims are not the product of one isolated community, but of all allophones.

In migrant writing, allophone communities appear through their neighbourhoods in the case of Régine Robin or Dany Laferrière, or in the form of secondary characters. These are often developed enough to play an important part in the plot, and their specific cultural aspects are frequently used to give more depth to their personality rather than to provide 'folkloric' detail. In his short stories, for example, Naïm Kattan examines Québécois

¹⁷⁵ Dany Laferrière. *Op.cit.* 2000. p.63

¹⁷⁶ This title is taken from an article written by Pierre Monette (*op.cit.* 1992. B-8.)

society from various angles and perspectives on the. In *La Mémoire sans frontières*, Louise Gauthier analyses some of Kattan's statements about on his work and remarks that his short stories are non-autobiographical sketches of life, which aim to understand other viewpoints and other choices.¹⁷⁷ As such, his characters are of different ages, religions, cultures or nationalities and of either gender. In *La Québécoise* (1983), Robin's anonymous narrator lives in three areas of Montréal, which correspond to three cultural communities: Snowdon, Outremont and around the Marché Jean-Talon. Each time, she adopts a lifestyle in accordance with the communities around her and deplores the lack of communication and interaction between them:

Parfois au milieu des collègues, des amis, elle serait prise d'une grande panique. Cela pourrait lui
venir en taxi, en autobus, au restaurant ou en traversant la rue. N'y a-t-il rien d'universel ici?
DES GHETTOS
DES CLIVAGES
CHACUN SA LANGUE
SA COMMUNAUTÉ
CHACUN SON QUARTIER
SON DÉPUTÉ.
[...]
N'y a-t-il rien d'universel ici?
Ciels clivés au raté de l'Histoire
Au raté de l'exil
solitudes mauves dressées les unes contre les autres les unes en face des autres.
Comme le ciel est loin et quel silence givre sur les branches!
Le texte bruit des imaginaires gelés. [LQ, p.158]

Robin points out the isolation of the various communities within Québécois society, with a depiction that recalls the Canadian multicultural mosaic. With the repetition of the ironic negative question *N'y a-t-il rien d'universel ici?*, Robin suggests that this solitude could be avoided by identifying elements that are common to all communities and transcend circumstantial differences and by forging an alliance based on the universality of the human condition.

With authors like Francis Bossus or Dominique Blondeau on the other hand, characters of other origins are not confined to background landscapes or characters. They are more developed and provide an opportunity for the authors to voice other opinions and histories, rather than give merely a glimpse of them. In Francis Bossus's *La Tentation du destin* (1996), there are several secondary characters: an Italian brother and sister, who have migrated to America in the hope of making a fortune; Cloé, who is from the French Caribbean islands; and Prosper, who is originally from Cameroon. In the novel, Prosper is

¹⁷⁷ Louise Gauthier. *La Mémoire sans frontières*. Sainte-Foy: Presses l'Université de Laval, collection culture & société. 1997. p.76.

an accessory character, who becomes the friend of Jules, the narrator, and helps him in his adventures. Instead of just outlining a succinct portrait of Prosper, Bossus brushes a slightly more developed psychology by telling Prosper's story. Recalling their first meeting, Jules describes him in the following terms:

C'était un jeune Noir à la peau luisante, au visage rond, aux yeux globuleux et aux cheveux crépus à l'aspect laineux. [TD, p.70]

Prosper turns out to be quite a violent character, who is thief and an assaulter. This negative image, all too easily fitting prejudiced stereotypes, is in mitigation, explained by Prosper's personal history of destitution:

Il est une fois un nègre, un pauvre nègre, qui crève à moitié de faim et qui ose encore rêver. Ce nègre, il a vingt ans, il parle et il écrit le français, il est allé à l'école des missionnaires, il a été un bon élève. On l'a baptisé Prosper alors qu'il s'appelle Odonka. Et c'est moi, le Prosper civilisé et catéchisé au nom d'un dieu à trois têtes (Tu te rends compte? C'est mieux que dans les histoires de sorciers), moi qui me retrouve un jour en plein Douala, errant dans les rues avec les chiens qui me mordent les chevilles, et avec des milliers de vagabonds qui se battent, s'entretenant pour une bière ou un morceau de pain, dorment d'un oeil dans les ruelles sur des tas d'ordures et repèrent de loin le policier ou le soldat. Je me méprise. Je rumine ma colère. Je désespère aussi. [TD, p. 91]

Here, Bossus justifies his character's violence by giving him a violent past, in which he was robbed of his cultural identity and left with no self-confidence and no hope for the future in a country ruined by years of colonial abuse. By understanding Prosper's past, Jules is able to see the man beyond the clichés and other stereotypes that he has been fed throughout his life.

Dominique Blondeau goes a step further and chooses migrants of other minorities than hers at the centre of her novel. These characters are given an equal share of the narrative and occupy centre-stage. In *Les Feux de l'exil* (1991), there are three narrative female voices: Anastasia, Chloé and Madame Yu. Anastasia, who is the link between the other characters, is originally from a European country, but was brought up in Morocco (like Blondeau herself, who was born in France but spent most of her youth in Morocco before migrating to Québec). Chloé is a young black woman from the French Caribbean islands who migrated in the late 1970s; and Madame Ruan Lijun Yu is an old Chinese woman who migrated to follow her husband in the 1950s. The novel intertwines the voices and experiences of the three women who represent different ages, cultures and origins. In one novel, there are three viewpoints of the migration process in Québec, three sets of reasons and reactions, etc., but all are bound by the common experience of exile (echoing Robin's earlier ironic question, *N'y a-t-il rien d'universel ici?*). It is also interesting to note the relationship between the three women. Chloé is Anastasia's friend; she has listened to

her in time of illness, and supported her when her partner left her. Anastasia and Chloé are united by an acute understanding of a curse or a stigma that eats away their lives:

Je le répète, un point commun nous unissait, Nastasia et moi, plus fidèle qu'une passion parjurée dans une seconde d'extase: son cancer et ma peau noire. [LFDE, p.219]

They both can relate to their alienation and frustration at being rejected for something which they have no power over and no responsibility for. The relationship between Anastasia and Madame Yu is quite different. Anastasia is a writer. She has had the idea of writing an article on a lonely old Chinese woman who shares a flat with half a dozen cats. Anastasia wishes to understand why this woman lives on her own, isolated from her community, and blacklisted by her neighbourhood.

On lui pardonnait mal son attitude dédaigneuse; elle, qui semblait à l'aise dans une perpétuelle solitude, elle, originaire d'un État aux mille légendes, aux mythes fabuleux, ignorait que le *mystère derrière lequel elle se protégeait*, recluse entre ses chats, se révélait une *menace plus dangereuse* que la présence des animaux dans l'appartement. *Les individus redoutent le mystère*. Elle était chinoise, de quoi vivait-elle? *Pourquoi n'habitait-elle pas le quartier de ses congénères?* Questions dérangeantes que, dans son pays, on taisait pour ne pas tourmenter les dieux. [LFDE, p.95, my italics]

Before Anastasia even manages to talk to her, the old woman dies in a fire. From then on, Anastasia is obsessed with reconstructing the past of the woman. She starts writing her story, and becomes further isolated, refusing to speak even to her friend Chloé. Writing Madame Yu's story is a catharsis for Anastasia: not only does she give a voice to the old woman who had retreated into silence, she gives herself the opportunity to express feelings that she had bottled up for years:

Elle doit écrire, son destin s'imbriquant dans celui de Ruan Lijun. Le courage lui manque; elle voudrait se singulariser plus précisément. Elle a commencé par se nommer JE, après des heures de travail entre nuits et jours indistincts. Elle se fond dans l'anonymat et dans le rejet: ON. Des années durant, n'a-t-elle pas nié le prénom de Sarah? [LFDE, p.102]

For Anastasia, Madame Yu is an alter ego. The experience of the old woman could have been hers, and vice-versa. Exile has made them similar, because it has severed the links that anchored them in the certainty of their culture. While reading the few pages that Chloé stole from Anastasia's manuscript, she realizes that her friend and Madame Yu are so similar that, in the narrative, their personalities and histories seem to have merged:

Anastasia s'intègre à l'histoire de Madame Yu. Le temps lui manque. A moins que la distance séparant Changai de Marrakech n'ait plus d'importance. Chloé qui, la première, lut le récit a été surprise par le rôle que s'est librement composé Anastasia. Immigrerait-elle à son insu dans sa propre écriture? Quel profil dévoilera-t-elle derrière celui de Ruan Lijun? [LFDE, p.96]

Through writing, Anastasia is able to reach 'l'universel': the accuracy of her own personal history is not as important as capturing the feelings brought on by migration. Blondeau suggests that the alliance of minorities should be based on their common experience of migration, as they can all relate to it, and writing is one way to access and express this common knowledge.

One of the minorities represented by migrant writers is that of the Native Americans, who want to be recognized as a Nation and obtain a certain independence from the Québec government. According to *Le Goût du Québec – l'après référendum 1995*, Native American delegations

... se réclament du droit international pour revendiquer un statut de nation ou d'État. Elles invoquent le fait qu'elles ont une population permanente, un territoire défini, un gouvernement et la capacité d'établir des relations avec d'autres nations ou États, en plus de leur langue, de leur culture et de leurs traditions.¹⁷⁸

Of course, the official recognition of Native Americans as a nation would involve Québec in a territorial reorganisation, along with a restructuring of power and jurisdiction, because they could reclaim the territories that the European settlers confiscated. By endorsing Native American issues, migrant writers make a point about the legitimacy of Québec's demands and attitude with regard to immigration policy. Not only does it challenge Québec's authority, it also links migrant writers with the claim of the more tolerant Québécois 'pure-laine' that Quebeckers are migrants too and that the territory they now occupy was not originally theirs. Dany Laferrière is openly taking sides – not only in the situation in Québec, but in the whole North American continent - from the beginning of his first novel published in Québec, *Comment faire l'amour avec un nègre sans se fatiguer* (1999), with the following statement:

Dans les années 70, l'Amérique était encore bandée sur le Rouge. A chaque hurlement entendu la nuit dans les dortoirs, on pouvait deviner, suivant la modulation, qu'un Huron, un Iroquois ou un Cheyenne venait d'ensemencer une jeune Blanche de son foutre rouge. Cela a duré jusqu'à ce que chaque Indien ait écopé d'une syphilis chronique. La race blanche anglo-saxonne étant de ce fait menacée dans sa survie, l'Establishment arrêta à temps le massacre. Les filles WASP furent traitées drastiquement à la pénicilline, après qu'on eût renvoyé les étudiants indiens, *dans leurs réserves respectives achever en douce le génocide commencé avec la Découverte*. [CFA, p.18-9, my italics]

Here, Laferrière challenges the myth of the foundation of North American Nations – namely the United States of America, Canada and New France that later became Québec, - by adopting the European point of view and mainly focusing on the 'Discovery' of the American continent by Christopher Columbus in 1492. Laferrière replaces it by an image

¹⁷⁸ Marc Brière (ed.). *op.cit.* 1996. p.151.

of alienation and gradual genocide of Native peoples. Furthermore, he underlines quite ironically that relations between the Europeans and the Native Americans are kept clandestine, if not sordid and exploitative, and are merely tolerated as long as they do not undermine the position of power of the European dominant class.

