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College of Arts & Humanities

French Studies

The Invention of the Self in Female Travel Writings: Isabella Bird, Alexandra David-Néel and Isabelle Eberhardt

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Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the Degree of PhD

Supervised by: Professor Olivier Salazar Ferrer, Professor Ramona Fotiade and Professor Ophira Gamliel

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Abstract

The British writer Isabella Bird, the French writer and orientalist Alexandra David-Néel and the Swiss journalist and writer Isabelle Eberhardt all had travel in common. They wandered throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, a period when women were more associated with the home and therefore with immobility. These writers show how nomadism allows them to redefine themselves.

First of all, we will see that the reinvention of identity is done through a departure for elsewhere. Indeed, travelling to a new country (Japan, India, Tibet, Algeria) will offer the three writers the access to new practices, but these practices reflect the complexity of the relationship between the West and the East. That being said, Isabella Bird, Alexandra David-Néel and Isabelle Eberhardt, thanks to an intellectual nomadism, break down the West-East binary opposition by questioning it. Indeed, they learn new languages (Arabic and Tibetan), they understand the culture of a different country, they participate in all kinds of local practices, and they even convert to a new religion: Buddhism for Alexandra David-Néel and Sufism for Eberhardt. In other words, they become the other, or rather they become other and show that identity is a process in constant movement.

The three women also challenge the opposition between women and men, shaking up the codes associated with their gender by travelling through spaces considered masculine, dressing as men, existing in the public and intellectual spheres. Isabella Bird was the first woman member of the Royal Geographical Society, Alexandra David-Néel travelled alone for 14 years and became the first European woman to enter Lhasa (a forbidden city at the time), and Isabelle Eberhardt lived her nomadic life under a male and Muslim identity.

But identity is also defined by the narrative. Indeed, we will see that their travel writings contribute to the reinvention of the self and even have a therapeutic effect. Whether through travel writings, fiction or letters: writing permits the performative to exist. Indeed, for Isabella Bird, Alexandra David-Néel and Isabelle Eberhardt, the reinvention of the self is found in the balance between the narrative and the performative, with a need to fix memories, to be one's own witness to the evolution of the self while existing in the predominantly male public space.

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Author's declaration

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Anaïs Delcol

INTRODUCTION

> 'Si l'identité n'est plus une donnée en soi mais un processus non achevé qui est inséparable des réalités discursives utilisées pour l'exprimer, le voyage, comme forme de déplacement, devient comme le catalyseur qui va révéler mais aussi remettre en question ce mécanisme'[1].

The link between travelling, writing and gender has already been questioned and explored by writers such as Dúnlaith Bird (*Travelling in Different Skins: Gender Identity in Women's Oriental Travelogues, 1850-1950,* 2012), Monica Anderson (*Women and the Politics of Travel, 1870–1914*, *2006),* Elizabeth Bohls (*Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics*, 1716-1818, 2004), Barbara Hodgson (*Dreaming of East, Western Women and the Exotic Allure of the Orient, 2005),* Marie Louise Pratt *(Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation, 2007)* or Carl Thompson (*Travel Writing*, 2011). They all point out that travelling is primarily associated with men and that the journey is often a demonstration of manhood as shown, for example, by the practice of the 'Grand Tour' (Black, Jeremy, *The British Abroad: The Grand Tour,* 2003). The Grand Tour took place mainly in the eighteenth century and is a cultural tour of Europe undertaken by young men of the highest classes in European society. This aristocratic educational trip was intended to further their learnedness. These journeys generally lasted several years and became a normal, even necessary practice for young men destined for high careers or stemming from the cultivated aristocracy.

Thus, men have often been seen as the symbol of mobility while women have always symbolised immobility[2]. This was still the case in English and French society in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, periods that will be studied in this thesis. Nevertheless, Carl Thompson showed that the man-woman opposition was not so radical: 'The 1980s witnessed several pioneering anthologies of women's early travel writing, amply demonstrating an extensive female tradition in what many had assumed to be an overwhelmingly — perhaps

[1] Jean-Xavier Ridon, *Le Voyage en son miroir* (Paris: Kimé, 2002), 23.

[2] The Grand Tour is, of course, not the only example of male mobility. Men were more mobile thanks to their roles as explorers, settlers or even pilgrims.

inherently — masculine genre'[3]. Indeed, some women in the aristocratic classes - (like Anna Francesca Cradock, Marie d'Agoult or Margaret King also known as Lady Mount Cashell)- already had access to travel in the eighteenth century. Moreover, the development of tourism allowed women to discover the world as well. Women wanted to attain more freedom but also to exist in the public sphere and travelling could appeared as a solution. Indeed, according to Rosi Braidotti : 'Le nomadisme constitue le premier pas vers un processus de compréhension de l'aspect illusoire de la stabilité des identités. Les éléments les plus intéressants dans cette proposition ont trait à l'idée du bricolage et à la remise en question de l'identité fixe du sujet'[4]. Nomadism seems to redistribute the identity cards and indeed allows women to escape a predetermined destiny of European women. Yet most of the time, compared to men's journeys, women's travels were less free and they were rarely taken seriously when they wrote about it, as confirmed by Elizabeth A. Bohls: 'Both tourism and writing for publication took women into the public realm in potentially transgressive ways. Sensibility and taste helped legitimize a woman (…) in her pursuit of these dubious endeavors'[5]. Thus, when they were able to travel, their testimonies were supposed to remain in conformity with the requirements of acceptability, which is to say limited to topics relating to native customs and habits. Indeed, travel and its writing were seen as masculine activities because it implied autonomy and a presence in the public sphere. By conforming to the concepts of 'sensibility' and 'taste' in their travel writings- that is, to aesthetic appreciation- women made their activity more acceptable and thus enabled them to justify their presence in the public and intellectual space. In such a context, it may be surprising to learn that in 1892, Isabella Bird was the first woman to be elected Fellow of the Royal Geographic Society. How did she, as a woman, manage to be an intellectual figure of her time? Just like Alexandra David-Néel and Isabelle Eberhardt, she questions the codes of the society she lives in. This thesis will help us understand how questioning the self through nomadism allows these three women to reinvent themselves.

According to Judith Butler in her book *Le Récit de soi*, 'si le 'je' n'est pas en harmonie avec les normes morales, cela signifie simplement que le sujet doit délibérer sur ces normes

[3] Carlene Thompson, 'Journeys to Authority: Reassessing Women's Early Travel Writing, 1763–1862,' *Women's Writing*, no. 24 (2017): 131.
[4] Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* (New York: Columbia Press University, 1994), 159.
[5] Elizabeth A.Bohls, *Women Travel Writers and the Language of Aesthetics, 1716-1818* (Cambridge: University Press, 2004), 103.

et qu'une part de la délibération occasionnera une compréhension critique de leur genèse et de leurs significations sociales'[6]. It is this malaise that drives the three travellers to set off, and it is this criticism of social norms that will enable them to understand and embrace a new culture. In 1878, Isabella Bird travelled alone to Japan – her best-known trip, on which we will focus – with the desire to meet the Ainu, indigenous people living in northern Japan, particularly on the island of Hokkaido. Alexandra David-Néel undertook a solo excursion to Lhasa in Tibet (1911-1924), a city that was forbidden at the time, and Isabelle Eberhardt fled Switzerland for Algeria in 1897, where she lives under a male identity to roam the desert with the nomadic people. Thus, 'Le voyage permet aux individus de repousser leurs limites, de réaliser des faits, d'adopter des attitudes et des pensées qui n'auraient pas pu se développer au sein de leur sémiosphère. C'est pourquoi le voyage est le moment idéal pour se recentrer sur soi-même'[7]. 'Se reconcentrer sur soi-même', expresses the idea that travel is a time for introspection and self-definition, enabling travelers to affirm or rediscover their identity.

But what is identity? Many have tried to define this complex notion and we will try to understand it by starting with the etymology. Identity comes from the Latin *idem* which means the same. Identity would be that which remains the same, something immutable. In the Middle Ages, identity was defined more as conformity to a group since: 'Cela participe en ce sens d'une mise en ordre du monde, et s'oppose au chaos de l'informe'[8]. Indeed, this idea explained by Fanny Oudin is also developed by Ilsen About and Vincent Denis in *Identifier à l'époque médiévale*[9] where we understand that in the Middle Ages, society tried to categorise people by their seals, their coats of arms, their emblems and their clothes in order to easily identify the groups to which they belonged. In the 19th century, Hegel thought of identity in direct link with social relationships, that is to say the different social practices but also individual interactions and conflicts. For him, the individual is not defined in isolation, but always through a process of interaction with others. In his book The P*henomenology of Spirit*, Hegel developed this topic -Chapter IV 'The Truth of Self-Certainty'-, where he explored the dialectic of Lordship and Bondage: 'Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the

[6] Judith Butler, *Le Récit de soi* (Paris : PUF, 2007), 8.
[7] Fanny Martín Quatremare, 'Identités plurielles au cours des voyages d'Alexandra David-Neel,' *Hybrida,* no. 4 (2022) : 201, https://www.jstor.org/stable/48765794.
[8] Fanny Oudin, 'Identité et persona. Quelques réflexions liminaires autour de l'image de soi au Moyen-Age,' *Questes*, no. 24 (2012) : 25, https://doi.org/10.4000/questes.3090.
[9] Ilsen About and Denis Vincent, *Identifier à l'époque médiévale, XIe-XVe siècle* (Paris: La Découverte, 2010), 8-31.

fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged'[10]. With this example, he showed that one wants to be recognized as superior and the other as an indispensable worker, but neither can exist and be defined without the other. This idea is developed later by Freud, who affirms the importance of others and of the social environment in the identity process[11]. According to him, there is identity for oneself and identity for others; and add to this the different instances of the individual which are the Id, the ego and the superego. Nevertheless, our approach to the concept of identity in this thesis will not be psychological but rather philosophical and sociological. Indeed, the sociologist Erving Goffman also highlights the importance of identity attributed by others in his book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, published in 1956: 'We are all just actors trying to control and manage our public image, we act based on how others might see us'[12]. Moreover, the idea of self-awareness can be associated with the question of identity, as Claude Dubar explained : 'C'est l'analyse de l'auto-réflexion, du fonctionnement de la subjectivité et du Self (soi) comme définition et conception de soi-même qui va provoquer l'émergence d'une nouvelle problématique, celle de l'identité du Moi comme processus social' [13] and since there is a social process it means that identity evolves and changes constantly. That being said, in this study we will mainly use the theory of Jean Claude Kaufmann. For him, identity is not linked to the past, with the memory or with the heritage (contrary to what the idea of national identity proclaims), 'l'identité n'est jamais une essence ou une substance. En réalité le processus identitaire est en mouvement permanent'[14] and 'l'identité renvoie à une subjectivité en vue de produire du sens'[15], an idea also developed by Claude Dubar in *La crise des identités : l'interprétation d'une mutation*[16].

Thus, identity seems to be about the performative – which involves discovering and applying practices that may be cultural, religious, linguistic or linked to the body- and this

[10] Georg Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1976). 38.
[11] Especially in his book *Malaise dans la civilization* (Paris: Points, 2010). This idea is developed mainly in Chapter IV, where Freud explains how the norms and values imposed by culture and society influence the development of the ego.
[12] Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of the Self in the Everyday Life* (London: Anchor, 1959), 76.
[13] Claude Dubar, 'Polyphonie et métamorphoses de la notion d'identité,' *Revue Française des affaires sociales*, no.2 (2007) : 117, https://shs.cairn.info/revue-francaise-des-affaires-sociales-2007-2-page-9?lang=fr.
[14] Jean-Claude Kaufmann, *L'Invention de soi* (Paris: Hachette Littératures, 2005), 78.
[15] Ibid.
[16] In the second chapter of his book ('Les Processus de socialisation et la construction des identités'), Dubar explains how identities are constructed through dynamic socialisation processes. He also highlights the idea that identity is never stable, but affected by changes in social contexts.

aspect goes hand in hand with the idea of travelling. The word 'performatif' was introduced by John Austin in *How to Do Things with Words* (1962). A performative statement is a sentence that does not simply describe reality, but performs an action by being uttered: 'To say something is to do something; or in saying something we do something'[17].Its effectiveness depends on its context. Therefore, the performative is initially associated with language, but the term has gone beyond the philosophy of language. The sociologist Jean Claude Kaufmann used the idea of performativity in his work on identity. For him, the performative encompasses the habits and practices that constitute individuals : 'L'individu ne préexiste pas à ses actes : il se construit dans et par ses pratiques[18]'. The performative – and this is how we use the term in this thesis- is when the very act of doing something produces a reality. Judith Butler extended this notion of performativity (we will also refer to her studies through the thesis) by talking about gender. According to her, the performative is a repetition of socially codified acts and behaviors: 'Il n'y a pas d'identité de genre derrière les actes qui l'expriment, mais cette identité est constituée par ces actes mêmes'.[19]

Thus, Isabella Bird, Alexandra David-Néel and Isabelle Eberhardt reinvent themselves through the experience of various practices: cultural, religious, linguistic. Nevertheless, it is important to underline that they do not only travel, they write about it. The performative dimension is completed by the narrative dimension. The two concepts are not necessarily opposed even if the narrative is more descriptive than active (compared to the performative) and it is part of a wider temporality (past, present, future) whereas the performative is an act of the present. Paul Ricoeur developed the idea of narrative identity in *Temps et récit*[20] by explaining that identity is also constructed through self-narrative. Indeed, it is thanks to writing that existence can find meaning and consistency. Hence, the performative would be the lived identity and the narrative would be the told identity, the identity of expression. As we can see, the boundaries between performative (defined by Kaufmann) and narrative (defined by Ricoeur) are blurred, since a narrative can set the scene for an identity that will give rise to actions. Throughout this thesis, we will look at the different practices that create the performative in the lives of Isabella Bird, Alexandra David-Néel and Isabelle Eberhardt.

[17] John Langshwa Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1975), 42.
[18] Jean-Claude Kaufmann, *L'Invention de soi* (Paris : Hachette Littératures, 2005), 34.
[19] Judith Butler, *Défaire le genre* (Paris : Éditions Amsterdam, 2016), 18.
[20] In chapter V ('L'Identité et l'ipséité: la dialectique de l'identité narrative'), Ricoeur develops the idea that personal identity can be constructed and understood through the writing of self-narratives.

How does the performative go hand in hand with the narrative, and what role does it play in the identity process?

Before presenting the theories on which this study will be based, an autobiographical presentation of Isabella Bird, Alexandra David-Néel and Isabelle Eberhardt seems necessary.

Isabella Bird was born on 15th October 1831 in Boroughbridge Hall, Yorkshire. She was very close to her sister Henriette who was born in 1834. They grew up during the Victorian era (1837-1901) which was the heyday of the British Empire and a moment of economic prosperity. While this period was good for rich people, it is also widening social inequalities. In addition, the status of women did not progress at all, quite the contrary, and this was due to a singular yet widespread conception of what the 'feminine ideal' should be. The role of women was to take care of the house and the children. As Linda Macdowell explained:

> In Britain, as in other Western European societies during industrialization, the home was invested with a spiritual quality and idealisation of home took on religious characteristics. Housework and childcare in particular were seen as women's sacred duty, they and the "master" of the house being protected in this sphere from the harsh competitive world of capitalism'[21].

The life of Isabella Bird could have been all mapped out, but her health problems led her to discover the nomadic life. Sickness was a common companion for Bird during her childhood. She even had a tumour removed from her spine at the age of 18. After this surgery, she still suffered from nausea, pain and insomnia. When she turned 23, her doctor suggested that her health problems were probably due to her sedentary lifestyle. He prescribed a long trip. In 1854, she left for the USA. She travelled for seven months and published her first book called *The Englishwoman in America* in 1856. This book is based on her letters home. She compares the United States and Canada to Great Britain, no doubt to maintain a strong link with her British readers. It worked well and many British newspapers were interested in her book. Mentioning Great Britain as a way to captivate her readers is a writing strategy she keeps in her various books, for example in *A Lady 's Life in the Rocky Mountains*, where she writes: '[…] surely one advantage of travelling is that, while it removes much prejudice against foreigners and their customs, it intensifies tenfold one's appreciation of the good at home

[21] Linda Macdowell, *Gender, Identity and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 75.

and, above all, of the quietness and purity of English domestic life'[22]. However, when she returned to Great Britain after her first trip, her health problems reappeared: back pain but also insomnia and depression. She decided to travel again, this time to Australia and Hawaii where her health miraculously improved. Then, she continued her wanderings in Colorado (in 1873) and wrote the previously mentioned *A Lady 's Life in the Rocky Mountains*, published in 1879. She became a well-known traveller. That said, the journey for which she is most renowned is her 1878 trip to Japan at the age of 46. She wanted to meet the Ainu people, persecuted by the authorities at the time. She published *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* directly after her return in 1880. This book was in the form of letters like the previous ones, describing her journey from Tokyo to Hokkaido with her interpreter Ito. She visited places that no Westerners had seen before, which enabled her to act as an authority figure and be elected a member of the Royal Geographical Society (only in 1891 and she lectured at the Society's branch in London in 1892), becoming the first woman to be given a place in this institution. In 1881, she married Dr John Bishop, which did not stop her from travelling[23]. The previous year, after a trip to the Isle of Mull, she wrote to her sister: 'I shall always in the future as in the past have to contest constitutional depression by earnest work and by trying to lose myself in the interest of others'[24]. Her tone changed when she travelled: 'I have freedom, and you know how I love that'[25]. We will see how this form of freedom that she found was permitted by religion but also by a colonial context, of which she was more or less representative.

Alexandra David-Néel was born on the 24th of October 1868 in Saint Mandé, France. She was an orientalist [26], opera singer, feminist, journalist, writer and explorer. She was born into a tense environment since her mother wanted her to receive a Catholic education, while her father secretly had her baptised in the Protestant faith. In 1873, Alexandra David-Néel followed her parents to Belgium, where they settled for a while. It was there that she began

[22] Isabella Bird, *A Lady's life in the Rocky Mountains* (Berkeley: Mint Editions, 2021), 45.

[23] Little is known about her relationship with her husband. She accepted the marriage late (especially for a woman in Victorian times) and her husband died shortly after their union (1886). Their relationship will therefore not be at the heart of the thesis, unlike that of David-Néel and her husband Philippe.

[24] Cara Parks, 'The Peripatetic Life of Isabella Bird,' *The Appendix 2*, no. 4 (2014), 49, https://theappendix.net/issues/2014/10/the-peripatetic-life-of-isabella-bird.

[25] Ibid.

[26] That is to say an expert of Eastern cultures, religions and History, and not in the sense in which Edward Said explains it (as a Western ideological construction which presents the East as inferior to the West). During this thesis, we will also use the word 'orientalist' in Said's sense

her musical training (singing and piano classes) and also gained her taste for travel, as she devoured the books of Jules Verne. While developing these passions, she suffered from her parents' lack of love and was soon sent to a Calvinist boarding school. At the age of 15, while on holiday with her parents in Ostend, she tried to run away to the port of Vlissingen in the Netherlands, to embark for England. Only a lack of money stopped her journey. Her independent personality took shape during her adolescence.

From 1895 to 1902, she lived in Paris and worked as a singer [27]. Her profession allowed her to travel, notably to Athens and Tunis. Concurrently to singing, she pursued her career as a writer, publishing numerous feminist and anarchist articles in the magazines *Le Lotus bleu* or *l'Étoile socialiste*. She also became a contributor to *La Fronde*, a feminist newspaper founded by Marguerite Durand. In 1906, Alexandra David-Néel delivered a speech to the Italian Women's Congress: '[…] cet aboutissement à l'homme, en tout et pour toujours, est le plus funeste des obstacles que nous (les femmes) ayons à surmonter'[28]. Despite her criticism of marriage, she married Philippe Néel (1861-1941, a French engineer born in Ales) in 1904 and announced her departure on a trip to India and to Tibet in 1911. Indeed, when she lived in Paris she became very interested in Buddhism and Sanskrit. Her long journey to Lhasa, the capital of Tibet, was a continuation of this interest. She confided in Philippe about this in a letter dated May 16, 1915: 'J'ai toujours eu l'effroi des choses définitives. Il y en a qui ont peur de l'instable, moi, j'ai la crainte du contraire. (…) l'immobilité, la stabilité sont des rêves de fous'[29]. As with Isabella Bird, travel was a necessity for her. Her journey to Tibet lasted until 1925. She became famous in the world of explorers, writers and orientalists. Indeed, in 1912 she met the 13th Dalaï-lama, stayed in a monastery in Lachen where she made a spiritual retreat and learned the methods of Tibetan yogis, and eventually in 1924 became the first European to enter Lhasa. During these years, she also visited China and Japan, but our thesis will concentrate on her stays in India, Nepal and Tibet. It is important to add that, from 1914, Alexandra David-Néel travelled with Yongden, a young *lama* from Sikkim. She even ended up adopting him and he came back with her to live in France. Even in motherhood she reinvented herself and created her own family after the menopause; she was happy to travel at this time

[27] She wrote *Le Grand Art*, a novel inspired by her life as a singer and criticising the artistic environment of the time.
[28] Alexandra David-Néel, *Le Féminisme rationnel* (Paris: Les Nuits Rouges, 2000), 61.
[29] Laure Dominique Agniel, *Alexandra David-Néel exploratrice et féministe* (Paris: Tallandier, 2018), 239.

of her life because it allowed her to detach herself from a mother's duties and take greater control of her body. She died at the age of 100 at Dignes-les-Bains.

The third writer that we will analyse in this comparative study is Isabelle Eberhardt. She was a journalist (more precisely a war reporter, which was extremely rare for a woman at the time) and writer, well known for her trip to Algeria where she discovered nomadic life in the desert. She was born in Geneva on 17th February 1877 and died very young in 1904, in Aïn-Sefra, Algeria. Isabelle Eberhardt was Russian on her mother's side and did not know her biological father. She grew up in Switzerland and was educated by Alexandre Trofinovski, a preceptor with anarchist ideas. Indeed, she received an avant-garde and polyglot education. The young Isabelle spoke Russian, Italian, German, French, Turkish and Arabic. Her childhood in her house called *Villa neuve* was on the fringes of society and gave rise to a solitary character with a constant feeling of being out of step with the world. As a teenager, she sometimes dressed as a boy, and in 1895 she published her first short story 'Infernalia: volupté sépulcrale' in *Nouvelle revue moderne* under the male pseudonym Nicolas Podolinsky. Her first journey to Algeria took place in 1897. Eberhardt lived there with her mother and converted to Sufism. In 1899 she moved to the city of Batna and started to live under a male identity, calling herself Mahmoud Saadiand portraying herself as travelling from one Koranic school (called *Zaouia*) to another in order to learn. Her nomadic lifestyle was steeped in spirituality. This new life in Algeria was a liberation for her, as she wrote in *Écrits sur le sable:* 'Jadis, quand je ne manquais de rien matériellement, mais quand je manquais de tout intellectuellement et moralement, je m'assombrissais et me répandais sottement en imprécations contre la Vie que je ne connaissais pas. Ce n'est que maintenant, au sein du dénuement dont je suis fière, que je l'affirme digne d'être vécue'[30].

After the death of her mother, she lived for several months as a nomad between Batna, Bni Mzab and Oued Souf. There, she met her eventual husband Slimane Ehni, a Muslim with French nationality who was a Spahi – a cavalryman in the French army. In 1901, Isabelle Eberhardt was wounded in an assassination attempt by a Sufi brotherhood opposed to hers, since she belonged to the *Qadiriyya* brotherhood. Not long after she recovered, the French authorities expelled her from Algeria. She spent some time in Marseille, where Slimène joined her to marry her. Thanks to her marriage she could return to Algeria and became a journalist

[30] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 108.

for the newspaper *Akhbar,* directed by Victor Barrucand who campaigned for a more humane colonial system, in particular for a recognition of the rights of indigenous Muslims. After the death of Eberhardt, he was the one to publish her work. It is thanks to this meeting with Barrucand that Eberhardt became a war reporter in 1903. She went to Aïn Séfra during the fights close to the Moroccan border. She published articles about the political situation but also some short stories inspired by her nomadic life in *La Dépêche*. She also had a feminist discourse that matched the ideas of Alexandra David-Néel, when she wrote '[…] quand la femme deviendra la camarade de l'homme, quand elle cessera d'être un joujou, elle commencera une autre existence'[31]. She also criticised the institution of marriage in *Journaliers*: 'Ignoblement, bêtement, on lie la vie de la jeune fille avec un mari, personnalité ridicule finalement. A lui appartient la virginité matérielle de la femme. Puis, le plus souvent avec dégoût, elle doit passer sa vie auprès de lui, subir le devoir conjugal'[32]. Thus, even if she never claimed to be a feminist, she was aware of gender inequality and liked questioning it by playing with gender identities. Isabelle Eberhardt associated the nomadic life with self-realisation: 'J'éprouvais la sensation délicieuse de liberté, de paix et de bien-être qui, chez moi, accompagne toujours le réveil au milieu des spectacles familiers de la vie nomade'[33]. Traveling and its writing are a therapy for her and she defined herself as '[…] une exilée sans foyer et sans patrie, une orpheline dénuée de tout'[34]. In October 1904, Aïn Séfra, where Isabelle Eberhardt had her house, was flooded. Her body was found dead under the rubble on the 27th of October.

One thing unites these three women: travel, and more specifically nomadism. What is nomadism? Nomadism is as old as humanity itself. Homo Sapiens were nomadic because they had to find food, water and natural shelter. Then, came the advent of agriculture and animal husbandry during the Neolithic revolution, leading to sedentarisation (it was a slow process): 'Les formes de sédentarisation sont diverses, variables avec le temps. La croissance des villages néolithiques suggère une augmentation démographique importante et s'accompagne d'une spécialisation des bâtiments (collectifs/ familiaux). Au 8e millénaire, les villages peuvent s'étendre sur plus de 10 hectares, les réseaux d'échanges se complexifient et le partage d'un

[31] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Lettres et journaliers* (Paris: Babel, 2003), 266.
[32] Ibid., 21.
[33] Ibid., 106.
[34] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 107.

ensemble de valeurs (procédés techniques, représentations symboliques, rites) se diffuse'[35]. Then, with colonisation, nomadic societies were destructured, marginalised or eliminated. Throughout America, Europeans (mainly English and Spanish) practiced genocide against native Americans. This continued with the creation of the United States and the conquest of the West. The Bushmen suffered the same fate in South Africa and in Asia. Later, over the centuries, urbanization appeared and nomadism declined in most countries. As explained Hedi Timoumi 'la sédentarisation pouvait être réalisé de deux sortes : elle pouvait se faire spontanément et d'une façon lente sous la poussée de lois historiques objectives. Mais elle pouvait être imposée aux gens d'une façon autoritaire et pour des impératifs divers'[36].

That said, there are many peoples who have remained nomadic, such as the Tuareg, the Mongols and the Inuit. They continue this way of life, which for them is traditional and cultural, but above all- as for the Homo Sapiens- vital. They move according to resources. So, the idea of nomadism is first and foremost about survival. The Larousse dictionary defines the term as follows : 'Genre de vie caractérisé par le déplacement des groupes humains en vue d'assurer leur subsistance'[37]. Of course, the nomadism experienced by our three authors is very different from that, because it is made possible by their privileged positions: they are Western women from well-to-do backgrounds. They traveled not out of necessity but out of desire. For Bird, David-Néel and Eberhardt, nomadism is intellectual and spiritual, that is to say a quest for knowledge and transformation through movement. It is a desire to understand and know the unknown, while at the same time being a commitment to others and to oneself. Indeed, according to Rosi Bradotti: 'Nomadic thought rejects the sedentary habits of the mind, the attachment to established values, and the certainties of a fixed identity. It is a mode of thinking that remains open to change, to flows, and to the unexpected'[38].

We will see how nomadism had an impact on Eberhardt, Isabella Bird and Alexandra David-Néel by focusing on three key areas: questioning the self (Part1), reinventing the self (Part2) and representing the self (Part 3). As mentioned above, these three parts will permit us to analyse and understand the performative and the narrative aspects of identity.

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[35] Fanny Bocquetin, 'Sédentarisation', *Dictionnaire de l'Humain*, n°8, 2018, 505.
[36] Hedi Timoumi, 'La Colonisation française et la sédentarisation des semi-nomades des steppes tunisiennes 1905-1925',*Cahiers de la Méditerranée,* n°6, p 95.
[37] *Dictionnaire Larousse* (Paris: Larousse Poche, 2025), 237.
[38] Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* (New York: Columbia Press university, 1994), 78.