As for Mona Latif-Ghattas, she targets more specifically the case of Native Americans in Québec. In *Le Double Conte de l'exil* - published the year of the Oka Crisis in 1990 -,¹⁷⁹ the central character is Madeleine/Manitakawa, a Native American, who, mocked and harassed because of her origin, changes her name and abandon her traditional way of life to disappear into Québécois society. Her encounter with Fêve, an illegal immigrant, makes her realize where her true identity lies and feel that she wants to live up to her new ideal. With this character, Latif-Ghattas shows that Native Americans, despite their claims, are the only minority that is not respected: other minorities are tolerated and their cultural identity – officially at least – encouraged, but Native Americans are faced with either total absorption or exclusion in reservations. There is no middle ground for them. Madeleine/Manitakawa believes that her origins guarantee her right to accept migrants on the territory that belonged to her ancestors:

Madeleine se leva calmement, lui prit les deux mains, le regarda dans les yeux avec cette force que personne ne soupçonnait et lui dit: «Je suis une Québécoise, moi. Une Ancienne du “Kébec”. Tu sais ce que signifie “Kébec”? “là où passe le fleuve.” J’ai des droits sur cette terre et je te garderai....» [LDCE, p.127]

But of course, the authorities quickly contradict this claim when Fêve is advised that his request to stay in Québec has been refused:

C’est Madeleine qui les injuria encore et les accusa de cruauté.
C’est Madeleine qui leur affirma que c’était une erreur, une erreur inhumaine, *une autre injustice* qu’ils pourront inscrire dans *leur livre d’histoire*. [LDCE, p.157-8, my italics]

Here, Latif-Ghattas echoes the dissonance between historical facts as presented by Europeans and as seen through the eyes of the Native Americans. In fact, at the end of the novel, Madeleine/Manitakawa undertakes her vengeance against the Québécois government by rewriting and teaching history from the Native American point of view:

Alors, dit Madeleine à l’enfant, les Espagnols obligèrent les Indiens à devenir chrétiens et à travailler dans les mines. Alors, ils se sont révoltés et se sont mis à détruire tous les ranchs, et les chevaux s’enfuirent et se mirent à galoper dans la nature, ils devinrent des chevaux sauvages, tu sais, les mustangs, ce sont leurs petits-enfants.
Alors, les Anglo-Saxons, eux, ne voulaient pas les Indiens, ils voulaient seulement leurs terres. C’était simple, ils les ont repoussés vers l’Ouest, où ils les ont exterminés.

¹⁷⁹ The Oka crisis was an act of resistance from the Mohawks of Kanesatake to the development of a golf course on their ancestral territories. They built barricades and held them against the authorities for seventy-eight days. Despite on-going negotiations, the army intervention in August 1990 put an end to the crisis.

Alors, les Indiens ont fini par comprendre qu'il fallait se soumettre et s'adapter pour subsister. Alors, cinq tribus d'Indiens se sont mises à s'adapter tout en gardant leurs traditions et leur culture. Ils ouvrirent des écoles, composèrent un alphabet, publièrent des journaux et rédigèrent une constitution. Mais, un Grand Malin alla dire à l'oreille du Blanc qu'on avait découvert de l'or sous leur territoire. Alors, les cinq tribus furent chassées et déportées vers l'Oklahoma... [LDCE, p.163-4]

Madeleine/Manitakawa shows her side of history to the little girl. She might not be able to reconquer the territory of Québec, but she might be able to rewrite its history and regain some control over the future.¹⁸⁰ Mona Latif-Ghattas also draws a parallel between Fève's experience of migration and Madeleine/Manitakawa's ancestral history. Fève was persecuted and forced to leave his country by the surrounding unbearable violence of war, an experience to which Madeleine/Manitakawa can relate both personally and from her people's point of view. Of course, this also suggests a parallel with all migrants originating from dictatorial regimes, whose legal and human rights were not respected in their native land. This again contributes to the idea of an alliance between minorities, based on a shared experience. The parallel is complete when Fève visits Madeleine/Manitakawa's reservation:

Fève délirait de bonheur. Il se sentait accueilli par des paysages généreux. Un dimanche, ils allèrent à Kanawake où ils furent reçus par le chef du village qui avait connu le grand-père de Madeleine. Fève délirait de bonheur. C'est étrange, c'est étrange, ici, quelque chose ressemblait à... chez lui... [LDCE, p.146]

Fève feels at home in the Native American reservation, because he notices the similarities that exist between his experience and theirs. While authors like Bossus or Robin pointed to similarities between various experiences of migration, Mona Latif-Ghattas and, to a lesser degree, Laferrière stress the similarities between the experience of migrants and that of Native Americans, suggesting a possible alliance in the power struggle between the Québécois majority and minorities.

Conclusion

In their work, migrant writers take a stand against an underlying attitude within Québécois society that leads to the exclusion of other 'ethnic' minorities. They underline Québécois

¹⁸⁰ In *Fictions de l'identitaire au Québec* (Montréal: XYZ Éditeur. 1991. p.16), Sherry Simon reminds that 'le discours politique de l'identitaire relève donc d'exigences qui n'ont parfois que peu à voir avec la pluralité réelle des identités au quotidien. L'identité culturelle, en d'autres mots, n'est jamais une donnée; c'est un ensemble d'éléments puisés dans le quotidien ou dans l'histoire et que l'on façonne en vue d'objectifs précis'. In this case, Europeans construct a history excluding the Native Americans to avoid a challenge to their dominant position; Madeleine/Manitakawa presents an updated version that does just that.

racist stereotypes and lazy lack of interest, which together maintain a pernicious climate of suspicion between the Québécois 'pure laine' and allophones.

To reverse this situation, migrant authors propose a heterogeneous vision of Québec, which includes not only other migrant minorities but also Native Americans. Their work appears to begin a dialogue and an alliance between minorities by underscoring common elements of experience brought about by migration, and by undermining the social hierarchy based on the time of settlement and country of origin. Authors also allude to the migrant history of the Québécois themselves and remind their readers that, not so long ago, the Québécois themselves were referred to as the 'Nègres blancs d'Amérique' – in the provocative work of Pierre Vallières, at least - and were the victims of social and cultural prejudice.

In this context, migrant authors embrace Native American claims, challenge the supremacy of Québécois people of European descent over the territory, and bid for a general restructuring of society that would more fully reflect the multicultural face of Québec, reduce social division and include *différent* points of view.

Chapter 9: A cosmopolitan vision of Québec

Introduction

Migrant authors have dedicated a large proportion of their novels to defining their cultural identity and the consequences of the process of migration on it. They have also described the problems that they encountered when arriving in Québec, and have shown that the cultural identity crisis can be overcome if one takes the time to distance oneself from the past and to identify the benefits of migration for the future.

Once they come to terms with the process of acculturation and its consequences, migrants are ready to start the process of 'ré-enculturation'. We have seen in the previous chapter that this process starts with challenging Québécois society and pointing out the obstacles that the Québécois desire for cultural supremacy in Québec puts in migrants' way. Having noticed the discordance and competition between minorities, migrant authors also try to appeal to other minorities by proposing a unifying vision of migrants that would be able to counterbalance the Québécois majority.

In this final chapter, we will show how migrant authors dedicate part of their work to presenting a new image of Québec and its cultural identity, based on hybridity of cultures (or transculture), on 'imaginary cities' and territories (to quote Régine Robin, Sarah M. Corse and Sherry Simon),¹⁸¹ and a redefinition of the francophone Québécois identity to reflect the multicultural aspect of Québec. In this new representation, migrants are shown to take an active part in the 'devenir québécois',¹⁸² particularly by transforming the landscape of the national literature.

Hybridity and transculture

So far, we have studied elements that are specific to the respective cultures of the migrant authors studied, or the migrant literature. While describing their pasts and origins, migrant authors seem to remain outside Québécois society, as they place themselves in the tradition

¹⁸¹ This expression is inspired by Régine Robin in *La Québécoise* (Montréal: Éditions Typo. 1993. p.186: 'l'imaginaire de la ville'), Sherry Simon (Sherry Simon, et al. *Fictions de l'identitaire au Québec*. Montréal: XYZ éditeur. 1991. p. 25: 'Les frontières de l'espace culturel sont génératrices de sens.'), and Sarah M. Corse (*Nationalism and literature. The politics of culture in Canada and the United States*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1997.p.22: 'The nation and its cultural expression in literature underlies, unifies, and makes meaningful the political formation of the state.'), as they all suggest a link between the identification and legitimization of a nation and the cultural construction of its borders, particularly in its national literature.

¹⁸² This expression, which implies a transformation, is borrowed from Marco Micone. Micone uses it to describe the future of migrants in Québec, once they have settled. See Micone, Marco, 'La Parole immigrée' in Fulvio Caccia, *Sous le signe du phénix. Entretiens avec 15 créateurs italo-québécois*. Montréal. Guernica. 1985. p.263.

of their own national literatures and remain within the boundaries of their communities. Even though their work is published in Québec, it can still be placed under the banner of ‘minor’ literature – in the sense of François Paré’s definition¹⁸³ – because it does not refer to the dominant culture and stays on the margin of society, confined to minorities. When migrant authors describe the experience of migration and express criticism of the host society, they start the process of their *ré-enculturation* by ‘making a space’ for themselves. In effect, they force the dominant culture to reconsider the ‘margin’ – previously thought insignificant – as a factor in the construction of national identity. In *Les Littératures de l’exiguïté*, François Paré analyses the terms of ‘minor’ and ‘dominant’, and what is at stake behind them:

C’est ainsi que l’institution littéraire dominante aime à représenter ces cultures, dans le geste embryonnaire et sacré de la prise première de parole. Autant les ‘petites’ littératures cherchent dans les discours dominants la confirmation de leur valeur dans l’institution littéraire, au sens large; autant ces mêmes discours dominants instituent leurs propres caractéristiques de domination en représentant les littératures dominées, surtout celles des peuples autochtones, comme naïvement porteuses, prégnantes du phénomène littéraire dans ses commencements mythiques. *Ainsi ce qui est petit cherche ultimement à dominer; ce qui est multiple cherche ultimement à se réconcilier dans l’Un. Le langage de l’exiguïté [...] ne serait qu’une stratégie retorse pour parvenir à conquérir tout le territoire.* [my italics]¹⁸⁴

For Paré, therefore, there exists a power struggle between minorities and dominant culture in order to conquer or to preserve their imaginary territories.¹⁸⁵ Each party has to defend its ground in order to protect its existence. This is exactly what migrant authors do when they challenge Québécois society by pointing out – as we have seen in the previous chapter - that it can be intolerant and blind to migrants’ problems and dilemmas, or when they present cultural minorities that cooperate and communicate. It is a provocation that will hopefully lead to a modification of the present boundaries between coexisting cultural identities in Québec.

Migrant authors were no strangers to this cultural ‘battle’ before their migrations to Québec, as most of them had already personally experienced a certain cultural hybridity that migration only reinforced. It was often the impossibility of expressing their alterity within the boundaries of their own country that led them to emigrate. Dominique

¹⁸³ For François Paré, ‘minor’ cultures and literatures are those that exist on the margin of dominant ones and that strive to be recognised by, and compete with them. See François Paré. *Les Littératures de l’exiguïté*. Québec: Les Éditions du Nordir (collection Essai Le Nordir). 1992.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.* p.39.

¹⁸⁵ The idea of imaginary territories is inspired by Sherry Simon, whose definition of cultural identity is made in geographical terms: ‘Toute représentation de l’identité culturelle établit en fait un jeu complexe de frontières, d’inclusion et d’exclusion.’ See Simon, Sherry, ‘Espaces incertains de la culture’, in Sherry; Simon et al. *Fictions de l’identitaire au Québec*. Montréal. XYZ Éditeur, collection études et documents. 1991. p.9-52.

Blondeau, for example, was born in France but, like her character Anastasia, brought up in Morocco. This strong influence on her work has led us to include her in the group of Middle Eastern writers rather than the French. Haitian writers have also experienced this cultural ‘in-between’: their mother tongue is the vernacular Creole, but their language of education was French. Before the 1990s (when Haiti became officially bilingual), as soon as they attended school, Haitian children lived a double referential life. As we have previously seen, in their autobiographies, both Ollivier and Laferrière comment on the use of language as being indicative of different systems of values: Creole was used for daily life, French was for ‘intellectual’ life and official business; Creole is for legends, and voodoo stories, French is for literature. But Creole also refers to Haitian lifestyle, whereas French refers to colonialist France and to a lifestyle that is unknown to them. The use of languages in Haiti already hints at the tension between ‘here’ and ‘there’, ‘now’ and ‘then’, that exiles experience when they live in Québec. A similar tension exists for the Jewish writers whose Jewishness is superimposed on their nationality. Régine Robin, of Polish extraction, was brought up in France, in the French education system, but she was aware, through her family life, that she also belonged to the Jewish community and that their collective history was different from that of most other French. Her memories and cultural elements are intricately connected and confirm her belonging to both her community and the dominant culture. Naïm Kattan was in a similar position when he lived in the Baghdad Jewish community. He learnt his own culture within his community, but he also went to school outside the community, where he learnt Arabic and acquired a better understanding of the culture of the dominant group. He then went to the *lycée français*, where he was initiated into French language and culture and which later prompted him to emigrate to France then Québec. As Louise Gauthier points out in *La Mémoire sans frontières*, Kattan’s name is a cultural crossroad because it is meaningful both in Hebrew and in Arabic:

Son nom avait d’ailleurs une double signification: en hébreu, Kattan veut dire *petit*, alors que Naïm signifie *charmant, agréable*; en arabe, Kattan signifie *cotonnier*, et Naïm, *paradisique*.¹⁸⁶

As for Yves Navarre, his homosexuality could be seen as a form of cultural hybridity that underlies his life. In his autobiographical novel *La Terrasse des audiences au moment de l’adieu* (1990), Navarre describes his homosexual encounters as a secretive, almost clandestine enterprise, in the dark, in veiled terms. Even though his homosexuality is an

¹⁸⁶ Gauthier, Louise. *op.cit.* 1997. p.74.

open secret, he feels the need to conceal it in order to avoid homophobic remarks and to separate his sexual life in the gay community from the rest of his public life. This double belonging that seems so difficult to assume for Navarre finds expression, however, in his novels, in which his characters often find a way to combine both worlds.

Migrant authors also apply their experience of cultural hybridity in the construction of their characters. Mona Latif-Ghattas's characters in *Les Lunes de miel* (1996), for example, show an overlap of cultural identities. All the characters are from Egypt, but they all belong to different backgrounds. Vava, for example, is a member of the Greek community whose founding members settled in Alexandria several centuries ago,¹⁸⁷ while Liette and Raouf are respectively from the Jewish and Muslim communities. Some authors have preferred to include characters who are at the confluence of two or more languages and cultures, often being professional translators or assuming this position for other characters in the novels. Not only do they translate for others; they often explain cultural items and behaviour. Translators, as we have seen in the novels of Naïm Kattan, Stanley Péan or Régine Robin, are at the intersection of different communities and facilitate the passage from one to the other(s). They render communication possible, because they combine two (or more) cultures and countries. Other characters, like Méir in *La Fiancée promise* (1983) or Camille in *La Dame au fond de la cour* (2000), come into contact with other communities and are adopted by them. In so doing, they eventually become the mouthpiece of these adoptive communities, because they are able to use their viewpoints as outsiders to facilitate interactions with the dominant culture and other minorities.

The extreme case of multiple identities is found in Régine Robin's novels. All characters/narrators seem affected by a drifting identity syndrome (or Robin's 'dérive identitaire').¹⁸⁸ It is impossible to determine the identity of the narrator(s) and other characters. The narrative voice keeps changing while retaining similar characteristics, inducing the reader to believe that either it is a different narrator or that the original one is just adopting a mask to blend in with the group he or she is in. Identity, memory and culture are the central topics of Robin's novels and short stories. As we have seen previously, Robin suggests that memory and culture cannot be kept in a 'perfect' state and illustrates the process of 'contamination' in the short story 'Journal de déglingue entre le

¹⁸⁷ According to the website <http://greece.org/alexandria/eka2>, the Hellenic community settled in Alexandria in 63AD. The community has retained its language and traditions, but has dwindled from approximately 150,000 members when the colony was founded to a mere 800 at the end of the 20th century.

¹⁸⁸ This expression is from Pierre L'Hérault, 'Pour une cartographie de l'hétérogène', in Sherry Simon et al. *Fictions de l'identitaire au Québec*. Montréal: XYZ Éditeur, collection études et documents. 1991. p.74.

Select et Compuserve' (p.127-71) in *L'Immense Fatigue des pierres – Biofictions* (1999). She also shows how one can manipulate the concept of identity by 'telling the story': the narrator constructs a biographical narrative that remodels or reinterprets memories and events. Robin stresses the crucial part of creating and editing in telling one's story: the organisation and logic of the narrative are essential because they change the perspective and show elements in a different light to oneself and to others.¹⁸⁹ This illustrates the concept of identity as a careful narrative construct. Elements are chosen for their effects, their connotations, not for their truthfulness. Identity is no longer conceived as a fixed amalgam of biological facts – such as unique fingerprints or DNA sequences - and historical and social events, it is a composed narrative with the purpose of conveying a specific image of oneself or, by extension, of one social group. This idea rejoins that of Sherry Simon in *Fictions de l'identitaire*, in which she explains that

[La culture] n'est plus la transmission sélective de valeurs sûres, elle n'est plus l'objet d'affinités électives. Elle est un terrain surchargé de représentations qui se disputent la dominance; elle est un ensemble mouvant de discours et d'institutions, doublé de communautés qui en font l'interprétation.¹⁹⁰

For Simon, culture and cultural identity cannot be considered as monolithic entities; rather they are combinations of emotions, facts, and events that can and should be reorganised according to circumstances. It is the flexibility of the concept and its capacity for adaptation that ensures the survival of the cultural system.

Indeed, through their characters, migrant authors illustrate the complexity of this concept and what is at stake in the reformulation of culture. In *The Politics of Culture in Canada and the United States*, Sarah M. Corse notices the shift of focus that exists in cultural studies. Recent theories, like post-colonialism and postmodernism, have shown the fundamental heterogeneity of national culture (and of its literature). Instead of presenting national identity (and of its literature) as a homogeneous entity, these theories stress that it is, in fact, a construction of motivations and tactics together with a reshaping of history:

The underlying premise of the literary nationalists was that humanity is naturally divided into homogeneous, but distinctive groups marked by a unique set of values and concerns and by a distinctive 'national character'. This set of nationalist ideas created a vision both of the nation itself

¹⁸⁹ Like culture, identity is now seen as a construction of ideas, desires and unconscious elements, which can be rearranged almost indefinitely in order to project an image adapted to the situation and moment. In *L'Identité* (Paris: PUF, collection Que sais-je?.1986), Alex Muchielli also shows that this rearrangement of elements requires similar editing and organising skills to those required when constructing a narrative. For Muchielli, identity is a selection of information relevant to a situation at one time and in one place: 'Nous avons vu, par ailleurs, que chaque identité est, à chaque instant, une construction, une émergence de sens, résultant d'un ensemble de négociations circulaires entre les identités de chacun' [p.120].

¹⁹⁰ Sherry Simon et al. *op.cit.* 1991. p.24.

and of national literatures as naturally occurring, as arising without action on the part of specifiable individuals. Reflection theories subsume these assumptions, ignoring the fact that national literatures are created by conscious human action, as indeed are nations themselves. Recent theorists of the nation, on the other hand, have amply demonstrated the constructed nature of nations; they are 'imagined communities' built as much in the minds of their citizens as in military or cartographic exercises. National literatures, like nations, are created by the cultural work of specific people engaged in an identifiable set of activities.¹⁹¹

The last line of the above extract could be applied to the literature produced by migrant authors in Québec. Migrant authors do not always admit to being the mouthpieces of their communities, but, by clearly referring to their cultural background, they assume a position that suggests that they are. Furthermore, their literary work is either inspired by their own experience or presents characters and situations that appear to be representative of their communities. In light of the above extract, we can also clearly identify the topics that they develop as underlying goals - a 'battle plan' - for their nations/communities, who are striving to assert their existence and power in a country in which they are a minority and in which the majority - as we have seen earlier - are often perceived as hostile. In terms of battle for 'imaginary territories', novels inspired by memory and the past could be interpreted as tracing and determining the borders of one's territory. Acculturation and the crisis deriving from it would result in the territory shrinking under the pressure of attacks. And the period of *ré-enculturation* would correspond to a counterattack; migrant authors seek allies in other minorities with whom to make common cause so as to push back the borders and expand their territories. Seen in this light, all novels by migrant authors take a subversive edge because they become part of a puzzle, whose purpose is to dismantle the unity of Québécois identity and replace it by a new *nous*, that would refer to a multicultural society rather than a traditionally francophone catholic group.