Questioning the self is about comprehending how nomadism is a response to the crisis they go through. To do this, we will try to understand how they are evolving in their new geographical areas. Despite their shared self-questioning and some similarities, we will see that Isabella Bird, Alexandra David-Néel and Isabelle Eberhardt offer us different perspectives of travelling and journeys. Furthermore, in a second stage, this chapter will address the question of the relationship with the landscape, that is to say the appropriation of space but also the relationship between body and space. In order to do this, we will use the theory of Linda Macdowell, who explains that the relationship that the self has with space is as important as its relationship with other human beings. In a third stage, we will look at the idea of questioning the self through the appropriation of masculine spaces by women, so as to include the gender studies argumentation that will be applied throughout the thesis. We will mainly apply the work of Rosi Braidotti, for whom '[…] nomadism is an invitation to dis-identify ourselves from sedentary phallogocentric monologism of philosophical thinking and to start cultivating the art of disloyalty to civilization'[39].

Once the self questions itself, it can also decide to reinvent itself. Thus, the second part of the thesis will look at the idea of reinventing the self through another culture, focusing mainly on the construction of the self through the performative. Indeed, this thesis will argue that the many practices carried out by Isabella Bird, Alexandra David-Néel and Isabelle Eberhardt overturn binary oppositions such as man/woman, West/East and self/other. Actually, the three authors studied are not afraid to play with gender codes. This leads us to Judith Butler and her idea of the performance and performativity of gender, especially in her book *Gender Trouble*. We will also use the ideas developed by Linda Macdowell in her book *Gender, Identity and Place*, which will allow us to bring together gender studies and post-colonial studies. Moreover, Bird, David-Néel and Eberhardt also break the West/East opposition. Although Edward Said and Marry Louis Pratt will help us to understand the colonial system and its dynamics, they do not cover the issue of gender. Hence, Macdowell but also Alison Blunt and Gilian Rose will permit us to understand the place of women travellers in a colonial context. In this subsection, the terms West and East will be used. We are aware that these words are the legacy of a colonial system and that their use is, therefore, questionable.

[39] Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* (New York: Columbia Press university, 1994), 78.

Indeed, The terms ‘West’ and ‘East’ do not originate directly from colonization; however colonization contributed to solidifying these categories, imbuing them with a hierarchical and ideological dimension that persists today. In addition, the simplified opposition of West and East obscures histories of interconnection, which is why they are being called into question by postcolonial studies. We decided to utilise them in this thesis because the authors we studied used them, since it is a reflection of the times in which they lived. Following that, we will speak about the opposition of self/other in order to explore the notion of otherness, particularly with the idea of linguistic nomadism, since Alexandra David-Néel and Isabelle Eberhardt learned a new language in order to get closer to the people whose cultures and countries they explored. We will be helped by David Evans and John Edwards, for whom language is a meeting place. After that, we will talk about the reinvention of the self through religious practices. This will be the second chapter of this section on reinvention of the self. The three authors offer us three different ways of experiencing religion. Isabella Bird has a missionary role, Alexandra David-Néel becomes lama (a Buddhist priest) and Isabelle Eberhardt converts to Sufism. Thus, nomadism also means religious nomadism.

For Isabella Bird, Alexandra David-Néel and Isabelle Eberhardt, travel goes hand in hand with writing, which brings us naturally to the third part of our thesis: the representation of the self. The idea of narrative identity developed by Paul Ricoeur will be at the centre of our analysis and we will confront this theory with the ideas of Jean-Claude Kaufmann, who offers a sociological approach to identity. The first subsection will focus on travel writing, showing that writing about the journey can give coherence to the self. Indeed, self-representation through writing allows the performative to exist, and also to excite in the public sphere. We will cross-reference the concept of narrative identity (that is to say being created by what they say about themselves) with the autobiographical theories of Philippe Lejeune. Then, we will analyse the fictional writings of Eberhardt, who wrote numerous short stories, to see how self-representation is also achieved through fiction, again based on the work of Paul Ricoeur. In a third stage, we will analyse the representation of the self through the epistolary genre. Letters written by Bird, David-Néel and Eberhardt underline different aspects of their personalities since it is supposed to be an intimate genre. To understand the complexity of the writing process in a letter (writing for one’s interlocutor, for the readers and for the oneself), we are going to use the studies of Brigitte Diaz and Vincent Kaufmann. They

ask the question: who is the letter really addressed to? The correspondent? Nothing is less certain. To conclude on self-representation, we will explore pseudonym and publication strategies because, even if writing can have therapeutic effects and therefore has a personal purpose, the authors write to exist in the public sphere. Therefore, the representation of the self is also made for and by the readers.

This thesis follows in the footsteps of the numerous studies that have been carried out on these three authors such as *Deux itinéraires sous le signe de l'Orient : Isabelle Eberhardt et Ella Maillart* by Danièle Masse or *Isabelle Eberhardt and North Africa: Nomadism as a Carnivalesque Mirage* by Lynda Chouiten. These two studies analyse how Isabelle Eberhardt, while adopting elements of oriental culture, nevertheless reproduced certain orientalist stereotypes, thus questioning the fluidity of her nomadic identity. Then, Kristi Siegel wrote about Alexandra David-Néel in books such as *Of Offal, Corpses, and Others: An Examination of Self, Subjectivity, and Authenticity in Two Works by Alexandra David-Neel* which focused on postcolonial studies and *Gender, Genre and Identity in Women's Travel Writing* which explores women's travel writing, including that of Alexandra David-Néel, and how she redefined the notion of home through a life of nomadic travel, offering a perspective of gender identity. Isabella Bird was also being studied: *Feminine Journeys: The Role of Gender in the Adventure Writing of Isabella Bird* by Bassnett, *Gender, Geography, and the Female Traveler: Isabella Bird's Influence on the Travel Genre* by M.L Stacy, C*olonial Encounters: Isabella Bird's Representation of the 'Other' in Her Travel Writing* also written by Stacy and *Isabella Bird and the Colonized Landscape: A Postcolonial Reading of Her Travel Narratives* Joohyun Jade Park. The main studies have approached these women travelers from the angle of gender, postcolonial studies, the transgression of norms or the relationship with otherness[40], few have looked specifically at the construction of identity through travel writing. Indeed, the 'Invention of the self' suggests a reflection on the way in which these women shape their own image in their stories, between reality, fiction and personal myth. In speaking of 'self-invention', the thesis is also questioning their narratives as proto-autobiographical or proto-autofictional forms, which is an angle that has yet to be explored. Numerous studies have highlighted these women travelers as figures of feminine transgression or emancipation, which they are, but this thesis also adds a nuance by showing how they not only transgress norms, but also

[40] We will also look at all these approaches.

consciously shape their own literary myth. Thus, gender studies and postcolonial studies are important reading grids that we will use, but they are secondary. The originality of this project also stems from the comparison of these three authors who have not been compared in the past. Isabella Bird, Isabelle Eberhardt and Alexandra David-Néel come from very different backgrounds (Victorian Englishwoman, Franco-Swiss adventurer fascinated by the Orient, Orientalist and Buddhist explorer). A comparative analysis of these three figures undoubtedly brings to light common mechanisms and differences in the way they reinvent themselves through their stories, enabling a broader understanding of the subject. Another specific feature of this thesis is that it examines the way in which spirituality is used to (re)invent oneself through writing, and not just the question of cultural otherness. My approach thus crosses travel writings, gender studies, postcolonial studies, theories of autobiography and the history of religions, giving this study an interdisciplinary and creative perspective.

PART 1: QUESTIONING THE SELF

Whether it is for health reasons, to make a name for themselves in the public sphere (as intellectual, journalist or writer) or to escape a hostile environment, Isabella Bird, Isabelle Eberhardt and Alexandra David-Néel show us that the departure for new pastures is a necessity for them. This moment of rupture comes naturally into their lives and leads them to question themselves. Questioning the self is the starting point for reinventing the self. Therefore, in this first part, we will focus on how they questioned the societal norms in which they grew up, moved towards nomadism and, accordingly, explored different ways of appropriating space, for themselves and for others. Indeed, by travelling, they illustrated the instability of the concept of identity, especially of female identity. Thus, discovering a new geographical area is a process which responded to the crisis they went through. By moving physically, they displaced the societal criteria linked to their gender and their culture. But nomadism is a vague concept which can be experienced in different ways, so is it therefore legitimate to ask what kind of nomadism they practised?

Chapter1: Geographical Mobility and the Dynamics of Departure: Interrogating the Self in Motion

Self-questioning appears to occur primarily through the act of departure and the various practices enabled by relocating to another country. A new culture has a direct impact on the construction and liberation of the self. Firstly, we will try to understand in this chapter what kind of travellers they were. In other words, what kind of nomadism did they adopt? In a second stage, we will analyse their relationship with space and how their bodies evolved in these new spaces (focusing on the speed of travel: walking, using trains and so on). To finish this chapter, it is important to cross-reference the appropriation of new spaces with gender studies. We will show how Bird, Eberhardt and David-Néel are evolving in spaces initially intended to be masculine.

1.a Nomadism and *vagabondage:* questioning social norms

'Un départ est toujours une promesse d'aventure'[41]

In the notion of nomadism there is the idea of necessity, of survival. As we explained, the nomad travels to obtain means of subsistence. We can think in particular of the nomadic empires of Asia that Alexandra David-Néel met in Tibet[42] : 'Au Tibet, nul ne pérégrine pour son plaisir, les gens considèrent comme absurde de voyager quand on n'est pas appelé dans un endroit déterminé pour affaires ou que l'on n'accomplit pas un pieux pèlerinage'[43]. It is interesting to see that David-Néel, Bird and Eberhardt all appropriated a known concept linked to primary needs and did something different with it. Indeed, the nomadism experienced by the three writers was linked to a moral necessity and a desire to break the codes established by their respective Western societies, and not with survival. For them it was an act of courage, leading to necessary freedom: 'Le voyage, c'est la liberté. Une vie de voyage, c'est une vie d'indépendance'[44] as David-Néel said. Eberhardt felt the same way : ' Il me semble que je ne puis vivre que dans le mouvement et l'aventure ; que l'existence monotone me tue'[45]. This sentence functions almost as a profession of faith: in a few words, it sums up the very spirit of Isabelle Eberhardt's life. She built herself against stability, against the limits imposed on her (gender, origin, religion, nationality). In *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains*, Bird also highlighted the necessity of freedom that allows the travel: 'Travelling is the most delightful experience of all. [...] I am conscious of a delightful feeling of independence and detachment from the world and its cares'[46]. Thereby, due to their Western origins, they had the privilege of living their nomadic life motivated by a form of curiosity, as confirmed by David-Néel: 'Mon désir de me rendre compte par moi-même est trop fort pour me permettre de me contenter

[41] Alexandra David-Néel, *Au Cœur des Himalayas* (Paris: Payot, 2016), 27.
[42] In north of Tibet they were the Drogpa, then the Golog who were semi-nomadic, the Khampas in the east of the country and the nomadic lamaists.
[43] Alexandra David-Néel, *Voyage d'une Parisienne à Lhassa* (Paris: Pocket, 2004), 294.
[44] Ibid, 88.
[45] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Lettres et journaliers* (Paris: Babel, 2003), 102.
[46] Isabella Bird, *A Lady's life in the Rocky Mountains* (Berkeley: Mint Editions, 2021), 12.

en n'importe quelle matière, de ce que je puis apprendre dans les livres ou les récits d'autrui' [47].

But much more than a curiosity, it is also, as we started to imply earlier, a philosophical act of resistance and a subversion of norms as Eberhardt wrote: 'J'ai le mépris instinctif de toutes les conventions sociales'[48]. In a letter to her husband Philippe in 1912, David-Néel expressed a very similar idea: 'Je n'ai jamais aimé les règles, les conventions, les habitudes prises'[49]. Bird also saw travelling as a way of questioning norms and enjoyed the freedom that it can give: 'I have found a freedom here such as I have never known — no one to dictate, no conventions to observe, no drawing-rooms to enter, no dresses to change, no proprieties to respect'[50]. As Deleuze and Guattari explained in their book *Mille plateaux* : 'Le plus important, c'est peut-être les phénomènes de frontière où la science nomade exerce une pression sur la science d'État, et où inversement la science d'État s'approprie et transforme les données de la science nomade '[51]. The nomadic/sedentary opposition seems obvious for Deleuze and Guattari. Indeed, the term 'science d'État' refers to a type of knowledge that is structured, codified, hierarchical and subject to institutional norms. It is centralised, regulated, often linked to official institutions (such as the university, the state, academies), and produces knowledge that is considered legitimate and stable. In contrast, nomadism is mobile, marginal, experimental and escapes the rigid frameworks of the institution. Deleuze and Guattari speak about a nomadism that is not the nomadic lifestyle of traditional nomadic peoples (like the one of the Drogpa, the Golog, the Khampas and the nomadic lamaists), but a philosophical nomadism, as concrete as it is metaphorical, which enables us to create knowledge that is in motion, creative and experimental. It is a philosophy of nomadism that is similar to that of the authors we studied, and that allows us to understand their approaches better. The three writers we are studying were not afraid to challenge the political and organisational structures of their culture. In fact, nomadism for them can be understood as a philosophical stance in which thinking moves laterally, breaking away from hierarchical or fixed patterns. In *Mille plateaux*, the philosophical nomadism that it described favours spatiality over temporality, as

[47] Alexandra David-Néel, *l'Inde où j'ai vécu* (Paris: Plon, 1951), 181.
[48] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Inédits et textes originaux* (Bibliothèque numérique romande, 2021), 128, https://ebooks-bnr.com/eberhardt-isabelle-inedits-et-textes-originaux.
[49] Alexandra David-Néel, *Correspondance avec son mari: Édition intégrale 1904-1941* (Paris: Plon, 2016), 377.
[50] Isabella Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (Reno: Pantianos Classics, 2017), 92.
[51] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Mille plateaux* (Paris: Minuit, 1980), 449.

this quote explains: 'Les nomades sont toujours au milieu (…). Ils n'ont ni passé ni avenir, seulement des devenirs. Ils n'ont pas d'histoire, seulement de la géographie'[52]. Saying that nomads have no history does not mean that they have no past, but rather that nomads define themselves by the way they occupy space and not by the attachment they have to their native land or to their heritage. In the life of nomads, geography takes precedence over history. Was this the case in the lives of Bird, David-Néel and Eberhardt? This is what we will try to understand.

For Alexandra David-Néel, nomadism is primarily an intellectual and mystical pursuit. She embodies a nomadic science in the Deleuzian sense : operating at the margins of the academy, yet rigorous, experimental and subversive: 'J'ai voulu voir, savoir, expérimenter, comparer, juger par moi-même'[53]. And she defined herself as follows : 'Je suis une sauvage mon bien cher, mets-toi cela en tête. Toute la civilisation occidentale me dégoûte. Je n'aime que ma tente, mes chevaux et le désert'[54]. Eberhardt, for her part, declared:

> J'ai toujours été très étonnée de constater qu'un chapeau à la mode, un corsage correct, une paire de bottines bien tendues, un petit mobilier de petits meubles encombrants, quelques argenteries et de la porcelaine suffisaient à calmer chez beaucoup de personnes la soif du bonheur[55].