Deconstructing the Québécois nous

The claims against the collective *nous* - referring to the traditional francophone Québécois - are expressed by the characters of novels by migrant writers. The main argument against the majority is that rather than being an inclusive collective, it deliberately excludes the part of Québécois society which does not fit the criteria. In *Questions of cultural Identity*, Stuart Hall shows that the underlying structure of identity is based on strategies and representations that enable the assertion of one's difference from others:

¹⁹¹ Sarah M Corse. *Nationalism and Literature – The politics of Culture in Canada and the United States*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1997. p.7.

Precisely because identities are constructed within, not outside, discourse, we need to understand them as produced in specific historical and institutional sites within specific discursive formations and practices, by specific enunciative strategies. Moreover, they emerge within the play of specific modalities of power, and thus are more the product of the marking of difference and exclusion, than they are the sign of an identical, naturally-constituted identity – an ‘identity’ in its traditional meaning (that is, an all-inclusive sameness, seamless, without internal differentiation).¹⁹²

In the case of Québec, ‘the marking of difference and exclusion’ has been as essential as elsewhere for their survival first and foremost because of English domination in the Canadian Confederation, supplemented by the growing Anglo-Saxon influence of the neighbouring United States. Gérard Bouchard remarks in *La Construction d’une culture (Le Québec et l’Amérique française)*,¹⁹³ that Québécois culture is based on two principles, namely homogeneity and difference:

Il est remarquable en effet que le thème de la différence ait été érigé en une sorte de valeur nationale et souvent traité d’une façon dogmatique.¹⁹⁴

According to Bouchard, homogeneity of the Québécois culture is achieved through a common religion, common French origins and heritage, perpetuation of traditions, and the defence of the French language, at the expense of any other influence. For migrant writers therefore, the task is not only to make themselves heard and accepted in Québécois society. It is also to change the concept of Québécois identity.

As we have seen earlier, most migrant writers express the difficulty they have in feeling involved in the Québécois sense of patriotism, because any celebration of it denies the very existence and input of other migrants, be they allophone or francophone. Clément Moisan and Renate Hildebrand, who have published a chronological study of migrant writing in Québec between 1937 and 1997, show that, although it is not a new phenomenon in Québec, migrant authors’ claims of otherness and exclusion from dominant Québécois culture is and dates from the late 1970s and early 1980s.¹⁹⁵ In the wake of the Quiet Revolution in the 1960s, authors – migrant or not – in Québec have tended to put

¹⁹² S. Hall and P. Du Gay (eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity*. London: SAGE Publications. 1996. p.4.

¹⁹³ G. Bouchard (ed.), *La Construction d’une culture (Le Québec et l’Amérique française)*. Sainte-Foy: Presses de l’Université de Laval. 1993.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.* p.10.

¹⁹⁵ Clément Moisan et Renate Hildebrand. *Ces Étrangers du dedans – Une histoire de l’écriture migrante au Québec (1937-1997)*. Québec: Éditions Nota Bene. 2001.

more emphasis on individuality and personal identity, and explore their differences rather than their similarities with the main culture:¹⁹⁶

Les auteurs néo-québécois, ceux qui commencent à publier vers 1975, sont de plus en plus préoccupés par cette relation de conflit, d'opposition ou de dissemblance par rapport à la composante majeure de la littérature québécoise.¹⁹⁷

For migrant writers, exploring their otherness does not only mean exploring their origins in often autobiographical narratives that retrace an often enhanced way of life in their country of origin, or their experience of immigration in their country of adoption. It also involves exploring their feeling of estrangement from the dominant culture. Published in 1983, Régine Robin's *La Québécoise* depicted several attempts by a migrant character (or characters) to be accepted into Québécois society. Despite similarities that should have eased the process of her integration (the main one being the common language), the Québécoise feels that Québécois society remains out of reach. She does not feel victimised by an attitude of deliberate exclusion on the part of the Québécois people, but rather by an intangible feeling of not belonging. Ironically, the narrator feels excluded by the collective pronoun *nous*. This pronoun for her is never synonymous with inclusion but rather reinforces the fact that she does not belong and that *nous* refers to everybody else but her. The narrator expresses her feeling of foreignness and collects details from her surrounding environment that emphasize this feeling, but she mainly notices the recurrence of the pronoun *nous* that is used in advertisements, in newspaper articles, etc:

La peur de l'homogénéité
de l'unanimité
du Nous excluant tous les autres
du pure laine
elle l'immigrante
la différente
la déviante. [*LQ*, p.133, my italics]

Although she logically understands the Québécois cultural markers and symbols of identity, the narrator is aware that her own markers often interfere with her fully grasping a sense of belonging in Québec:

Et puis la fleur de lys a pour elle d'étranges connotations: royalistes, antisémites, nobliaux imbus de leurs anciens privilèges. [*LQ*, p.134]

¹⁹⁶ At the same time, Québécois authors such as Michel Tremblay or Hubert Aquin voice their differences from the traditional, but often superficial, images of Québécois cultural identity. The use of the vernacular in their work or the topic of homosexuality are but a few examples of their will to present alternative visions of society, closer to reality and to Québec modern cultural identity.

¹⁹⁷ Clément Moisan et Renate Hildebrand. *Op.cit.* 2001. p.143-44.

Here, the symbol of the fleur de lys is turned upside down: the symbol of Québécois identity and of francophone resistance to Anglophone culture in Québec, the fleur de lys represents the opposite of an egalitarian regime for the narrator(s) of French extraction. For La Québécoise, who seems fairly knowledgeable about her country and culture of adoption, her feeling of being excluded does not stem from a lack of knowledge but of nationalistic attachment to Québec. She is able to identify and rationalise the external signs of identity, but not the feelings that are also an integral part of it. It is that part of irrational commitment to a territory, to a people that she cannot acquire, because there is no emotional and imaginary narratives that link her to her country of adoption. This feeling of non-inclusion – rather than exclusion – is still present twelve years later in Émile Ollivier's *Les Urnes scellées* (1995). Through the mouthpiece of Estelle, Ollivier shows this implicit exclusion of migrants, particularly when national celebrations take place. Estelle, who has fled Haiti and settled in Québec for about twenty years, finally returns to Haiti after the fall of the Duvalier Regime in hope to start her life again there. Her disappointment with her Québécois experience does not so much stem from acculturation and cultural differences, but in her perpetual exclusion from national identity in her country of adoption. No matter how much effort she puts into integrating and understanding the Québécois way of life, she always has the feeling of being an outsider:

Elle s'était forgé sur le Québec, le Canada, l'extrême nord de l'errance, un jugement catégorique: elle n'aimait pas ces terres, non parce que l'été durait deux jours et demi et que le reste de l'année voyait un ciel en deuil d'oiseaux et d'étoiles filantes [...]; ni à cause de l'impossibilité de pénétrer le cœur des êtres; le Québec, en particulier, engoncé dans une question nationale, se contemple le nombril; mais parce que, à force de vivre une autre vie rythmée par d'autres fêtes, d'autres cultes, d'autres drapeaux, elle avait l'impression d'assister, quotidiennement, à l'écoulement de tout son être. [US, p.286]

Estelle feels drained by the fact that, despite her material contribution to Québécois society, symbolically, she is not 'allowed' to become part of it: there are no national celebrations for Néo-Québécois' contribution to society. She is kept outside, on the margin of it because the acknowledgment of her presence would jeopardize the organization of society. In previous chapters, we have seen that one of the symptoms of the crisis that migrants go through during the process of acculturation is a feeling of being almost invisible and mute.¹⁹⁸ While this feeling may be attributed to menial work and general poor living conditions, another possible - and symbolic - explanation for it is, of course, the

¹⁹⁸ Other allophone migrant writers have noticed and developed these topics in their work. One may think, for example, of Marco Micone, whose fictional and critical work has influenced ways to analyse migrant identity and its impact on the dominant culture.

refusal to acknowledge their contribution to, and involvement in the development of Québécois society, which feels a need to assert itself in an Anglo-Saxon country and continent.

It is therefore quite surprising that, in his article 'Un travail de taupe: écrire avec un stigmaté de migrant',¹⁹⁹ Émile Ollivier describes the issues underlying the battle between Québécois and migrant cultures as not so much an attempt to conquer cultural territories and destroy otherness, as opposition to the separation and isolation of cultures:

Écrire au Québec la dictature, l'exil, l'errance, c'est mettre en parallèle des sols bouleversés par des occupations successives, des cultures qu'à maintes reprises on a tenté d'étouffer, de museler, de normaliser. C'est mettre en relief, un destin d'intellectuel en butte à la violence des pouvoirs, une pensée toujours obligée de se frayer un chemin à travers une contrainte quotidienne, harassante...²⁰⁰

Ollivier substitutes images of analogies for the images of battle. He also suggests that the rivalry between cultures does not only come from their differences, but also from the fear that their similarities inspire: if both migrant and dominant cultures refuse to draw too many parallels between them, according to Ollivier, it is because they fear that their resemblance might lead to a questioning of their individuality, and to the homogenisation of their cultural components. The goal of migrant writing is clearly not assimilation, but by drawing parallels between migrant and Québécois cultures, migrant writers hope to open a dialogue between cultures, to find common ground. Beyond the specific individual background of migrants, they highlight the similarities between the past of francophone Québécois and the present of newcomers. We have seen earlier that migrant authors try to undermine the predominance of the francophone Québécois group by reminding them that they too are a migrant community in Québec. But, more importantly, they also draw attention to the points of convergence between Québécois and migrant paths by developing similar literary topics, such as nature and childhood, family, time and history, death, etc., which are, of course, universal topics, found in most literatures. The cultural specificities in the development of these topics only serve to highlight the universal dimension of human experience. They constitute the emotional factor that Estelle or the narrator(s) of *La Québécoise* (1983) could not find or recreate in a foreign land.²⁰¹ Cultural identity, in this context, is put into perspective. It becomes almost anecdotal compared to the universal and timeless experiences to which all cultural groups can relate. Moisan points out that even

¹⁹⁹ Émile Ollivier, 'Un travail de taupe: écrire avec un stigmaté de migrant', *Possibles: L'Amérique inavouable*, vol.8, No.4, 1984 (été). p.111-17.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.* p.117.