She did not understand this form of happiness associated with a sedentary life, since being a nomad for Eberhardt was about detaching herself from material goods. By making this choice, she is moving away from European thought structures. Like David-Néel, she is close to a nomadism that can be described as intellectual. Intellectual nomadism means not sticking to a single method, theoretical framework or tradition. The nomad moves between disciplines, languages and cultures, and brings heterogeneous knowledge into dialogue. This reflects the concept of 'thinking on the move', connected to the experience- such as traveling and writing about oneselft. Deleuze and Guattari elaborate on this idea in *Mille Plateaux*: 'Il n'y a pas de pensée qui ne soit en devenir, au moins en puissance, et qui ne se fasse dans la mouvance, dans le déplacement, dans la déterritorialisation'[56]. Thus, Eberhardt wrote : 'Je suis de toutes

[52] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Mille plateaux* (Paris: Minuit, 1980),39.
[53] Alexandra David-Néel, *Mystiques et magiciens du Tibet* (Paris: Pocket, 2019), 95.
[54] Alexandra David-Néel, *Correspondance avec son mari, Édition intégrale 1904-1941* (Paris: Plon, 2016), 56.
[55] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Lettres et journaliers* (Paris: Babel, 2003), 240-241.
[56] Deleuze and Guattari, *Mille plateaux*, 302.

les races et de toutes les langues'[57]. Behind this sentence there is, of course, a utopia, since in reality Eberhardt did not always detach herself from the colonial gaze (as we shall see in part 2), but she did have the desire to put cultures and knowledge in touch with each other.

Bird offers a different perspective, since she did not directly criticise European habits but shunned them in order to fully experience her trip: 'I like Kubota better than any other Japanese town, perhaps because it is so completely Japanese and has no air of having seen better days. I no longer care to meet Europeans – indeed, I should go far out of my way to avoid them. I have become quite used to Japanese life, and think that I learn more about it in travelling in this solitary way than I should otherwise'[58]. She is an observer who moves both geographically and mentally, engaging with other ways of life while maintaining a critical distance. She did not seek to melt into the other culture like Eberhardt, nor to make it a path of initiation like David-Néel, but she questioned, described and compared. She writes: 'Is it not strange to find the same ideas gathered up into recognizably similar forms in Japan as in England, and cast into these forms at a date when our ancestors were clothed in paint and skins?'[59]. This cultural parallel made by Isabella Bird is also a way of showing that there is in travel the idea of a co-existence of cultural and anthropological systems (the one of the country of origin and the one of the country she visited). Through this, she read the world through two superimposed lenses. This parallel also challenges colonial ideology, as she relates distant cultures without hierarchising them; she shifts the center of Western thought by allowing it to be influenced by otherness; and she seeks correspondences rather than domination. That said, in the remainder of this thesis, we will demonstrate that despite some ambiguity, she ultimately embodies the ideas of her time. Also, the idea that Bird opted to draw comparisons between cultures can be understood as a means of grounding oneself in the familiar. In this sense, it may serve as a more accessible strategy when first encountering a new environment, as it enables the writer to navigate unfamiliar terrain through the comfort of the known.

[57] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Inédits et textes originaux* (Bibliothèque numérique romande, 2021), 57, https://ebooks-bnr.com/eberhardt-isabelle-inedits-et-textes-originaux.
[58] Isabella Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (Reno: Pantianos Classics, 2017), 101.
[59] Ibid., 47.

David-Néel had a different approach to the unknown. For her, understanding a new geographical and cultural space requires a quest for a profound understanding of the human soul and civilisations:

> Le but de mes voyages a toujours uniquement été la satisfaction de ma curiosité et cette curiosité concerne ce que j'appelle des 'paysages'. J'applique ce terme, suivant son acception ordinaire, à la nature physique, et c'est pour moi une joie extrême de parcourir des régions peu connues ou, encore mieux inconnues (…). Mais j'entends aussi 'paysage' dans un autre sens que je lui ai donné. 'Paysage' c'est la vie des hommes, ce qu'ils en laissent voir dans leur conduite qui tisse l'étoffe de l'histoire, mais bien plus 'paysage' ce sont les idées, les pensées, les croyances, les désirs, les amours et les haines, les peurs, les espoirs et tout le contenu de ce que les gens d'Occident appellent l'âme et qui, loin d'être 'contenu' dans une âme, constitue, sans doute, l'ensemble mouvant qui est l'âme elle-même.[60]

David-Néel does not only want to observe the 'paysages' that she crosses – as Bird can sometimes do from an anthropological point of view – she also wants to live in them and immerse herself in them. She wants a global understanding of the cultures she encountered. The process of understanding in these cases involve 'paysages' which are not just geographical landscapes but also become synonymous with reality, world, and culture. This is also an idea present in Deleuze's theory. According to Deleuze, the journey must be a vector of *deterritorialisation*, that is to say it allows to enter a new territory. For him, a territory is a reality which also means a differently perceived and structured space (geographical and cultural space). The nomad therefore moves from one type of territory to the next. They travel across what Deleuze calls *espaces striés*, which means marked and codified spaces[61], but ideally they reach *les espaces lisses*, which seem to offer freedom because they are not codified, they are elusive as a whole like the sea or the desert. However, *les espaces lisses* do not just refer to a geographical but also to a position taken, to a mental displacement. These spaces participate in the nomadic philosophy mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. Subsequently, this helps our understanding of Deleuze's term *deterritorialisation:* '[…] un processus qui libère un contenu (multiplicité ou flux) de tout code (forme, fonction ou signification), et le fait filer sur une ligne de fuite'[62]. But the *deterritorialisation* is only successful if it asserts itself even in *reterritorialisation,* which is by the reconstitution of a

[60] Alexandra David-Néel, *Au Cœur des Himalayas* (Paris: Payot, 2016), 74.
[61] Geographical spaces are codified by their heritages and cultures.
[62] Robert Sasso and Arnaud Villani, *Le Vocabulaire de Gilles Deleuze* (Paris: Centre de Recherches d'Histoire des Idées, 2003), 82.

territory. Of course, the creation of a new territory does not mean the erasure of European culture. There are times when several cultural systems seem to coexist, as we explained before through Isabella Bird's quote. This can be reassuring but it is not always perceived in a positive way, especially for Bird herself:

> I heard the well-known British bugle; I saw the familiar scarlet of our troops; the voices which vociferated were English; the physiognomies had the Anglo–Saxon cast and complexion; and on the shores of the western hemisphere I felt myself at home. Yet, as I sprang from the boat, and set my foot for the first time on American soil, I was vexed that these familiar sights and sounds should deprive me of the pleasurable feeling of excitement which I had expected to experience under such novel circumstances[63] .

A brutal and sudden break, a real change of cultural reference seems to be part of the process wanted by Bird. Here, the Victorian mindset in which Bird grew up makes itself felt, as she expresses a desire for exoticism, and this exoticism reinforces her sense of belonging to her country. Exotism is a central concept in travel, particularly in the 19th century. Bird's writing (and that of David-Neel and Eberhardt, as we shall see later) is sometimes marked by prejudice and idealised or distorted visions of the cultures she encounters: 'I have often thought that the most useful lesson to be learnt from a knowledge of the 'savage' races, is to be taught the great difference between the civilization of the West and the barbarism of the East'[64]. The representation of the Other as an exotic curiosity helped to maintain a distance, even a hierarchy, between European cultures and those they considered 'inferior'. These exotic images enabled the colonial powers to justify their expansion and their 'civilising' missions, claiming to bring modernity to societies perceived as backward.

On the other hand, Eberhardt's nomadism appears to correspond with the concept of 'paysages' as developed by David-Néel. This approach is similar to what Deleuze called *espace lisse* (as opposed to an *espace strié*), and his line of flight is defined by the phenomenon of *deterritorialisation* and his speed is immeasurable, which may even equate to immobility. Of course Eberhardt was far from immobile, but the calm of the desert offered moments suspended in time : 'Ces soirs-là, pour chercher les aspects connus et aimés du vrai désert berceur, je m'enfuis vers Djenan-ed-Dar, tout proche, petite poignée de poussière humaine,

[63] Isabella Bird, *The English Woman in America* (London: Global Grey, 2009), 13.
[64] Ibid

essai timide de vie perdu dans le vide et la stérilité de la plaine immense, libre, tranquille'[65]. The landscape around her becomes '[…] une monotonie harmonieuse des choses'[66]. '[…] Vide'[67], '[…] stérilité'[68], '[…] monotonie'[69], this vocabulary is very often used with a negative connotation, but here it is what permits the connection to a whole, because the *espace lisse* allows the absence of outlines, and therefore of conventions. The desert is sterile because it is in no way attached to any form of productivity, it is in this that it opens the doors to freedom. This way of approaching the journey and the landscape echoes the idea of Braidotti, according to whom: 'It is the subversion of set conventions that defines the nomadic state, not the literal act of traveling'[70] .

If we perceive nomadism as a change of anthropological and cultural landmarks, then this does not necessarily require movement in space. Indeed, we can choose to redefine the social criteria within our country of origin. Accordingly, Eberhardt had been a nomad since adolescence when she decided to dress as a young man, breaking Swiss gender conventions. But this is also the case with Alexandra David-Néel, who turned to Buddhism long before travelling and adopted this culture as the guiding principle in her life. It is also worth mentioning that David-Néel first turned to the entertainment world to assert her independence, although this was a context in which women were associated with prostitution. However, being in a marginal position enabled her to meet singers from different countries, and therefore helped her come into contact with different ways of perceiving the world. David-Néel and Eberhardt observed European society and experienced it through the prism of a different culture (without completely denying their European cultural heritage), which is however not the case for Bird, for whom geographical movement was essential to give birth to the idea of nomadism.

In all cases, the journeys of our three writers allowed them to access more freedom (freedom of movement, intellectual freedom, financial freedom and even religious freedom) through uprooting. The journey for them became '[…] une ascèse, qui favorise le détachement et la disponibilité de l'esprit'[71] as explained in *Espace et écriture*. For Eberhardt, it is the desert

[65] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 159.
[66] Ibid
[67] Ibid
[68] Ibid
[69] Ibid
[70] Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* (New York: Columbia Press university, 1994), 5.
[71] Hervé Guyader, *Nicolas Bouvier-Espace et écriture* (Chêne-Bourg: Zoé, 2010), 77.

space that allows freedom of spirit: 'Je m'endors en songeant vaguement à la joie d'être au moins libre et tranquille dans les grandes steppes vides'[72] ; the desert gave Eberhardt the mental, spiritual and physical freedom that comes from an environment of solitude, silence and inner quest. For Bird nature is also a place which permit *la disponibilité de l'esprit* as she explained in *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan*: 'It is so good to have got beyond the confines of stereotyped civilisation, and the trammels of Japanese travelling, to the solitude of nature, and an atmosphere of freedom'[73]. But for Bird, unlike Eberhardt, natural space does not allow for an attachment to and understanding of the culture of the other, but rather a freedom linked to the possibility of travelling alone and escaping the stifling social norms of the Victorian era without denying the superiority of the West. For David-Néel, nomadism also allows a greater freedom of spirit: 'Le voyage est un moyen de s'affranchir, de se détacher des liens qui enchaînent l'esprit, de se libérer des influences extérieures pour mieux s'immerger dans l'inconnu'[74]. Living elsewhere does not lead to self-effacement with regard to Bird, but it can sometimes lead to the negation of the self as we can observe in David-Néel's and Eberhardt's books, especially when they address their relationship to religion. Indeed, Buddhism and Sufism can be perceived as a self-effacement or at least as a 'self-disappearance' for the benefit of self-giving as Eberhardt explained : 'Dieu a semé en mon âme quelques germes féconds : le désintéressement poussé à l'extrême vis-à-vis de toutes les choses de ce monde, la foi, l'amour vivace, pitoyable, infini, de tout ce qui souffre. Ce pardon du mal est un dévouement illimité pour la cause islamique, la plus belle de toutes, puisqu'elle est celle de la Vérité... '[75]. Does religion allow David-Néel and Eberhardt the conquest of the self in order to better tend towards the negation of the self? We will answer this question in the next chapter.

Throughout our analysis, Eberhardt's nomadism appears more radical; that is, her desire to completely transform her life and become the Other- although ultimately an illusion- constitutes a fundamental aspect of her journey. Thus, her rejection to Western society (even if she does not deny her Swiss identity) made her: 'un être hypersensible et hyperconscient

[72] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Inédits et textes originaux* (Bibliothèque numérique romande, 2021), 492, https://ebooks-bnr.com/eberhardt-isabelle-inedits-et-textes-originaux.
[73] Isabella Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (Reno: Pantianos Classics, 2017), 39.
[74] Alexandra David-Néel, *Mystiques et magiciens du Tibet* (Paris: Pocket, 2019), 93.
[75] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Journaliers* (Bussigny: Bourlapapey, 1923), 158, www.ebooks-bnr.com.

qui, ayant constaté les ruines de la civilisation occidentale, (…), erre comme un fantôme'[76]. The verb *errer* is particularly interesting, and corresponds to Eberhardt's vision of traveling since she uses it very regularly in her works: 'Par une nuit d'août, où des lourdeurs d'orage flottaient dans l'air, ne trouvant pas le sommeil, j'étais sortie et j'avais erré en rêvant, dans le dédale des rues arabes, où la vie finit avec le jour'[77], 'je songeais à l'étrangeté charmante de ma situation et au bonheur d'être vagabond errant'[78], '[…] la volupté profonde de la vie errante'[79]; or '[…] fatiguée de vaguer ainsi sans but'[80]. For Eberhardt, the act of wandering is linked to a state of reflection and contemplation. It is not only a random wandering, but a wandering full of reverie, self-reflection and the search for meaning. It seems to be a mental escape, a way of escaping from a reality that does not fully satisfy the spirit. Wandering thus becomes a means of getting away from the confinement of the mind, of enriching oneself by observing the outside world while remaining on the borderline between dream and reality. In the context of Eberhardt's writings, wandering takes on a spiritual and philosophical dimension, particularly in relation to Sufism and the mystical teachings she encountered[81]. Thus, *errer* is not just physical, it is intellectual and spiritual: it allows her to immerse herself in metaphysical realities, to seek transcendence through the freedom afforded by disassociation from the rational, organised Western world. By wandering, Eberhardt finds herself at a crossroads, both in a physical space and in an inner space where the rules are rewritten and where she can redefine herself as a free individual. She wrote: 'Un droit que bien peu d'intellectuels se soucient de revendiquer, c'est le droit à l'errance, au vagabondage. Et pourtant *le vagabondage*, c'est l'affranchissement, et la vie le long des routes, c'est la liberté'[82]. While the notion of 'the vagrant' initially has a negative connotation – a negative connotation that we find even in Isabella Bird's book when she describes her arrival in Bedeque in Canada, where Mr. Oppe who was supposed to house her, is absent: '[…] we looked very much like a group of vagrants sitting by the road side'[83] –, this notion is the only way of emancipation for Eberhardt.

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[76] Kenneth White, *L'Esprit nomade* (Paris: Le Livre de poche, 2008), 52.
[77] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 32.
[78] Ibid., 105.
[79] Ibid.
[80] Ibid., 34.
[81] As we will see in the chapter about Sufism (part 2).
[82] Ibid.
[83] Isabella Bird, *The English Woman in America* (London: Global Grey, 2009), 32.

Before the 19th century, in France as in Great Britain, the *vagabond* was a threat to society, he was the figure of the marginal, the one who was outside all boxes and therefore represented a deviance. This was all the more the case for vagrant women who were always associated with prostitution. From an etymological point of view *la péripatéticienne*[84] is the woman who walks. It was only at the end of the 19th century that, thanks to literature (and authors such Victor Hugo who in his book *Les Misérables* depicted the peregrinations of Jean Valjean), that the image of the *vagabond* changed. The figure became more synonymous with revolt and freedom. As Dúnlaith Bird writes in *Travelling in Different Skins*: 'From the position of marginality, the vagabond becomes the most privileged of people'[85]. It is exactly this same sublimation of the figure of the vagabond that appears in Eberhardt's way of travelling. Her nomadism is one made of fortune and unpredictability, which differentiates her from Isabella Bird and David-Néel, both of them having more clearly defined routes. This is particularly relevant for David-Néel's three attempts to get to Lhasa 'C'est même, alors, que l'idée d'aller à Lhasa, restée un peu vague jusqu'à ce moment, devint, chez moi, une décision fermement arrêtée. Aucune revanche ne pouvait surpasser celle-là ; je la voulais et à n'importe quel prix je l'aurais'.[86] The vagabond is more than the symbol of freedom, the figure is taking a stand in relation to European society. Eberhardt in particular seemed to find in the desert a point of attachment for a possible restart away from European norms.

These different ways of looking at nomadic life and travel are all intended to lead to freedom and self-realisation, because to achieve this, they must necessarily confront the world. By confronting and/or discovering other cultures, they tried to reinvent themselves and find a coherent self. This corresponds to the process of creation of a new way of being in space, with the help of an intellectual, cultural and linguistic[87] nomadism. But we will see that this coherence of the self and can be hard to find, and that the experiences and travel strategies practised by Bird, David-Néel and Eberhardt give rise to an *identité multiple* that is always on the move. That being said, now that we have a better understanding of the different approaches to the concept of nomadism, let us take a closer look at the impact this has on their appropriation of space and landscapes.

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[84] From the greek *peripatetikos*, which gave the latin word *peripateticus.*

[85] Dúnlaith Bird, *Travelling in Different Skins: Gender identity in European Women's Oriental Travelogues, 1850-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 45.

[86] Alexandra David Néel, *Voyage d'une Parisienne à Lhassa* (Paris: Pocket, 2004), 14.

[87] Language as a means of accessing others will be discussed in Part 2 of the thesis.

1.b Relationship with landscapes and its writing

'Quand je marche, cela me laisse un peu plus de temps pour me déplacer d'une réalité à l'autre'[88]

The intellectual and cultural nomadism practised by Isabella Bird, Alexandra David-Néel and Isabelle Eberhardt is only possible thanks to their direct confrontation with the world. This confrontation – or rather this meeting – seems possible thanks to a desire to experience different geographical spaces through various practices accomplished by their body: walks, horse-riding, meditation, and so on[89] which also allows them to move slowly or quickly (for example when travelling by train). It has an impact on the way they feel and interact with places. There is, therefore, a reinvention of the self through the relationship with landscapes, which we will examine both performatively- through the journey itself- and narratively- through the ways in which landscapes are described- recognizing that neither the landscape nor its representation is ever neutral.

Indeed, the three authors' writings take the time to observe, to contemplate, to move from one reality to another (geographical and cultural reality).

This appears necessary especially to get into what Mary Louise Pratt calls 'contact zone'[90]. The contact zone is '[…] a social space where disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination'[91]. It is a phenomenon that we find in colonized countries and what Eberhardt refers to when she is in Algeria: 'Les deux mondes voisins, le monde européen et le monde arabe, se coudoient, se mêlent sans jamais se confondre[92]'. The East-West opposition does not facilitate cultural and human relations. Rather, the representation of the Orient, made through Orientalism, imposes a prism with which Westerners perceive the rest of the world. For Edward Said, 'l'orientalisme est un processus idéologique qui construit les sujets dans une relation de comparaison dans laquelle l'Orient est envisagé comme une entité inférieure à

[88] Erling Kagge, *Pas à pas* (Paris: Flammarion, 2017), 41.
[89] This chapter focuses on physical practices. There are also social and religious practices that will be analysed in the second part of this thesis.
[90] Mary Louise Pratt, 'Arts of the Contact Zone,' *Profession* (1991): 33.
[91] Rose Gillian and Alison Blunt, *Writing Women and Space* (London: Guilford Press, 1994), 34.
[92] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 128.

l'Occident'[93]. This balance of power distorts interactions[94]. Travelling by walking seems to be a possible answer to this difficult meeting of the two worlds.

To allow this slowness and to discover their new geographical and cultural space, the three authors do not hesitate to walk. Moreover, walking is opposed to the cult of speed and performance valued in the West and rejected by David-Néel and Eberhardt: 'Les moyens de transport rapides ne nous transportent qu'à la surface des choses'[95] and 'J'ai toujours aimé errer, marcher longtemps, sans but, à l'aventure… On sent mieux la vie quand on la suit à pied'[96]. Here we see their intimate relationship with walking, with slowness, with the freedom of the body in space. Eberhardt and David-Néel saw wandering as a way of melting into the world, of living intensely, outside the confines of control. Walking as a stance to counterbalance the vision of a Europe in full economic extension; walking consumes time, but nothing material, it has no production goal. Indeed, in an age obsessed with speed, efficiency and economic growth (as European countries were in their time, and still are today) walking becomes a simple but subversive gesture, a return to a human rhythm and selfless freedom. Isabella Bird did not necessarily reject this European vision, even though she also values walking and a slower pace in her journey as she explained: 'One must travel slowly to see truly; the soul lags behind the body when we hurry'[97]. Hence, the three authors were all in favour of walking, for more or less different reasons. How does this have a real influence on their travels?

Eberhardt sees walking all the more as an act of revolt. We already know that she was influenced by anarchist ideas. In fact, she was raised in a non-institutional environment by her adoptive father, a former priest turned anarchist, she grew up rejecting religion, authority and bourgeois norms. Educated in freedom of thought, subversive reading and foreign languages, she was brought up in a spirit of revolt, radical independence and openness to the world. In order to better understand the idea of walking as a rejection of modern Western society, we will use the Nietzschean thought, which presents slowness as a way of finding oneself,

[93] Edward Said, *L'Orientalisme. L'Orient créé par l'Occident* (Paris: Fayard, 2000), 58.
[94] This will be explored in greater depth in part 2 of this thesis.
[95] Alexandra David-Néel, *Le vieux Tibet face à la Chine nouvelle* (Paris : Plon, 1953), 73.
[96] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 44.
[97] Isabella Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (Reno: Pantianos Classics, 2017), 88.

whereas speed on the contrary creates a distance from the self. Nietzsche assures that '[…] vous tous qui aimez le travail acharné et tout ce qui va vite, tout ce qui est neuf et inconnu, – vous vous supportez mal, votre assiduité n'est que malédiction et volonté de vous oublier vous-mêmes'[98]. Thus, we can see the desert as a place of rupture with the ideology of consumption in Europe. Since the desert is not a closed space, it cannot hinder the free spirit of anarchists like her. She describes it (Sahara desert) in *Écrits sur le sable* :'Le chaos des dunes, les tombeaux, les maisons et les jardins, toutes les choses s'estompent, se fondent. (…) aucun contour net et précis, aucune forme arrêtée et distincte : tout reluit, tout scintille à l'infini, mais tout est vague'[99].There is nothing defined, everything is yet to be written. She is looking for an absolute. Moreover, it would be possible by using this example to connect the Romantic conception of the desert as a contact zone between the imaginary and the real, the dream world and geography, which is possible thanks to the movement of walking. Eberhardt in describing nature also often favoured an overlooking position, as in the description of the Moroccan town Figuig: 'J'étais assise sur le parapet en terre dorée d'une haute tour branlante.'[100], hence confirming the legacy of Romanticism.

Once again, this idea is confirmed when she speaks about the plain of Hodna (natural region of Algeria located between the Tell and Saharan Atlas ranges at the eastern end of the *Hautes Plaines*): 'L'espace libre paraît n'avoir plus de bornes. Les chevaux flairent cette immensité calme et libre… ils voudraient s'y lancer, pour s'enivrer en une course vertigineuse. (…) c'est grand, monotone et berceur…'[101]. Horses are nothing more than a metaphor for her irrevocable desire for freedom. This space without borders is called 'berceur', thus underlining the appeasement provided by the freedom of the desert, but 'berceur' is also a reference to dreams, and dreams often come back to Eberhardt's writings. The line between dream and reality is often thin, like desert mirages, thus reinforcing the idea of blurred borders between things. She attaches importance above all to the impressions given by the landscape more than the landscape itself, which is why her writing is, for example, very sensitive to sunrise and sunset because these moments offer changes of lights, colours and therefore impressions. She writes about Djebel Mekter (a mountain in the Atlas in Algeria): 'La dune d'un rouge doré

[98] Friedrich Nietzche, *Ainsi parlait Zarathoustra* (Paris: Le Livre de Poche, 1972), 77.
[99] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 106.
[100] Ibid., 183.
[101] Ibid., 116.

ardent tranche violemment sur le fond bleu et sévère du Djebel Mektar'[102] and also '[…] en contemplant les dunes fauves, sanglantes ou violettes, ou livides sous le ciel bas et noir de l'hiver'[103]; the descriptions here are very colourful, even going as far as colour saturation. Eberhardt does not seek to make a realistic or anthropological description like Bird. In other words, it is important to see the landscape no longer as a neutral space but as a form of representation depending on the cultural context, as Daniels and Cosgrove explain: 'A landscape is a cultural image, a pictorial way of representing, structuring or symbolizing surroundings'[104]. It is a way of approaching the landscape used as already explained by Orientalism but also by Eberhardt, who used the description of the landscape as a new structure where her male alter ego Mahmoud Saadi could evolve: 'Je suis loin du monde, loin de la civilisation et de ses comédies hypocrites. Je suis seul, sur la terre d'Islam, au désert, libre et dans des conditions de vie excellentes'[105]. The use of the masculine 'seul' shows that her masculine identity finds, indeed, freedom in the desert space. Thereby, geographical space of the desert becomes the reflection of her personal reality : 'Le charme que nous attribuons à certaines régions de la terre n'est que leurre et illusion ; tant que les aspects de la nature environnante répondent à notre état d'âme, nous croyons y découvrir une splendeur, une beauté particulière…. Mais, du jour où notre âme éphémère change, tout s'écroule et s'évanouit…'[106]. The expression of feelings and emotions through the landscape, but also the desire to be between dream and reality show that Eberhardt can be seen, as we said previously, as a part of Romanticism[107]. Nature leads to dreams in her writing : 'Je rêve en face des champs inondés de lumière, loin de la ville[108], l'une des plus ignobles et des plus bêtes qui soient, dans le silence reposant des herbes et des fleurs, aux chants naïfs des oiseaux heureux de vivre'[109]. She corresponds to the Romantic heritage also in her way of approaching writing: 'Il est une beauté en toute chose et savoir la discerner est le don du seul poète : ce don n'est

[102] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Au Pays des sables* (Paris: Edition du Centenaire, 2018), 224.
[103] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 83.
[104] Stephen Daniels and Denis Cosgrove, *The Iconography of Landscape* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 1.
[105] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Journaliers* (Bussigny: Bourlapapey, 1923), 56, www.ebooks-bnr.com.
[106] Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable*, 369.
[107] Romanticism is a literary movement that values the expression of emotions, subjectivity, sensitivity, imagination and the inner self. It exalts nature, dreams, the past, mystery and melancholy, but also revolt against established social and literary norms.
[108] Alger.
[109] Eberhardt, *Journaliers*, 93, www.ebooks-bnr.com.

point mort en moi et je m'en glorifie'[110]. What is important to remember about Eberhardt is therefore the desire to make the desert the place of all possibilities but also the place of recollection of feelings. In fact, we do not find this approach in the urban space, on which she writes that '[…] une fois de plus, la tentation me vient, au lieu de retourner vers l'ennui de la captivité à la ville, de redescendre avec les chameliers insouciantes vers les horizons aimés et de ne jamais revenir…'[111]; she affirms that civilisation does not allow access to the inner peace and the freedom that she searches for. It is an idea that she confirms once again in *Écrits sur le Sable*: 'Fuyant la banalité d'Alger, son bruit et sa foule, j'ai voulu revoir le Sud, le pays du silence bienfaisant, revivre, ne fût-ce qu'un instant, la vie libre de là-bas, que je regrette depuis si longtemps dans l'atmosphère hostile des grandes villes embourbées de "civilisation" '[112].

This form of slowness in life, thanks to contemplation, places her in the role of observer, and also creates a slowness in the narrative.The scope of the visual perspective (immense landscapes) can be seen as a liberation, or at least that the power of narrativity is part of the process of liberation. Indeed, the slowness of the narrative[113] created by the description of the landscape leads to conducive moments for Eberhardt for writing about the self. Moreover, as both a traveller and a writer, Eberhardt presents herself as moving through space and mastering it in two ways: through her control of the narrative and her command of the geographical and physical environment. By virtue of this dual control, the journey is organised as an act of recollection, and thus becomes an act of identity-building through self-narration. Speed and slowness, depending on the scale of observation (near and far) also affect the observer in the autodiegetic or autobiographical text (*Journaliers*) and constitute new feminine powers in relation to self-invention. For example, Eberhardt, traveling by train, writes '[…] le long voyage en chemin de fer, à travers l'ouest et le sud-ouest de l'Algérie, fut charmant. (…) j'eus quelques heures de repos et de rêverie. Il est ainsi, (…) des instants où rien d'extraordinaire ne survient, mais qu'on n'oublie jamais dans la suite, car ils sont d'une indicible douceur'[114]. The movement itself is fast but the passivity of the young woman

[110] Ibid., 383.
[111] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Au Pays des sables* (Paris: Edition du Centenaire, 2018), 98.
[112] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable* (Paris : Grasset, 1990), 111.
[113] Slow narration is a stylistic or structural choice in a story that manifests itself in a slower narrative pace, allowing the world, the characters or the issues to be explored in greater depth, but which can also produce an effect of suspense, tension or, on the contrary, contemplation or melancholy.
[114] Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable*, 125.

permits reverie and the inscription of this moment in her memory. The train widens the angle and lends speed while the body is immobile; thanks to that her mind is available, this is what allows a real connection to the world and to herself. That being said, the desert remains the central landscape of her travel writings.