²⁰¹ As we have seen in chapter 6, migrants' failure or success to resume their lives in the adoptive country depends on their ability to create a new set of emotions and to distance themselves from the past.

the topic of acculturation – which one would class as a typically migrant topic - becomes relevant for the modern Québécois readership because it is linked to traditional topics of Québécois literature:

Ainsi, le déracinement, un thème privilégié par les auteurs immigrants, trouve son équivalent dans les sous-thèmes de la maison et de la mémoire que les auteurs québécois ont beaucoup privilégiés, la maison représentant une forme de refuge pour le colonisé ou le minoritaire, la mémoire confortant l'action en vue de sortir de cet état de domination.²⁰²

The militant aspirations of migrant literature are, therefore, echoed in Québécois national work. Up to the Quiet Revolution of the 1960s, Québécois literature was considered the base of cultural resistance and had to reflect the values of Québécois society whose members felt colonized by the British. By the 1980s, the Québécois had acquired a form of emancipation in the form of political power and laws (The famous *Loi 101* guarantees the use of French language in schools, commercial advertising and the workplace on the territory of Québec, and contributes to the process of bilingualism on a national level, for example; or the Québécois are offered the choice of independence from Canada with the first referendum in 1980.) It is at this time that migrant literature in Québec begins to assert itself and follows the same autonomist tendencies for its own purpose: defining its differences and asserting its claims against the dominant cultural and political power.

Migrant literature, therefore, hints at a different perception of Québécois identity. Far from destabilising it, it emphasizes its formation, its movements, its changes, and its goals, and acts as a reminder of the founding principles of Québécois literature. Echoing the goals of the dominant culture and literature, migrant authors point to possible common ground upon which to build a new Québécois identity. Rather than undermining the values of the dominant culture, migrant culture offers the alternative of sharing experiences while keeping one's own specific traits. It is a middle ground between the Canadian mosaic of cultures, between which there is little interaction, and the defensive approach of Québécois society, that tries to blank out minorities. Migrant authors propose a cultural intermediacy, in which cultural identity would evolve organically: cultural differences would not be artificially eliminated or preserved, but simply respected, and the basis of integration would be shared human experience. This involves a shift of focus in the process of defining one's identity: rather than a definition based on the exclusion of others, migrant authors suggest an ever-evolving identity, that constantly transforms itself when in contact

²⁰² Clément Moisan et Renate Hildebrand. 2001. *op. cit.*, p.183.

with other cultures; this new definition of identity proposes opening oneself to otherness rather than attempting to limit and protect a set of values. As Moisan suggests,

Le déracinement devient ainsi un déplacement vers l'Autre, sans abandon ni de soi ni de son passé qui se trouvent ainsi transformés par la distance établie entre deux réalités.²⁰³

This shift of focus in defining one's identity, from asserting one's 'difference' to embracing otherness, is the opportunity for migrants to integrate themselves fully into Québécois society and to gain the recognition of their contribution to it. It is also the opportunity for Québécois society to find new inspiration and renew its own traditional topics by taking account of the migrant perspective. In *J'écris comme je vis* (2000), Dany Laferrière offers his observations on the evolution of Québécois literature during the years that he has spent in Québec.²⁰⁴

DL: Au début, j'étais assez allergique à la littérature québécoise qui me semblait malade de gravité. Une lourdeur morale. Une angoisse sourde travaillait les œuvres. Les écrivains se méfiaient de tout ce qui pouvait rappeler le plaisir. Venant de quitter une dictature étouffante, j'espérais une sorte de récréation. On semblait vraiment prendre la chose au sérieux. [...]

BM: -As-tu remarqué une évolution dans la littérature québécoise?

DL: -Énormément. C'est la littérature la plus dynamique en ce moment et sous peu, dans moins de vingt ans, elle éclatera sur la scène mondiale. Les deux grandes nouveautés durant ces vingt dernières années dans la littérature québécoise, c'est d'abord qu'elle a apprivoisé la ville [...], ce qui fait qu'un grand nombre des romans d'aujourd'hui ont Montréal pour cadre. Et le deuxième point c'est l'apparition massive des écrivains de diverses origines donnant une vigueur nouvelle à une littérature qui avait plutôt tendance à se mordre la queue. [my italics]²⁰⁵

For Laferrière, migrant influence softens the dogmatic rigidity of Québécois literature, puts the tension between Francophones and Anglophones into perspective by setting it in the broader context of relationships between cultural minorities amongst others, and contributes to its rejuvenation by injecting new ideas, new energy, and new focus. These mutual influences between the cultures in presence in Québec are a form of transculture.

Transculture and imaginary territories

In *Ces Étrangers du dedans – Une histoire de l'écriture migrante au Québec (1937-1997)*, Moisan and Hildebrand attempt to offer a definition, or rather definitions of the term transculture:

L'approche abstraite considère que l'autre n'existe pas; l'approche réaliste, que les différences effacent l'autre; l'approche universaliste, que les mécanismes en cause canalisent les différences. Ce sont en gros ce que nous venons de décrire sous la forme de l'uni-, du pluri-, et de l'interculturel. L'approche constructiviste tente de créer des rapports dynamiques entre l'un et l'autre, un véritable *alter égotisme* qui ne se contente pas de recevoir mais de vivre l'autre. Cette attitude est fondée sur la fascination de l'autre et la volonté de le pénétrer, de le faire soi et de se faire lui. [...] Elle

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.174.

²⁰⁴ Dany Laferrière emigrated to Québec in 1974.

²⁰⁵ Dany Laferrière. *J'écris comme je vis*. Genouilleux: La Passe du vent. 2000. p.63.

entraîne alors que l'on abandonne de part et d'autre certaines certitudes identitaires qui bloquent les passages afin que s'établissent des transferts culturels entre les composantes ou les éléments du système.²⁰⁶

The concept of transculture appears to be the synthesis resulting from previous cultural theories. It does not suggest dealing with otherness in a single manner; on the contrary, its diversity of approaches reflects the diversity of attitudes towards otherness. The concept of transculture is intangible and versatile – even more so than the notions of culture and identity - because its scope extends to several cultures, numerous territories, and an infinite combination of cultural elements, themselves determined by socio-economic and historical factors. The main idea that underlies transculture is migration: not necessarily a physical migration, but a dis-location of borders and values. In her book *Questions of Travel – Postmodern Discourses of Displacement*,²⁰⁷ Caren Kaplan analyses the migrant perspective in terms of its critical position towards the dominant culture:

Due to the fact that Western culture tends to erase all signs of this operation of construction and to naturalize concepts of belonging and identity, the best manner of recognizing the organizing principles or elements of a culture is to embrace displacement. Thus, exile becomes the situation par excellence for the cultural critic – distance and alienation enable profound insight [...].²⁰⁸

Not only are borders and boundaries pushed back, moved, remodelled infinitely to fit around an individual, but also individuals place themselves on the margin of the dominant culture, in areas that Kaplan calls 'dynamic borders'. The margin is the point of encounter, interaction and hybridity between cultures. Kaplan also points out that the existence of these 'dynamic borders' forces a re-evaluation of the concepts of culture and identity undertaken in order to reflect the spectrum of views and cultural combinations that they generate:

Deconstructing the discourse of exile requires imagining distance in less binary and more complicated ways. In the age of telecommunications and transnational cultural production this might mean that distance does not inevitably lead to exile or war but to new subjectivities that produce new relationships to space as well as time so that distance is not only a safety zone or a field of tension but a terrain that houses new subjects of criticism.²⁰⁹

More importantly, the acquisition of culture no longer appears to be a group duty, but rather a matter of individual choices. Belonging to a cultural group is important, but modern technology and an increased freedom of travel/movement allow people to choose

²⁰⁶ Clément Moisan et Renate Hildebrand. 2001. *op. cit.*, p.17.

²⁰⁷ Caren Kaplan. *Questions of Travel – Postmodern Discourses of Displacement*. Durham: Duke University Press. 1996.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.* p.115.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.* p.142.

the cultural group(s) to which they wish to belong to. Whereas individuals used to inherit their culture from their ancestors and their peers, it seems that now, under the influence of migrant ideologies, individuals are allowed to take a proactive and editorial role in the making of their cultural identity: they are able to compose an 'à la carte' cultural identity, picking elements that appeal to them.

In fact, there is a hint of these reinvented territories and imagined identities in the novels of migrant authors. Whatever their reasons for emigrating, migrant authors and their characters create a mental picture of the country and the society in which they are going to live. These images are a mixture of facts, hearsay, and, to compensate for the unknown, fantasy. Before even setting foot in Québec, they have - in their imaginations at least - crossed the borders, reinvented them and, in a way, appropriate their adoptive country. We have previously shown that the French image of Québec, for example, reflects the ideas that the Province is still the sole surviving stronghold of old French values. They cherish the idea that Québec is an enclave of an idealised past, and that the simple fact that they share the same language will allow them to be integrated into Québécois society without any problem. Yves Navarre, particularly, comments repeatedly on the legendary friendliness of the Québécois. Feeling rejected and betrayed by the French literary society, he hopes that the Québécois will welcome him and recognise his talent as a writer. Describing his arrival in Québec in *La Terrasse des audiences au moment de l'adieu* (1990), Navarre admits to being charmed by the honesty of people:

L'accueil, ici, partout, est heureux, sans aucun calcul, sobre, sans aucune manière, ingénu, il y a des poseurs de piège comme partout ailleurs et je ne les ai pas encore rencontrés. [*TDA*, p.366]

Navarre's vision of Québec is not only idealised, but also based on his own expectations. In his mind, he has made the Province a place to which he hopes to retreat, and in which he seeks recognition and respect.

In Latif-Ghattas's *Les Lunes de miel* (1996), Vava and Toto, who have fled Egypt, have tried to settle in other countries and other parts of Canada. Unhappy with their previous attempts, they set their mind on Québec. Their choice – or rather Vava's choice – is determined by language, but it was not the sole deciding factor:

Peut-être qu'il serait bon de vivre enfin dans un pays qui avait la réputation d'être la terre de l'avenir. Là, les enfants pourraient grandir dans la quiétude, la civilisation, le respect de la loi et la liberté d'esprit. Toto serait enfin tranquille. [*LDM*, p.125]

It is interesting that, of all the arguments, the first to be presented is Québec as 'la terre de l'avenir'. In previous chapters, we have seen that Vava in particular, but also other Middle

Eastern migrants, had been motivated by success and by the ‘American dream’. This is the first fantasy about settling in Québec.²¹⁰ The second is suggested by the use of the word *civilisation*. Proud of her European education, Vava considers herself ‘civilized’, i.e. well mannered and well-educated. In her opinion, she did not fit in Greek, then Italian society because she was misunderstood, but living in Vancouver for her is equivalent to living in a cultural desert: nothing is familiar because everything appears new; there are no marks of the past to hold onto. She is naturally drawn to Québec because of its older history and its obvious landmarks that anchor the Province in the past. In her mind, Vava has composed a picture that provides a balance of opportunities for a better future and a foot in the – European – past, which is so important to her.