If the desert allows renewal as we explained, this point needs to be nuanced since the desert is a geographical space often present in Orientalist discourse and can therefore be part of a colonial representation. Indeed, 'l'intérêt littéraire et artistique pour les pays d'Afrique du Nord, du Moyen- Orient et de culture islamique se développe au dix-neuvième siècle dans le cadre de l'expansion coloniale'[115]. For Eberhardt, her fantasy of the Orient is based primarly on literature, and in particular the novels of Pierre Loti : 'La personnalité de Loti me hante surtout malgré moi, et après lecture (de ce que j'écris) je le retrouve partout'[116] . Both Loti and Eberhardt disguised themselves, were fascinated with Islam and, for both, the desert was sometimes sublimated in their writings. Stretches of sand, mirages, caravans and oases are all elements that feed a romantic and often essentialist vision of the Orient. Indeed, *in Le Désert*, Loti wrote that the desert of Sinaï was 'presque pur de tout relief, de tout objet'[117] and it helped him to achieved his 'rêve d'artiste'[118] and his 'rêve du désert'[119]. This 'rêve de desert' described the desert as empty and it becomes a place of escape for Westerners: 'dans le long recueillement des solitudes'[120]. Thefore, Isabelle Eberhardt, despite her marginal position and her open rejection of the colonial order, did not escape certain Orientalist fantasies in her descriptions of the desert. She sometimes participated in the same aestheticisation of the East as Loti, projecting a poetic, mystical, even essentialist vision of the desert and its inhabitants. This is what makes her writing ambiguous. She wrote : **'**J'aime le désert parce qu'il est beau, vide et libre… Là-bas, tout est grandeur, simplicité, silence et lumière'[121]. Here she implies the idea that the desert is a virgin space, ready to welcome wandering, the absolute, purity - an idea that partly denies the complexity of the societies that live there. She never completely leaves the European imaginary, particularly in her use of the desert as a place of escape and

[115] Kamila Aitsiselmi Ouhibi, 'Sur les traces de Pierre Loit : Isabelle Eberhardt ou la fin de l'Orientalisme ?', *Nouvelles Études Francophones*, n°2. (2014) : 141.
[116] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Journaliers* (Bussigny: Bourlapapey, 1923), 58, www.ebooks-bnr.com
[117] Pierre Loti, *Le Désert* (Paris : Éditions Payot et Rivages, 1895), 181.
[118] Ibid., 190.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Ibid.
[121] Eberhardt, *Journaliers*, 77, www.ebooks-bnr.com.

personal transcendence. Like many European travellers, she projects herself into an existential quest that turns the desert into a mirror rather than a real, complex territory, at least at the start of her journey. This fantasy of the desert applies not only to the landscape itself but also to its inhabitants : 'Les Soudanais de la *zaouïa*, tant que leur race reste pure, sont robustes et souvent beaux, d'une beauté toute arabe, qui contraste singulièrement avec le noir ébène de leur peau. Ceux qui sont issus de métissage avec les *kharatines* sont, au contraire, ordinairement chétifs et laids, avec des visages anguleux, les membres grêles et disproportionnés'[122]. This expression is directly in line with the racialist and essentialist discourses of the XIX^{e} century, which classify individuals according to physical and moral criteria associated with their 'race'. Eberhardt takes up pseudo-scientific categories of thought from colonial anthropology, even though she uses them in a context of personal description. She establishes an aesthetic hierarchy in which the 'purity' of the Sudanese race is valued insofar as it is associated with 'Arab' criteria that are closer to her own Orientalist ideal.

The idea of the landscape as a non-neutral space through Orientalism is also present in Great Britain. According to Valerie Kennedy 'generally, three versions of Orientalism dominate in Victorian literature: exoticist Orientalism, imperialist Orientalism, and Orientalism used as part of a critical perspective on Victorian society itself'[123]. Isabella Bird, who was raised in Victorian society, seems to have an ambiguous position since she straddles these three ways of approaching Orientalism. In her relationship to others and in the way she represents herself and others she sometimes replicates imperialist ideas, like her way to describe the Ainus peoples: 'The hairy Ainos, as these savages have been called, are stupid, gentle, good-natured,and submissive. They are a wholly distinct race from the Japanese'[124]. She used the word 'submissive', which clearly shows the infantilisation of the Ainus peoples and Western superiority in her eyes. That being said, in her relationship to the landscape we rather have the impression that she breaks the clichés put in place by European imagination. We will focus exclusively on this point, addressing later in our studies her other way to reproduce forms of Orientalism. Indeed, Bird must break away from an idealisation of Japan

[122] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Au Pays des sables* (Paris: Edition du Centenaire, 2018), 180.
[123] Valerie Kennedy, 'Orientalism in the Victorian Era,' *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*, no. 10 (2017): 14, https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.013.226.
[124] Isabella Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (Reno: Pantianos Classics, 2017), 121.

which was very present in the Victorian period. Japan was perceived as the 'fairyland'[125] that is, in a colonial context, a landscape that is part of a discourse that combines fascination, idealism and cultural distance. This world is perceived as both attractive and incomprehensible, sometimes idealised and at the same time confined by stereotypes. This orientalist view transforms a real culture into a mythological and fantasised place, where reality is eclipsed by imaginary projections. It is true that Bird herself uses this expression to talk about Japan – '[…] ten minutes of sunshine would transform the whole into fairyland' [126] – but despite this, she does not hesitate to give a very realistic vision of the country, thus giving her journey a more adventurous side, as shown in this description of Kayashima (during her trip from Ikari to Yokokawa): '[…] miserable village'[127], '[…] darl, dirty, vile, noisy'[128]. Moreover, she does not hesitate to describe the flora and fauna of Japan, more specifically of the pass of Ishikawa (east centre of the country): 'The vegetation was significant of a milder climate. The magnolia and bamboo re-appeared, and tropical ferns mingled with the beautiful blue hydrangea, the yellow Japan lily and the great blue campanula'[129]. The choice she made to travel in a nature so different from the one in Europe permitted her to have an anthropological approach and therefore to assert herself in a very masculine environment. Indeed, slow travel on foot or on horseback (she travelled mainly on horseback) grants a better access to nature. She could observe this new nature and paint all the details for her readers, but this immersion did not only allow a scientific approach, it also emphasised the hostility of Japanese nature and therefore the difficulty of the journey.

Bird also crossed very specific landscapes. She describes it in *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* when she arrives close to the Okawa mountain (south of Japan): 'It is walled in by the high mountains, gloriously wooded and cleft by dark ravines, down which torrents where tumbling in great drifts of foam, crashing and booming, boom and crash multiplied by many an echo, and every ravine afforded abundant vegetation that I welcomed the sight of a gray cliff or bare

[125] This representation of Japan as a fairytale place coincided with the opening up of Japan to the West after the period of isolation, and Victorian artists often idealised and romanticised this culture, creating images that evoked a kind of fairytale world, full of bright colours and refined aesthetics (this influence of Japan on Western art is called Japonism). For example the oil painting 'The Princess from the Land of Porcelain' by James Whistler painted between 1863 and 1865.
[126] Isabella Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (Reno: Pantianos Classics, 2017), 59.
[127] Ibid., 61.
[128] Ibid., 61.
[129] Ibid., 64.

face of rock'[130]. The nature here is very powerful, the 'high mountains' bring her back to her own smallness, the 'dark ravines' counterbalance the height of the mountains by emphasising the danger of emptiness, the water also wants to be hostile, represented by the trembling torrents, and the abundant vegetation gives an image of nature taking back its rights. These protruding mountains and tumultuous waters often appear in Bird's descriptions, allowing her to move away from the western image of Japan, but also to highlight the difficulty of her travels. Her journey was physically very strenuous and even if she refuses to insist on this point, it permitted her to compete with male travellers like Sir Rutherford Alcock (British Minister at the Court of Japan) and Edward Morse (American naturalist).

If she deviates from the expectations of the British reader (that is to say idealising the country to make readers fantasise about it), she still corresponds to the codes of romanticism by presenting, as we saw in the previous quote, nature as an impressive environment, where men and women feel very small against its power. This description evokes the Romantic painting *Wanderer above the Sea of Fog* by Caspar David Friedrich (1818), in which nature appears at once hostile, captivating, and inscrutable. In Bird's writing, rivers make frequent appearances. We understand that they have a strong symbolic value. Indeed, the river can sometimes be a companion that follows her in her travels: 'We came to a large river, the Arakai, along whose affluents we had been tramping for two days'[131]. Above all, though, it is an element as hostile as it is beautiful and captivating. The most obvious example is that of crossing the river close to Ikarigaseki in the prefecture of Aomori Ken, where Bird gets carried away by the river:

> The great stream, whose beauty I had formerly admired, was now a thing of dread (…). The torrents from the heavens hissed through the forest, trees and logs came crashing down the hillsides, a thousand cascades added to the din, and in the bewilderment produced by such an unusual concatenation of sights and sounds we stumbled through the river[132].

The dangerous river may be a Romantic motif as we have seen but another interpretation may be possible if we refer to Kennedy in the article 'Orientalism in Victorian Era', where she writes: 'The most important generalised patterns of Orientalist tropes in much

[130] Isabella Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (Reno: Pantianos Classics, 2017, 59.
[131] Ibid., 63.
[132] Ibid., 120.

Victorian travel writing are those of the Noble (or Ignoble) Savage, which are both versions of the idea of the primitive linked to the idea of the Orient as either paradise or a place of danger'[133]. Although as we saw earlier, the descriptions of Bird can correspond to Romanticism, but she also has an orientalist gaze: 'The scenery is wild and grand, but there is a peculiar charm about the Japanese landscape, a charm that, to the untrained European eye, has something of the artificial about it, as if it were too carefully arranged and too symmetrical to be natural'[134]. She brings a judgement to Japanese nature, which for her is too 'superficial' because it's too arranged. Bird's judgement stems from her colonial heritage, which would have liked a wilder landscape, in the image of the inhabitants, to contrast with Western refinement.

Thence, it was with an ambiguous eye (romantic, orientalist, anthropological) that Bird explored Japanese landscapes. She notes during her trip from Ikari to Yokokawa (more precisely at Kuramatage, the last of seventeen mountain-passes): 'After the hard travelling of six days the rest of Sunday in a quiet place at a high elevation is truly delightful! Mountains and passes, valleys and rice swamps, forests and villages; poverty, industry, dirt, ruinous temples, prostrate Buddhas, strings of straw-shod pack-horses; long, grey, featureless streets, and quiet, staring crowds, are all jumbled up fantastically in my memory'[135]. Her memory is detailed but disorganised at the same time, it shows that in this situation the slowness makes it possible to live more intensely in the moment, so the memory is emotional, sensory more than factual. She has chosen slowness as a means of anchoring memories she created in her new chosen life. The slowness-memory relationship is also essential in the writing process: to remember is to be able to transmit[136]. The narrative identity allows to fix things and to master speed and memory, reinventing the self in the process.

As far as Alexandra David-Néel is concerned, walking is also a way of rubbing shoulders with the world but it seems, by the difficulty of the paths taken, to be a way to prove herself as well, to be deserving of her achievement and to compete with male travellers: 'L'idée me faisait rire et je me disais que riraient bien davantage, s'ils me voyaient, ceux qui m'avaient

[133] Valerie Kennedy, 'Orientalism in the Victorian Era,' *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Literature*, n. 10 (2017): 33, https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.013.226.
[134] Isabella Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (Reno: Pantianos Classics, 2017), 30.
[135] Ibid., 61.
[136] The writing processes will be approached in part 3 of this thesis.

indiqué des routes aisées et que je n'avais pas écoutés, voulant couper au court à travers la jungle pittoresque'[137]. It is interesting that she talks about 'couper court' because it means that walking makes it possible to reach a goal and have a form of efficiency. We feel her real desire to be at the heart of an authentic nature, but we also see that walking is a way for her to access new territories. She is an explorer who wants to go where no one has walked before. We can analyse this as a demand for autonomy and not just as a mind guided by its curiosity. This autonomy seems to be earned by going through a inhospitable nature, for example when she tries to reach the Dokar pass[138], she speaks about '[…] une dernière grimpade, plus raide encore que les précédentes, nous amena auprès d'un petit chörten marquant la jonction de notre sentier et de celui du pèlerinage'[139], then she explains further '[…] à mesure que nous nous élevions sur la montagne sainte, la forêt changeait de caractère, devenant beaucoup plus sombre et plus sévère que dans les environs de Londré. Des phénomènes curieux vinrent accompagner nos marches (…). Nous voyions danser sous les hautes futaies, les lueurs de braisiers cachés dans les replis des montagnes, des ombres mouvantes se profilaient…'[140]. The difficulty of walking also represents the difficulty of meeting a new culture. But the nature can also become the reflection of her inner state of mind: 'La nature environnante parut entrainée par ma déclaration passionnée et se mit à l'unisson'[141]. More than a reflection, nature in this example seems to listen to the author, at least to be one with her. It is perhaps in these snowy landscapes that she found her place and had access to a wholeness of being: '[…] nulle description ne peut donner une idée d'un tel décor. C'était un de ces spectacles écrasants qui agenouillent les croyants, comme devant le voile cachant la Face Suprême'[142].