Haitian writers have also described Québec from the perspective of hopeful migrants, and often the image of the dreamed-of country is ambivalent. The positive aspect is that Québec is a land of freedom and a safe place to live, but it is also a leap into the unknown that might compromise their cultural identity. In Marie-Célie Agnant’s *Alexis, le fils de Raphaël* (2000), Alexis and his mother are applying for a visa to be able to live and work in the United States, but unexpectedly, they are sponsored by one of Alexis’s uncles to immigrate to Canada:

Il s’agit d’un pays beaucoup plus agréable que les États-Unis, dit-on. [AFR, p.65]

In comparison to the humiliating process to which they have been submitted as refugees, their application for Canadian citizenship appears easy and the country itself seems more welcoming. Instantly, Alexis’s idea about Québec is one of acceptance devoid of victimization, even though this idealization is counterbalanced by the fear of the unknown brought on by the trying process of migration:

C’est comme emprunter les chaussures de quelqu’un qui n’a pas la même pointure que soi, pour s’engager sur une route inconnue. [AFR, p.127-8]

This mixed emotion recalls the end of Dany Laferrière’s *Le Cri des oiseaux fous* (2000), in which the author flees to Montréal for his own safety, but is anxious at the thought that

²¹⁰ Eva Hoffman recalls the same idealisation of the American continent in *Lost in Translation – A Life in a new Language* (New York: Penguin Group. 1989. p.84). The choice of her parents is irrational and based on little facts: ‘This man, whom my father helped in some way at the beginning of the war, offers to sponsor us as immigrants to Canada, which, he writes, is the real land of milk and honey, the land of opportunity, the place where you can grow rich and be happy. For my father, this is an irresistibly alluring vision – to become a man of means in the American way, a man of substance. We don’t have the remotest idea of what we might find or do there, but America – Canada in our minds is automatically subsumed under that category – has for us the old fabulous associations: streets paved with gold, the goose that laid the golden egg. There is also that book about Canada from the war. And, my father reminds my mother, whose impulses really draw her toward Israel, in Canada there is no war, and there never will be. Canada is the land of peace.’

nothing and nobody expects him. It seems that Haitian writers invent a partial picture of Québec: on the one hand, they compose a mental image of safety and freedom; on the other hand, the picture is spoilt by the lack of concrete elements. All migrant characters seem to have formed a preliminary idea of Québec, which is not based on any actual facts. It is a projection of their hopes and fears. The borders that they have crossed or invented were only in their imagination: they were getting accustomed to the idea of living in a new country.

This fantasy vision of Québec presented through the characters reflects the apprehension of migrants when faced with the prospect of settling in a foreign country. But migrant authors do not stop there and strive to redefine the geography of the country, and of Montréal in particular, through their own representation. Montréal has become one of the main topics of Québécois literature, particularly since the 1960s, as it is the scene where almost a third of the novels published in Québec take place.²¹¹ The city often appears as a symbol of cultural diversity, of modernity and of cultural dynamism, and, if it is often a representation of Québécois cultural identity, some authors, such as Gabrielle Roy, have also shown that Montréal can also be the place where one meet and experience 'otherness'.²¹² It is therefore interesting and significant that migrant authors should appropriate this topic/place and redevelop it. We have seen that migrant authors describe parts of the city that appear to be exclusively inhabited by migrant communities. In Dany Laferrière's *Comment faire l'amour avec un nègre sans se fatiguer* (1999), Gérard Étienne's *La Romance en do mineur de Maître Clo* (2000), Mona Latif-Ghattas's *Le Double Conte de l'exil* (1990), Naïm Kattan's *La Fiancée promise* (1983), Régine Robin's *La Québécoise* (1983) or Xavière Sénéchal's *Le Pays d'ailleurs* (1999), migrant authors describe or allude to areas of Montreal (e.g. the Marché Jean-Talon in *La Québécoise*, the Boulevard Saint-Laurent in *La Fiancée Promise*, and other multi-ethnic districts such as Côtés-des-Neiges in the novels of Laferrière, Étienne or Sénéchal) that have been reclaimed by migrant communities. Common to all the descriptions in these novels is the absence of Québécois people and poverty: these areas seem to be populated only by

²¹¹ This number is extracted from Rosemary Chapman's *Siting the Quebec Novel* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2000, p.85-6). According to Chapman, 'the Montreal novel constitutes over 31% of the novels published on the 1960s (the period of the Révolution tranquille), almost 28% of the total for the 1980s and almost 26.5% of the total for the 1930s. In fact, the figure for the 1940s, 19.43% of the total of novels published, is relatively low (particularly when one considers that about half of the population of Quebec live within the Montreal region).'

²¹² We refer to Rosemary Chapman's second chapter of *Siting the Quebec Novel* (*Ibid.*) in which she studies the representation of Montreal in the work of Michel Tremblay and Gabrielle Roy, and shows the ambivalent role of the city in the cultural identity of Québécois.

struggling migrant communities. We have seen previously that Étienne, Latif-Ghattas, or Robin give insights into the world of migrant (and sometimes illegal) workers, operating underground, with little social and legal protection. Poverty rules their lives: if it takes the form of a bohemian lifestyle in Laferrière's novel, it has dramatic consequences for characters like Adrienne in *La Romance en do mineur de Maître Clo* (2000) because she feels ignored and ultimately violated and by her society of adoption, in which she hoped to find a better life. These descriptions of poverty, exploitation and menial labour – which to a certain degree remain Gabrielle Roy's vision of the working-class suburb of Saint-Henri in *Bonheur d'Occasion* – modify slightly the image of modernity and respect of cultural communities favoured by Québécois authors. Migrant authors depict a cosmopolitan city; however, this cosmopolitanism does not imply solely developed and rich countries. It also includes 'third world' countries, i.e. parts of the world that are often overlooked, because of their colonial pasts as dominated countries. Therefore, not only do migrant authors suggest a redefinition of Montreal's landscape and social boundaries, they also propose a redefinition of cosmopolitanism, that would no longer be mainly Eurocentric and that would take other cultures into account.²¹³ Moreover, with these images of social realities, migrant authors present a point of view that contradicts the elitist 'pure-laine' Québécois (and Canadian) self-portrait as a successful and egalitarian country. They demand an acknowledgement of the contribution of all levels of society to the image of success. In order to gain recognition, migrant authors metaphorically retrace the map of Montreal, which includes the marginal areas of the city.

Migrant authors do not merely redraw a map that broadens the boundaries of the city; they also place their own landmarks on it. To places such as the Outremont suburb, the Parc Lafontaine, the Rue Sainte Catherine or even 'la Main' that form the background of most Montreal novels, migrant authors also add their own geographical locations. Chinatown, Little Italy, the Jean Talon area or the Jewish suburbs on the Plateau Mont-Royal are used as geographical markers of the migrant influence on the city.²¹⁴ These places are particularly present and represented in Régine Robin's *La Québécoise* (1983).

²¹³ According to the websites <http://www.statcan.ca/english/census96/feb17/eo1pq.htm> and <http://www.ercomer.org/metropolis/proceedings/Montreal.html>, an increased immigration rate in Québec in the early 1990s led people from a wider range of nationalities (such as the Philippines or Sri Lanka) to emigrate to Québec. The proportion of refugees also increases compared to that of economic immigrants. From the 1990s particularly, there is a surge of political refugees from countries such as the former Yugoslavia or Sri Lanka.

²¹⁴ Some of these areas have previously figured in Québécois literature, but often the trace of migrants on the neighbourhood is not mentioned. One may also think of the Jewish Montreal featured in anglophone literature in Québec, notably in the novels of Mordecai Richler.

The narrator comments on the artificiality of places such as these. They represent the physical *entre-deux* or hybridity of cultures. They are simultaneously the representation of otherness for the dominant culture, and the representation of the influence of the culture of adoption on migrant communities. For the dominant culture, these areas have a foreign feel because one might be exposed to foreign languages, foreign food, and people whose behaviour suggests a foreign way of life. The names of Little Italy or Chinatown in themselves suggest that their inhabitants have transformed or built a place that attempts to re-create the lifestyle that they abandoned when they left their country of origin. But, as the narrator of *La Québécoise* points out, these suburbs have also become a caricature of the culture that they are supposed to have preserved. In her view, the ‘preservation’ of culture has crystallized around language of course, but also cultural clichés that are displayed - almost boastfully - by each community:

DES GHETTOS
 DES CLIVAGES
 CHACUN SA LANGUE
 SA COMMUNAUTÉ
 CHACUN SON QUARTIER
 SON DÉPUTÉ.
SES GÂTEAUX. SON JOURNAL. SA RELIGION
SON FOLKLORE, SES POMPONS.
 CHACUN SON HISTOIRE
 SEULS
 À PART
 NOUS. VOUS. EUX. [*LQ*, p.158, my italics]

It seems that these places of hybridity maintain a certain cohesion of cultural minorities, but they also ensure that borders between ‘new’ migrants and Québécois are kept visible. Communities are not fooled by the artificiality of these places: they are a snapshot of their cultural identities, in which cultural characteristics have been voluntarily fixed in order to be preserved and passed on. Transformation would be equivalent to the destruction of the little trace left of their origins. Régine Robin, for example, implies that Little Italy is as artificially constructed as the fantasy attraction park of Disney Land:

Un Disney Land italien. Une vraie ou une fausse Italie comment savoir? Le besoin d’être là ensemble, de pouvoir évoquer le pays, la ville, le village? Peut-être! [*LQ*, p.181]

Real and fake elements are mixed to become cultural markers of identity. These, even though caricatural and inaccurate, appear as necessary for migrant communities as the bilingual signs or the renaming of streets with French names, etc that Québécois people negotiated and obtained through legislation, including the famous ‘Loi 101’.