Indeed, according to Rachel Bouvet, 'il n'est pas rare que des écrivains-voyageurs découvrent ainsi un paysage qui les rejoint intimement'[143]. For David-Néel, the mountain is a privileged place, in connection with her emotions. More precisely, the idea of crossing a mountain pass is an image that comes up very often as a symbol demonstrating an initiatory

[137] Alexandra David-Néel, *Au Cœur des Himalayas* (Paris: Payot, 2016) 145.
[138] The Dokar pass marks the border between Yunnan and Tibet.
[139] Ibid., 34.
[140] Ibid., 43.
[141] Ibid., 285.
[142] Ibid., 178.
[143] Rachel Bouvet, 'Variations autour d'un paysage : le désert chez Isabelle Eberhardt,' *Pratiques de l'espace en littérature, Figura*, no. 7 (2002) : 108.

journey. She underlines, as Isabella Bird did, the power of the nature and its unpredictability. She writes about it before the climb to the *Col de Déou*, located on the border between Tibet and the province of Qinghai: 'Ces glaciers géants et cette vaste étendue morne soulignaient la disproportion écrasante existant entre la fantastique région des hautes cimes et les chétifs voyageurs qui avaient osé s'y aventurer, seuls, au cœur même de l'hiver'[144]. 'La disproportion écrasante' of the glaciers is a way of remembering that man is nothing compared to a mountain, but also a way of emphasising the exceptional nature of what she undertakes. From a symbolic point of view, the mountain pass represents the crossroads, the place of all possibilities: 'Le jour suivant nous montions vers un col au-delà duquel se croisaient les routes entre lesquelles il nous fallait choisir : celle de San ngags tchös dzong et celle de Lanka-dzong'[145]. It is the accumulation of her choices at each intersection she encounters that constitutes an important part of the identity in the eyes of David-Néel and it is something that she will explain very well at the end of her life (in 1969) during an interview with Jean Fléchet: 'Il ne faut jamais dire si j'avais été là … j'aurais fait ça'[146] because if you had taken another path 'vous auriez été celui-là, et pas celui que vous êtes maintenant'[147].

Her various long expeditions allowed David-Néel to rise to the rank of explorer, but as with the two other authors, slowness is not the only way of travelling and it is not only through the performative that speed grants the reinvention of the self. Landscape and geographical space are produced by a narrative that determines the reader's psychological representation, for example in the rapid contraction of geographical itineraries of David-Néel in *Mystiques et magiciens du Tibet*: 'J'ai retraversé l'Himalaya, redescendant vers l'Inde'[148], '[…] séjour en Birmanie. Retraite sur les monts Sagain'[149], '[…] séjour au Japon, dans le calme profond du Tôfoku-ji'[150], '[…] séjour en Corée, à Panya-an'[151] … all of this in the space of one page. She speaks here about her journeys to different countries by speeding up her narrative. Therefore, there are two distinct types of displacement: that of the journey and that of the narrative. When she arrives in the monastery in Koum-Boum (close to the village of Lusar in the historical

[144] Alexandra David-Néel, *Voyage d'une Parisienne à Lhassa* (Paris: Pocket, 2004), 179.
[145] Ibid., 136-137.
[146] Jean Fléchet, *Alexandra David-Néel entretiens* (Paris: Collection Opus, 2015), 66.
[147] Ibid.
[148] Alexandra David-Néel, *Mystiques et magiciens du Tibet* (Paris: Pocket, 2019), 95.
[149] Ibid.
[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid.

Tibetan region of Amdo, west of Lhasa) to learn about practices of Buddhists, she returns to a slower pace of narration and tightens the scale of observation: 'Certain jours, quelques poignées de *tsampa* et un petit morceau de beurre sont distribués avec le thé quotidien; d'autres fois ce dernier est remplacé par de la soupe'[152] or 'chaque matin, les garçonnets à demi éveillés sont, à côté de leurs ainés, baignés dans cette étrange atmosphère'[153]. The pace of the narrative can be meaningful because it reflects a narrative process -as the actual journey may be faster or slower- and is part of the writer's self-representation. Behind this process lies a strong identification with the perceived speed of the traveler in geographical space.

Landscape and its writing are not neutral and can be representative of the tensions created by colonialism[154], but also of gender differences, as we will see in the next subsection. In this way, the speed of the journey, and of the narrative allows to approach places and spaces in a way that seems to facilitate the discovery of a new culture, but also encourages the reinvention of the self through the mastery of a landscape and its writings. Moreover, the use of Romanticism still has a strong impact on David-Néel, Bird and Eberhardt. For Eberhardt we can see a dreamlike function of space, whereas Bird and David-Néel tend more towards realism despite their use of the picturesque, with especially for Bird a strong contrast between the reliefs, reminiscent of alpine Romanticism. Through narrative control of temporality, Bird, David-Néel and Eberhardt master geographical space and autobiographical narrative power.

1.c Women and geography: appropriation of male spaces

> 'As a woman I have no country, as a woman I want no country, as a woman my country is the whole world'[155]

As we have argued in the previous subchapter, the liberation and the conquest of the self therefore seem to go through geographic conquest, but how was this possible for women at the end of the nineteenth century? As we have seen previously, the landscapes and the spaces are never neutral and presuppose a power relationship between the East and the West, as well as between woman and man. This is the idea that is highlighted by Linda McDowell in

[152] Alexandra David-Néel, *Mystiques et magiciens du Tibet* (Paris: Pocket, 2019), 103.
[153] Ibid.
[154] We refer to Mary Louise Pratt's theory, which explains the concept of the 'contact zone'.
[155] Virginia Woolf, *Three Guineas* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1938), 109.

Gender, Identity and Place, where she argues: 'Places are made through power relations which construct the rules which define boundaries. These boundaries are both social and special – they define who belongs to a place and who may be excluded, as well as the location or site of the experience'[156]. There are, indeed, male and female spaces; this is very clear, for example, in the city of Algiers where the public spaces such as cafés, mosques or harems[157] are separated so that men and women live together without crossing each other. But it also applies to natural spaces since the discovery of new territories remains something masculine and the conquest of new spaces as well as the difficulty of evolving in a hostile nature are also elements associated with men: 'Les femmes ont été exclues des récits d'exploration et de conquête non seulement en raison de leurs compétences perçues comme insuffisantes, mais aussi parce que les idéologies de genre les situaient dans des rôles sociaux confinés à l'espace privé et domestique, loin des sphères publiques de l'aventure et de la conquête'[158]. But it is not just about that, according to Gillian Rose

> Historically, in geographical discourse, landscapes are often seen in terms of the female body and the beauty of Nature. (…) This feminization of what is looked at does matter, because it is one half of what Berger characterizes as the dominant visual regime of white heterosexual masculinism: "women appear", he says, but "men act". This particular masculine position is to look actively, possessively, sexually and pleasurably, at women as objects'[159].

The male gaze, even before being theorised and associated with the representation of women in art and media, seems to emerge from the very representation of geographical space. In literature nature is sexualized and given to readers to see in this way, which allows men to appropriate this space through domination. We can also refer here to Simone de Beauvoir, who develops this same idea of a feminised nature which would be the symbol of a femininity to conquer and dominate. Indeed, in her seminal work *Le Deuxième sexe*, she draws a parallel between '[…] les terres vierges'[160] that have always '[…] fasciné(és) les explorateurs'[161] and '[…] un corps vierge'[162] (a feminine body), arriving at the same conclusion which is: '[…] un des

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[156] Linda McDowell, *Gender, Identity and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies* (London: Polity Press, 1999), 4.
[157] In the European imagination the harem is a place of fantasy. Isabelle Eberhardt will therefore not highlight this place and in doing so breaks with the orientalist description of cities.
[158] Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 55.
[159] Rose Gillian, *Feminism and Geography* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), 87-88.
[160] Simone De Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième sexe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 215.
[161] Ibid.
[162] Ibid.

buts que poursuit tout désir, c'est la consommation de l'objet désiré qui implique sa destruction'[163]. How can women travel and reclaim space by evolving in a world where this representation is dominant?

It is first of all necessary to remember that, while women are in that time mainly associated with the household, in the nineteenth century we find many women who travel, but often with their husbands. We think in particular of the colonised countries where the role of the Western woman was to recreate the family home in the colonised country. Even when she is travelling, the Western woman is associated with a form of immobility. Not having the role of a conqueror like the man, the woman would have a different relation to travel, to landscape and to the other according to Stevenson: 'Women travellers developed strategies of accommodation not confrontation or domination'[164]. As women travel writers, David-Néel, Bird and Eberhardt seem to expect self-liberation by appropriating masculine spaces and masculine characteristics[165]. The mobility as a process of helping self-liberation seems obvious to Dúnlaith Bird, and all the more obvious for women: 'Vagabondage becomes a dialogue of female disempowerment and self-empowerment. Women are often marginalised and seemingly inert in the face of repression, Colette suggests, but they have an endless ability to adapt and suffer, to survive in whatever form possible, and to retain an identity on the margins of society'[166]. By this, we understand that the idea of vagrancy is more evident for women because, being more marginalised than men, they are more accustomed to the process of adaptability: 'Je m'efforçais d'oublier que j'avais jamais été autre chose qu'une humble mendiante lamaïste errant de monastère en monastère'[167]. David-Néel sees this transformation as a necessity for travelling incognito but also as a profound learning experience, both cultural and spiritual. Bird is more aloof with the cultures she encounters, but she still tries to adapt, especially in Japan: 'I was soon on intimate terms with many of them'[168]. Eberhardt is also highly adaptable to her adopted culture : 'Je me perfectionne en

[163] Simone De Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième sexe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 215.
[164] Rose Gillian and Alison Blunt, *Writing Women and Space* (London: Guilford Press, 1994), 160.
[165] However, it should be underlined that occupying a masculine space does not necessarily mean having a masculine attitude (e.g.: Eberhardt does not become a settler). Bird, David-Néel and Eberhardt become 'others' in their own way, without always following male models. We will see this in the next chapter.
[166] Dúnlaith Bird, *Travelling in Different Skins: Gender identity in European Women's Oriental Travelogues, 1850-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 44.
[167] Alexandra David Néel, *Correspondance avec son mari: Édition intégrale 1904-1941* (Paris: Plon, 2016), 209.
[168] Isabella Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (Reno: Pantianos Classics, 2017), 47.

langue arabe'[169], 'Je vis comme eux, je mange comme eux, je dors comme eux'[170], 'Je vivais avec eux, dans les tentes, partageant leur pain et leurs peines. Ils m'avaient acceptée comme l'une des leurs'[171]. Indeed, this is all the more the case for Eberhardt, for whom the idea of adaptability appears from birth since she is a young Russian girl growing up in Switzerland. In fact, given their status as women Eberhardt, David-Néel and Isabella Bird are compelled to put in place strategies which, as we will see, are necessary and vital; which would not have been essential if they had been men.

The appropriation of a new space, and especially of a masculine space, is done in the first place through disguise. The disguise, before being a way of conquering identity seems to be essential for discovering the outside world, as described by Eberhardt in her book *Écrits sur le sable*:

> Sous un costume correct de jeune fille européenne, je n'aurais jamais rien vu, le monde eût été fermé pour moi, car la vie extérieure semble avoir été faite pour l'homme et non pour la femme. Cependant j'aime à me plonger dans le bain de la vie populaire, à sentir les ondes de la foule couler sur moi, à m'imprégner des fluides du peuple. Ainsi seulement, je possède une ville et j'en sais ce que le touriste ne comprendra jamais, malgré toutes les explications de ses guides[172].

In order to blend in with the Algerian society of the time, she needed an outfit that allowed her to move around freely, and this could only be done by adopting a male disguise. She also writes: 'J'échangeais mes vêtements de femme contre l'accoutrement correspondant à mes plans pour le reste de la journée'[173]. Her men's clothes are, at first, only a way that permits her to achieve her ends. Her costume evolves according to the places she crosses but the recurring outfit is that of the Algerian rider wearing a *gandouras*[174], a white *burnouse*s[175], a white turban with veils on her head and a black rosary. She does not hesitate to shave her head to make the disguise more realistic. When she travelled inside Morocco, her costume was different: 'Et voilà que maintenant, pour sortir, je me suis transformée en Marocain, quittant le lourd harnachement des cavaliers algériens pour la légère «djellaba» blanche, les savates jaunes qu'on chausse sur les pieds nus, et le petit turban blanc sans voile, roulé en

[169] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Journaliers* (Bussigny: Bourlapapey, 1923), 106, www.ebooks-bnr.com
[170] Ibid.
[171] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 41.
[172] Ibid., 73.
[173] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Amours nomades* (Paris: Folio, Gallimard, 2008), 18.
[174] Sleeveless tunic worn under the *bournous.*
[175] Large hooded wool coat.

auréole autour d'une chéchiya'[176]. However, the male character that she creates becomes her alter ego, becomes the prism through which she discovers a country and the locals. It becomes a part of herself, of her identity, even if she never denies her feminine identity. But if she does not deny her feminine identity, she does not claim it either, she sometimes even abandons it to speak of herself in the masculine, and not only for a strategic purpose, but also in her writings, something more intimate (like in her letters to her husband or her brother) this is all the more important since we know that her writing had a therapeutic purpose for her). Yet it seems that this masculine disguise is not the expression of a change of gender or transsexualism, but it is the gateway to a possible development. Actually, this is the gender fluidity that can define Eberhardt's identity. Can we see in her a precursor of the genderfluid theory?[177] What we can affirm for the moment is that the costume grants her entry into the male space but also into the Arab space, into what Mary Louise Pratt calls the contact zone. One such are the mosques, which are reserved for Muslims as Eberhardt specifies when she writes that 'l'accès des mosquées et des cimetières coraniques n'est licite qu'aux musulmans'[178]. Another such space are coffee places such as *le café maure:* '[…] arrêt au café maure de Ndila'[179]. This advantage of the disguise is confirmed by another testimony: 'J'ai toujours aimé errer, sous le costume égalitaire des bédouins, dans les cimetières musulmans, où tout est paisible et résigné, où rien de ce qui rend ceux d'Europe lugubres ne vient déparer la majesté du lieu'[180] and she further informs 'si Larbi ne se douta jamais que j'étais une femme, il m'appelait frère Mahmoud , et je partageais sa vie errante et ses travaux pendant deux mois'[181]. She insists on the idea of belonging with vocabulary such as 'frère', 'partageais' or 'costume égalitaire'. She appropriates the space of the desert by trying to be like the nomads and the Muslims. But it is understood here that this idea of 'belonging' refers mainly to the Arab world and not to the male space. She defines herself more as an Arab than as a man or a woman, and the disguise becomes a way to disappear, to go unnoticed, despite the active role she embodies, that of man rider who enters the spaces he desires. She was in Béchar (south west Algeria) when she wrote

[176] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Amours nomades* (Paris: Folio, Gallimard, 2008), 185.
[177] This idea will be discussed in the next chapter.
[178] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 32.
[179] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Journaliers* (Bussigny: Bourlapapey, 1923), 205, www.ebooks-bnr.com.
[180] Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable*, 32.
[181] Eberhardt, *Journaliers*, 101.