These hybrid urban places in migrant novels appear to be enclaves of cosmopolitanism, of cultural reinvention. These enclaves of ethnicity are also enclaves in which cultural identities have become detached from their place of origin, and have re-invented themselves in the neutrality and anonymity of a modern urban metropolis. Within their novels, migrant writers create or rather re-invent an imaginary territory. Régine Robin names it 'ville imaginaire' (*LQ*, p.186), Naïm Kattan an 'entre-deux' (*LFP*, p.198), and Jacques Derrida describes it as a 'ville franche'.²¹⁵ Derrida derives his notion of the 'ville franche' from that of the medieval one. A 'ville franche' is a safe place, within its own boundaries and independent from external and more powerful influence. Anyone, irrespective of his or her religion or culture, is welcome and offered protection for as long as he or she respects the rules. The 'ville franche' is therefore an independent place, with its own rules and logic, in which all cultural opinions coexist and are equally respected. This is the common denominator to the three terms employed above, and self-determination is the key to its creation, as Méir remarks in *La Fiancée promise* (1983) referring to Québec:

-Ici, nous sommes entre les deux, dit-il. Nous pouvons puiser de toutes parts: le meilleur et le pire.
[*LFP*, p.198]

The city becomes a crossing point between cultures of course, but also periods of time. We have seen that it seemed that time had been stopped in places such as Chinatown or Little Italy, but the city also seem to be the place where present and past collide. In Robin's *L'Immense Fatigue des pierres* (1999), the main character of the short story 'Mère perdue sur le World Wide Web' (p.99-125) is confronted with a lifestyle that he thought had disappeared during the Second World War:

Au détour d'une rue, il vit apparaître quatre ou cinq hassidim en costume avec leur caftan et leur shtraïml, ce bonnet de fourrure qu'ils portaient aux jours de fête par tous les temps, et leurs chaussettes blanches qui leur montaient jusqu'aux genoux. Barbus, maigres et blafards, ils avançaient gravement, lentement comme dans un film au ralenti. Il resta pétrifié. La dernière fois qu'il avait vu une scène semblable, c'était en Pologne, en 1937, l'année de la mort de son père et de leur départ pour la France. Il avait sept ans. Depuis, rien. Ces gens, c'était la réincarnation du Shetl, d'un monde qui était parti en fumée. Il prit peur. Montréal lui sembla une ville étrange, la ville des fantômes. [*IFDP*, p.109-10]

It seems that the 'ville imaginaire', therefore, allows migrant authors to reconcile not only the opposition between 'here' and 'there' by representing the diversity and interaction of cultures, but also the opposition between 'now' and 'then' by reconstructing artefacts that symbolise their past.

²¹⁵ See Jacques Derrida. *Cosmopolites de tous les pays – encore un effort*. London: Routledge. 2001.

The city in migrant novel is also the place of *babélisme*: all voices are heard and have equal rights to be heard. We have seen previously that migrant writers have used their work not only to represent their own cultural identity within the landscape of Québécois literature, but also to consolidate their places beside the Québécois in the construction of the country, be it intellectually or materially. Their work contains words, cultural elements and references that belong to their place of origin, making their novels themselves an example of *babélisme*. By mixing languages and cultures, *babélisme* contributes to creating a cosmopolitan ‘ville franche’, but cultural codes become jumbled. In *La Langue et le nombril*, Chantal Bouchard gives a definition of cultural identity and details the role of sharing a cultural code within a community:

Qu'est-ce qui permet à un groupe humain quelconque de se reconnaître comme une communauté? A cette question, il est d'usage de répondre: le partage d'un certain nombre de caractéristiques, de coutumes et d'intérêts communs, le fait de vivre dans un même espace, la possibilité de communication entre les membres du groupe, l'identification des individus à la collectivité, etc. Mais la culture ne se résume pas à une ensemble de croyances et de coutumes communes à un groupe humain, elle constitue un véritable code de significations permettant à l'individu d'interpréter le monde dans lequel il vit et de se définir lui-même dans cet univers. Cet ensemble de significations est partagé par tous les membres d'une communauté, il est acquis progressivement, comme le langage, par la vie dans le groupe, et il conditionne aussi la perception, de même que la compréhension qu'a l'individu des événements et des choses qui l'entourent.²¹⁶

Bouchard insists that culture is a ‘code of meanings’ shared by members of a community and serves the purpose of interpreting the world in the same manner. In migrant novels of Québec, we have observed that authors voluntarily alter this code or introduce new elements in the form of new words. They widen the cultural code by adding their own references, and in doing so, they take their place within the cultural code. These additions to the dominant culture result in a progressive hybridisation of the dominant culture by creating passageways between cultures and cultural communities and altering the hierarchy between them. We have seen that languages make the borders of communities permeable because they can be used as a mask or disguise to infiltrate another community; but they also contribute to the collision of present and past because language is, as we have seen, invested with emotions and memories. *Babélisme*, therefore, is an instrument to cosmopolitanize society by contributing to mixing cultural codes and references into a new cosmopolitan code that continues to evolve and change simultaneously through the interactions between cultural groups.

²¹⁶ Chantal Bouchard. *La Langue et le nombril – histoire d'une obsession québécoise*. Québec: Fides. 1998. p.19.

For most migrant writers studied in this thesis, this process of jumbling cultures is shown in parallel with the assertion of their origins whose memory is preserved in their novels. (We have previously seen the importance of autobiographical aspects in migrant authors' work, and particularly in that of Haitian and French authors.) However, Régine Robin, Émile Ollivier, Naïm Kattan and even Dany Laferrière to a lesser extent, in their most recent work, propose a vision of cosmopolitanism and *babélisme* that goes beyond the boundaries of a single 'ville imaginaire' or an individual's sense of national cultural identity. In interviews and other critical material, Ollivier, Kattan and Laferrière, consider themselves migrant writers,²¹⁷ in the sense that they feel they do not belong to one specific geographical place, but have experience of cosmopolitanism and find themselves at the confluence of cultures that we have described above. Ollivier illustrates this life of intermediacy through the character of Adrien in *Les Urnes scellées* (1995). Adrien has always considered himself primarily Haitian and his exile was supposed to be a temporary measure to escape the Duvalier dictatorship. His return visit to Haiti changes his view by bringing the realisation that he is unable to return permanently to Haiti because Québec has become just as much part of him as Haiti was, and that he is now torn between the two:²¹⁸

Il retourne à Montréal. Il revient à la case départ et rejoint ainsi le cortège de tous les errants, des sans-patrie, des déracinés en rupture avec leur passé, culpabilisés d'avoir survécu à tant d'holocaustes. Ils ont souvent perdu leurs points de repère, vivent tant bien que mal, connaissent à la longue de grandes joies, créent de nouvelles familles, poussent de nouvelles racines et puis, un beau jour, non ils ne meurent pas, ils s'absentent à pas feutrés. [US, p.293]

We have observed previously that, for the fictional migrant characters, realizing one's hybridity makes it impossible to return permanently to one's country of origin. This translates into living permanently in the 'ville imaginaire', in which the characters maintain their cultural identity while trying to control other cultural influence. As for

²¹⁷ See the following material in conjunction with authors' views on their status as migrant writers: Naïm Kattan. 'Comment devient – on écrivain francophone', *La Licorne*, 27, 1993. p.401-404, and *Id.*, 'Création et déplacement', *Possibles: Parler d'ailleurs d'ici*, vol.17, No2, 1993 (printemps). p.39-46; Dany Laferrière. *J'écris comme je vis*. Genouilleux: La Passe du vent. 2000; Émile Ollivier. 'Un travail de taupe: écrire avec un stigmate de migrant', *Possibles: L'Amérique inavouable*, vol.8, No4, 1984 (été). p.111-117, et *Id.*, 'Autoportrait', *Lettres Québécoises*, No 102, 2001 (été). p.7; Francine Bordeleau. 'Émile Ollivier: l'écriture pour desceller la mémoire', *Lettres Québécoises*, No 102. 2001 (été). p.8-10; Stanley Péan. 'Émile Ollivier: entre nostalgie et lucidité', *Lettres Québécoises*, No 102. 2001 (été). p.11-12. We have not found equivalent evidence regarding other authors considered in this thesis, but we hope to have proved that their work clearly points towards a similar point of view.

²¹⁸ Other migrant authors have developed similar situations, in which characters become aware of their hybridity. In Neil Bissoondath's *The Worlds within her* (London: Vintage, 2001), for example, the main character has migrated to Québec as a child and has no conscious memories of her country of origin. The death of her mother leads her to return and to rediscover her origins. By doing so, the character reclaims her past, her origin, and more importantly, becomes aware of her multiple cultural allegiance.

migrant authors, they state that their 'ville imaginaire' is their creative work. Within the boundaries of their own creation, they can, at will, explore their memory and the cultural combination brought by migration. This is, for example, what Kattan concludes in his article 'création et déplacement':

Il [l'écrivain] s'apercevra alors qu'en changeant de langue et de culture, il n'a fait que se déplacer, qu'aménager à nouveau une distance. Il l'aurait fait de toute façon, différemment. Là, il le fait dans l'accélération et le drame, pressé, poussé, violenté. S'il sait résister, il absorbera le choc, ajoutera le choc, ajoutera à sa richesse des biens inconnus et, en persistant, écrivain, il se recrée en créant.²¹⁹

For Kattan, therefore, writing fits Derrida's definition of the 'ville franche', as it is a place of negotiation between memory and present, between origin and adoption, between languages. Émile Ollivier also suggests that writing has provided him with a sense of stability and continuity, counterbalancing the chaotic experience of migration:

Réflexion faite, une vie n'est pas un conglomerat de tranches séparées; elle est tout simplement une totalité. Comme un langage, elle est constituée de flux inconscients, de faisceaux de relations, de réseaux de consciences, d'hybridation, de juxtaposition et que sais-je encore? Car, au fond, *nous sommes le produit des êtres que nous avons croisés*, des vivants qui nous entourent, des contemporains mais aussi des morts, de ceux qui nous ont précédés, ceux qui forment la tradition, ceux dont on se nourrit, y compris les êtres imaginaires, les êtres de papier. Les plissements, les crevasses et les longs rubans de flottements, d'incertitudes et d'hésitations jaillissent comme des coulées de laves ardentes provenant des soubresauts d'un océan souterrain: ils paraissent hors d'atteinte d'une observation *directe mais l'écriture, miracle! les met à ma portée. Thérapie pour la subsistance, cadeau pour les sens, bouée pour l'esprit, elle permet le dévoilement progressif de profondeurs abyssales insoupçonnées...*²²⁰ [my italics]

For Ollivier - as for Laferrière whose work is conceived as his 'American autobiography' -, writing is instrumental in producing a synthesis of experiences and a combination of cultural influences which allow him to transcend his personal experience and create universal narratives.

However, Régine Robin's latest work *L'Immense Fatigue des pierres – Biofictions* (1999) proposes a slightly different position in the sense that writing is not so much a place of synthesis, but rather a space in which all experiences coexist and all borders seem to dissolve almost completely. Whereas the narrator(s) in *La Québécoise* (1983) evolved within the boundaries of Montréal, the characters of *L'Immense Fatigue des pierres – Biofictions* (1999) seem to be going back and forth between countries without ever settling anywhere for long. The landscapes of any urban metropolis themselves seem to be reduced to sketched details or an international airport. Robin no longer puts emphasis on the origins

²¹⁹ Naïm Kattan. 'Création et déplacement', *Possibles: Parler d'ailleurs d'ici*, vol.17, No2, 1993 (printemps). p.46.

²²⁰ Émile Ollivier. 'Autoportrait', *Lettres Québécoises*, No 102. 2001 (été). p.7.

of her characters, but on movement and on the fact that they are on a life-long journey. In this book, the internet is omnipresent and is the main source of information and communication. It becomes the meeting and connecting 'place' of the separate characters of the short stories. With the use of the internet, geographical place becomes almost irrelevant as it allows its users to reach information and other people around the world and to be part of a community without physically meeting anyone. It contradicts the definition of Chantal Bouchard that we have mentioned above, because it allows people to come together and share the same cultural code without actually living together and within the same territorial boundaries. In Robin's work, the internet appears to be the dislocation of culture as it has been conceived until now. It is important to note also that not only are the characters de-territorialized, they are also de-personalised: as internet users in Robin's short stories adopt pseudonyms, change gender, nationality, age, etc., they could be anybody. The boundaries between one individual and 'others' seem to blur too, as characters reinvent their past by putting it into narratives and 'improving' it with borrowed episodes, or even 'borrow' someone else's life and identity. This is accompanied by the use of several languages to suit the circumstances: if languages are sometimes invested of emotions and memories, they are more often devoid of sentimental value and merely instrumental in the character's journey. In the mishmash of information on the internet, all cultural and personal combinations become possible. It is the extreme case of *babélisme*: once all geographical and personal borders have disappeared, there is no 'other', or, alternatively, 'otherness' invests everything. Individuals are faced with an infinity of choices and combinations, and the answer provided by one cultural code is no longer sufficient to understand the modern world, represented here by modern technology. It seems that, for Robin, cultural identity can no longer be considered in terms of origin, gender, age, geographical location, etc., but rather as a sum of influences and interests, always changing and evolving, or, as Émile Ollivier puts it, a 'produit des êtres que nous avons croisés'. Hybridity seems an inevitable process, despite efforts to preserve the past or cultural identities from the surrounding turmoil of codes. Even though this process has always existed, Robin shows that it is accelerated by an increased mobility as access to means of transport becomes easier and as means of transport themselves are faster and more numerous. The development of modern technology and telecommunications plays a great part in this extended freedom of movement, as virtual travel and identity offer potentially endless opportunities to transform existing social and cultural combinations and to reinvent oneself.

Conclusion

If migrant writing in Québec allows its authors to re-create their past and the main source of their cultural identity, it is also a place of hybridity. Migrant authors use their own ambivalence and their multiple cultural allegiances to position their presence within the geographical boundaries of the country and of the city, but also to infiltrate the imaginary boundaries of Québécois culture. This process leads them to slowly detach themselves from the limitations of belonging to a geographical space, and to create an imaginary one – a ‘ville franche’, an ‘entre-deux’ – in which they can negotiate the multitude of influences with which they are faced during their journey of migration.

The creation of this ever-increasing imaginary space of migrant literature within the Québécois culture challenges the very unity of the ‘nous Québécois’ because not only does it introduce ‘otherness’ into a cultural group that sees itself as tight-knit and united by the same values, but it also introduces the idea of similarities which challenge the concepts of uniqueness and difference upon which nations traditionally base their claim of independence.

Migrant authors propose a remodelling of the culture of Québec that does not try so much to eliminate others as to coexist and exchange cultural elements with others. Their writing becomes the privileged space in which to portray an ever-evolving culture that retains ingredients of the past but combines it with elements of the present and aspects ‘borrowed’ from other cultures. By emphasizing the importance of the journey in the formation of identity rather than focusing solely on origins, migrant authors aim to avoid the unproductive stagnation of introverted cultural identity, and to establish stronger links with the dominant Québécois culture.

Conclusion

The study of four groups of migrant writers in Québec has provided an overview of the major themes that they treat. It is hardly a surprise that memory, exile and alterity constitute the main thematic focus of their work and the centre of their preoccupations. Authors transpose these topics into narratives that explore their past (be it personal or collective), their motivations for leaving their birthplace, their feelings upon abandoning their country and arriving in a new one, their confrontation with the population and the culture of the country of adoption, and their coming to terms with their new way of life. They show migrants' experience in terms of a journey, almost an epic voyage in Émile Ollivier's lyrical style. Instead of conforming to the clichés of poverty and menial work commonly associated with immigrants, authors portray migrants as makers of their own destiny, and emphasize their achievements. Writing has also a cathartic effect as migrant authors voice their angst at becoming 'other', 'strangers to themselves'.²²¹ By exploring the past and their origins, they assert their specificity, or to use Derrida's word, their 'différance'. Writing (or re-writing) the past is not giving in to nostalgia: it is a way of tracing the borders of one's identity up to the time of migration and, therefore, to the present; it is a way of determining one's imaginary territory that comprises a sum of experiences and upon which an individual or a people has based his, her or their uniqueness. The revival of the past in migrant writing achieves the continuity that migrants' lives seem to lack as a result of their displacement and of the necessary changes it has brought on. Through the process of writing, past and present coexist and collide, challenging the boundaries imposed by time and space and allowing interaction between both set of experiences. Constantly shuttling between two periods of time and various geographical locations, migrant authors are led to see themselves as hybrids, striving to reconcile the cultures and worlds that are part of them.

Their work, indeed, is a place of exchange and dialogue, reflecting the influence of, and the attraction for, each world of experience. It shows the constant negotiations that migrants have to enter into in order to keep a balance between the different forces and influences that rule their lives. To keep living within the boundaries of the present and of their country of adoption, they must consent to change and to adapt. Change, for migrants,

²²¹ This refers to Julia Kristeva's *Strangers to ourselves* (New York: Columbia University Press. 1991), which explores the concept of otherness. Kristeva argues that otherness often takes the obvious and external form of foreignness, but it is also an intrinsic part of each individual that represents one's unconscious or uncontrollable aspects. Otherness is the fear of the unknown and the unexpected.

has often been seen and represented as a renunciation or a necessary sacrifice, but, from the 1980s on, migrant authors start re-claiming the right to retain their past. Their work acts as an intermediary, a transition between worlds and times, in which they try out different scenarios of migration, or in which they can explore their memory and express their nostalgia at will. In any case, writing is a way of exploring Otherness. Not only do authors review the elements that make them different from members of Québécois society, they also explore how their displacement has made them different from who they were before they emigrated and from the people they left behind. Of course, their origins and present lives have shaped their identity, but migrants identify a third type of element that makes their life slightly different from those associated with the dominant culture: the gaps and the areas of collision between both worlds, in which the meaning of cultural codes and geographical boundaries is challenged or lost in the Babel of voices and languages. This uncertainty is conveyed through their writing. Transplanted in an environment for which they have not necessarily been prepared by their cultural upbringing, migrant authors use their writing as a tool to search for new codes of interpretation, not only for themselves but also for their society of adoption. Their work is a place of dialogue – or the beginning of one – held in the hope of finding an understanding, a new common code of representations that includes migrants' views.

The introduction of migrant elements - such as foreign words, references to alien cultural elements or events, migrant characters - in narratives introduces an obvious appearance of 'otherness' in Québécois literature, but migrant authors take a step further by depicting Québécois society itself from their point of view. They force Québécois people to look at themselves through foreign eyes. By voicing their own preoccupations, francophone migrant authors change the perspective on Québécois preoccupations, such as the century-old debate between Anglophones and Francophones. They alter the imaginary borders of the country of adoption to include their own, and redraw the map of the city to place their own landmarks. They do not aim at the deconstruction of Québécois society, but at that of the hierarchy of cultures within it. Reluctant to take sides in the Anglophones/Francophones debate and in that of independence without guarantee for their own place and role within the Québécois territory, the work of migrant authors show that it is now time to claim their share of the country, to re-claim their input into its cultural and social life, and to take a more visible stand in the discussion about the future of Québec. This position – it seems - is reflected in the negative answer to the second referendum in 1995, which again proposed the independence of Québec but did not address the role and

place of migrants in it. The representation of the de-construction of borders in migrant writing in Québec suggests a redefinition of cultural identity for individuals as well as for groups. Rather than proposing a concept of identity that excludes otherness, they offer one that welcomes it and that encourages diversity. They also highlight the active role of individuals in this redefinition as the core of movement and hybridity between cultures. Cultural identity is no longer considered as something one inherits, it is something that one becomes, the sum of experiences that one collects and adopts on one's life journey. This theory reduces the concept of culture to individual choice. As a result, one is able - and encouraged - to compose and freely transform one's cultural identity around one's personal interests, and regardless of nationalist allegiances.

While redefining cultural identity as a journey, migrant writing in Québec also highlights the fact that, as well as being a sum of elements and artefacts, culture is above all a malleable mass of influences. Most migrants' cultural codes become almost obsolete from the moment they leave their country of origin. It is crucial for them to adapt fast to their new lives, and migrant writing shows the importance of constantly altering and updating one's cultural code in order to make sense of the present. While retaining the essential characteristics of one's past, one should ensure that culture remains flexible enough to adapt to new situations and places, for fear of becoming disconnected from both past and present and losing oneself. The ability to adapt is also a valuable lesson for Québécois society. In a world where technologies and communications speed up exchanges and interactions between cultures, and where economic powers encourage mass production to compete in a global market, migrant experience proposes a way to deal not only with Otherness but also to resist the pressure from dominant forces to smooth out differences so as to achieve a social and cultural homogeneity beyond borders. Migrant writing in Québec shows a cosmopolitan society that preserves and respects differences and divergences, but also creates links that connect groups. Their coexistence is made possible because each group is more aware of its own borders but is also prepared to compromise and negotiate its ground. Migrant literature in Québec offers an alternative cultural ideology and focus: the representation of Québec no longer tends to be that of a bastion of Francophone resistance to an Anglo-Saxon world; it is a cosmopolitan society that responds to the challenges of the present and is not afraid of the cultural changes ahead. Its resilience lies in its ability to remember its migrant essence.

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