> Parmi ces braves gens je n'ai pas de gêne. Je suis entrée chez eux et je me suis assise dans un coin de la cour. Ils ne m'ont même pas remarquée. Il n'y a rien de remarquable en moi. Je puis passer partout inaperçue. Excellente position pour bien voir. Si les femmes ne sont pas de grandes observatrices, c'est que leur costume attire les regards; elles ont toujours été faites pour être regardées et n'en souffrent pas encore. Ce sentiment me paraît, à la longue, trop flatteur pour les hommes.[182]

The parallel she draws with a feminine outfit shows the need for her stratagem as well as the fulfilment it gives her. Her way of moving freely in the Arab world corresponds to a disappearing act. But she does not always go unnoticed and her costume is not just a way to mingle with the locals. It is a practice for her to assert herself, and we understand this thanks to her sojourn to Marseille where she decides to wear her *fez*: 'Je me sens seule et étrangère parmi ces gens qui ignorent tout de moi, et dont j'ignore tout et qui, évidemment sentent et pensent autrement que moi. D'ailleurs mon fez musulman me retranche encore plus de leur société… ils me regardent tous comme une bête curieuse'[183]. This difference in attitude is interesting and shows that the disguise is sometimes a way of blending in, and at other times a way of asserting one's difference. As her journey unfolds, we understand that her disguise, becomes a way of asserting her Arab identity, which she calls her 'identité rêvée'[184]. Indeed, her cloths thus becomes a tool of self-invention and freedom: it allows her to escape bourgeois European femininity and move around in a masculine, Muslim world. But at the same time, it reveals the extent to which identity is always in tension between what she wants to be, how she is perceived, and what she is capable of becoming. In all cases, whether she mingles with the Algerians or the French people, her attitude and her costume are factors that have an important influence on her relationship to others. Indeed, according to Jean Xavier Ridon in *Le Voyage en son miroir*, 'le travestissement d'Eberhardt s'enrichit d'autres stratégies liées à la nécessité d'approcher l'espace de l'autre'[185]. For Eberhardt, the conquest of space goes hand in hand with the conquest of the *'vrai*'[186], the '*pure'*[187], that is to say '[…] un espace culturel qui se donnerait à voir tel qu'il fonctionne en dehors de tout regard extérieur, c'est-à-dire dans le cas d'Eberhardt, tel qu'il serait en dehors de l'influence du monde occidental'[188].

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[182] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 240.
[183] Ibid., 72.
[184] Ibid., 47.
[185] Jean-Xavier Ridon, *L'Étrangement du voyageur* (Paris: Kimé, 2018), 35.
[186] Terms used by Jean Xavier Ridon in *Le Voyage en son miroir* (Paris: Kimé, 2002).
[187] Ibid.
[188] Ibid., 36.

She accesses this 'world' by adapting her outfit. It is essential to specify that, whether she goes unnoticed or not, her costume above all allows her to have an active role (unlike David-Néel as we will see later). She not only penetrates male spaces, she also actively participates in actions, just like men. Indeed, this way of dressing like a man goes hand in hand with a masculine attitude, which is that of travelling alone at night on horseback: 'Cette nuit, vers 2 heures, traverse l'oasis lugubre d'Ourlana'[189] or 'hier soir, été, seul et à cheval, du côté de la route de Touggourt'[190].

We also think of scenes from everyday life, such as the many meals she partakes in with men and the many trips back and forth between the houses and the mosque, where she prays in the room reserved for men. The disguise creates possibilities for human as well as religious experiences: 'Je suis rentré, et, ayant mis mon *fez*, je suis ressorti et je suis allé, avec Ahmed, le domestique, d'abord à la *djemaâ* el-Kebira...(...) Salué l'*oukil* de la mosquée (...) Soupe chez El-Hadj-Mohammed, au coin de la rue Jénina'[191]. It is interesting to note that she even shares the intimacy of sleep with men, speaking of them as her brothers and talking about herself in masculine terms ('je suis allé'), reminding us that her Muslim identity is her alter ego Mahmoud Saadi: 'Il fait chaud, sous la tente, dans l'entassement des hommes à demi couchés, accoudés sur les genoux ou sur l'épaule du voisin, fraternellement'[192], or '[…] dans l'autre moitié de la tente, derrière les tentures aux somptueux reflets de laine pourpre, ce sont des frôlements de femmes et des chuchotements qui intriguent vivement mon compagnon. Pourtant, il s'efforce de rester impassible et de ne rien remarquer de ce qui révèle le voisinage des femmes'[193] where we understand that she is separated from other women during this trip with a group of Moghaznis[194] close to the Moroccan border. This separation should not be seen as an affirmation of her own masculinity or a refusal to be seen as a woman, but more as a possibility of experience.

For her friend Victor Barrucand[195], the many disguises of Eberhardt are a way of confronting her mind with that of others, without fully revealing herself. What relation to the

[189] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Journaliers* (Bussigny: Bourlapapey, 1923), 52, www.ebooks-bnr.com.
[190] Ibid., 63.
[191] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 334.
[192] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Notes de route, Maroc-Algérie-Tunisie* (Paris: Charpentier et Fasquelle, 1914), 44.
[193] Ibid., 284.
[194] Moghazins were auxiliaries to the *Sections Administratives Spécialisées* of the French army during the Algerian War, which confirms Eberhardt's ambiguous position (since she is close to the Algerian peoples but also to the French), which we will study later in the thesis.
[195] He was a writer and a journalist. He edited Eberhardt's works after her death.

other becomes possible if she wants to remain elusive?[196] Meanwhile what we can say is that the disguise allows her not only to integrate into new geographical or social spaces, but also to join new intellectual spaces such as journalism and literature seen as masculine environments at the time. She has integrated them perfectly by using a male pseudonym. Thus, the appropriation of space is also done by occupying different social positions (journalist, writer or Mahmoud Saadi). Therefore, travelling to Algeria was an opportunity of producing an identity in constant motion for Eberhardt, as she alternates roles and sees this as an immense freedom because of the unlimited choice offered to her. This appropriation of space as a means of achieving freedom is perfectly illustrated when she writes: '[…] vêtue de costumes d'emprunt, choisis selon les lieux ou les circonstances'[197], she refers to clothes of course, which, when chosen well, open the doors to new (masculine) spaces, but these 'costumes' can also refer to the social roles that she adopts.

It is also necessary to underline the conquest of the linguistic space, since Eberhardt speaks perfect Arabic, blending in with the locals in the same way as David-Néel does thanks to her knowledge of the Tibetan language. These two women quickly understand that to master a language is to increase their power and that it is also a way of belonging to the world they want to inhabit. Eberhardt speaks about her '[…] existence toute arabe'[198]. We know that all the interactions she had in Algeria were in Arabic, but what may surprise us more is the presence of Arabic in the writing. This is particularly evident when Eberhardt describes the landscape, since she uses Arabic words like *djebel* (mountain), *oued* (river), *chott* (dry salt lake), and *hamada* (stone desert). This can be seen as an appropriation of the desert through the language, which also contributes to her distancing herself from the European representation of the desert. She creates a linguistic space representative of her multiculturalism. Her writing therefore participates in this meeting of the West and the East.[199]

The disguise is a characteristic specific to Eberhardt, although David-Néel also uses this subterfuge on occasion, for example when she attends a witchcraft ceremony as part of the tantric cult in Shakti, thanks to Passang's trick (a Tibetan monk), during her trip to Nepal in

[196] We will answer that question in the second part of this thesis.
[197] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 73.
[198] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Journaliers* (Bussigny: Bourlapapey, 1923), 58, www.ebooks-bnr.com.
[199] This idea will be developed in the next chapter.

1912: '[…] il vous a prise pour la Déesse elle-même'[200]. However, her best-known disguise is that of the Tibetan, the one that allows her to go to Lhasa. For this to be credible she has to think of all the details; she does not have a hat (she will find one later) so she wraps a belt on her head, a red one to indicate that she is a widow. She is creative and used to role-playing and wearing costumes, something which comes with her experience of the theatre world and of the stage. In this way, she even pays attention to her hairstyle: 'Je m'étais coupé les cheveux. Dès qu'il eut été décidé que je voyagerais sous le costume laïque, je les avais laissé repousser'[201], but as they are still not long enough to look like a Tibetan, she is forced to use '[…] des crins de yak'. She also wears huge earrings to change the shape of her face, and she colours her skin to darken it, as she explains *in Voyage d'une Parisienne à Lhassa*: 'Je me poudrais avec un mélange de braise pulvérisée et de cacao'[202]. Dressed like this, she can start her exceptional journey. Indeed, she writes on her arrival in a village near the *Col de Kou* : 'Ce fut la première fois que je logeai chez des indigènes dans mon déguisement de pauvresse. Un intérieur thibétain n'était pas une nouveauté pour moi, mais la personnalité que j'avais adoptée y rendait ma situation très différente de ce qu'elle avait été pendant les années précédentes'[203]. If, as for Eberhardt, a disguise seems to allow a more authentic approach to space and culture, it also seems not to permit David-Néel to be fully herself and therefore can become, in certain aspects, distressing, like when she writes 'je me serais volontiers assise là, sur les pierres ensoleillées, pour jouir du charme du décor, savourer la joie de l'heure présente, l'ivresse de l'aventure (…) mais il ne s'agissait pas de rêver. Le personnage de pauvresse décrépite, que j'avais assumé, comporte peu de poésie'[204] or 'ce qui était le plus fatigant et devenait même parfois pénible à l'excès dans l'existence que je menais, c'était le rôle qu'il me fallait constamment jouer pour ne pas trahir mon incognito. Il en résultait une pénible tension nerveuse qui, heureusement se trouvait relâchée pendant les jours de vie plus libre dont je jouissais en traversant les vastes étendues de terre presque inhabitées'[205].

As far as the journey to Lhasa is concerned, access to this forbidden country can only be done by acting, by playing this constraining role of the poor Tibetan, mother of the lama

[200] Alexandra David-Néel, *Au Cœur des Himalayas* (Paris: Payot, 2016), 90.
[201] Alexandra David-Néel, *Voyage d'une Parisienne à Lhassa* (Paris: Pocket, 2004), 40.
[202] Ibid., 133.
[203] Ibid., 106.
[204] Ibid., 141.
[205] Ibid., 151.

Yongden. The costume here allows her to go unnoticed and to occupy the role of observer. Thus, as we have seen, she not only chooses to don the disguise of a Tibetan, but she disguises herself as a poor Tibetan, who is on a pilgrimage with her son, which permits her to blend into the decor because she occupies a humble role from the perspective of the country she is crossing. A convincing example is that of Yongden's invitation to talk about philosophy in Lhasa, when David-Néel writes : 'Très probablement, mes habits laïques et mon sexe m'eussent tenue à l'écart de la pièce où les tournois philosophiques des Lettres auraient eu lieu'[206]. We can also give as an example one of the many meals where they are invited by families and where Yongden is much more respected, as she is only the mother who follows her son. This is the case of the episode which happens on the right bank of Salouen: 'Lama, savez-vous consulter le sort?'[207] do they ask Yongden; meanwhile David-Néel is defined by the following sentence: '[…] la mère, c'est moi'[208]. She specifies further that people deduce it alone, that she no longer needs to decline her identity, proof that the camouflage ploy works perfectly.

Therefore, this is both a liberation of the self which is found in the access to natural territories and the possibility of making this journey in the first place, and thus reaching the goal she has set for herself, but also a non-conquest of the self because of biased social relations. Where Eberhardt finds a part of herself in her role play, David-Néel encounters frustration. Nevertheless, David-Néel knows that she has no other choice and that this gives her the chance to access a world normally closed to Europeans, especially for women. Here she has the opportunity to conquer masculine spaces, such as difficult paths that were thought to be reserved for male explorers only. For this, she is ready to '[…] courir les plus grands dangers sur la route que je choisissais'[209]. Therefore, she appropriates the masculine space of the mountain, a space to which women did not really have access before Romanticism, and even then, they had to correspond to a very feminine image. We have in mind the representations of women crossing the mountains of the Alps with large dresses. Here, David-Néel has an active role which counterbalances the passivity of her role as a Tibetan mother, since she travels the mountain to discover unexplored paths, coming closer to nature and

[206] Alexandra David-Néel, *Voyage d'une Parisienne à Lhassa* (Paris: Pocket, 2004), 162.
[207] Ibid., 138.
[208] Ibid., 139.
[209] Ibid., 95.

becoming equal to men: 'J'ai effectué cette montée-là à pied et sans aide'[210] and 'j'adore les nuits passées, parmi la jungle, sous la tente. (…) On s'y sent plongé dans la nature, un avec les choses environnantes. (…). Les pélerins tibétains semblaient être comme moi submergés par une vague de sérénité'[211]. She is one of them in these situations. She also takes on the male role of explorer when she travels to Po-Tsan-po valley, a place never explored before by Westerners. She plays with the social roles here, corresponding to the idea developed by Braidotti about *vagabondage*: 'It represents a means of securing women's right to movement on their own terms, inhabiting alternative identities and travelling in different skins'[212]. Surely, social roles are a way of being free and choosing how to be approached by others, how to evolve in a place and how to interact with the geographical space and with people. Here, Braidotti agrees with Dúnlaith Bird's idea by asserting that, while travel is more often associated with men, women, by the condition of their sex, are logically closer to the attitude of the nomad: 'In my reading, the feminist subject is nomadic because it is intensive, multiple embodied, and therefore perfectly cultural'[213].

Thus, David-Néel sometimes takes on more active social roles. She wanted to go to Bhutan when it was forbidden (like Tibet and Nepal at that time). For this she had to get a letter of introduction from the British resident of Gangtok, a letter which she would succeed in obtaining as she was a recognized intellectual, and she sometimes took over this role when it was helpful to her. Moreover, while living in Gangtok and waiting for the letter, she stayed in a room in the British Residence and had to, even if she did not want to, attend social events with other Europeans. The other male space that she actively occupied is that of religion, since she becomes a lama, which was not common at all for a woman. Indeed, David-Néel became a lama after a long and exceptional intellectual and spiritual journey: already a scholar of Buddhism before her departure, she immersed herself in monastic life in Tibet and Sikkim, studied with the great hermit Gomchen of Lachen and was initiated into esoteric practices reserved for an elite (such as *tumo*). Although she was not ordained within an official monastic framework, she was recognised as a lama by several Tibetan masters, a fact made all the rarer by the fact that there are very few women lamas in Tibetan Buddhism, a tradition long dominated by men. David-Néel herself confirmed this: 'J'ai reçu de mon Maître les instructions

[210] Alexandra David-Néel, *Au Cœur des Himalayas* (Paris: Payot, 2016), 30.
[211] Ibid., 178.
[212] Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* (New York: Columbia Press University, 1994), 31.
[213] Ibid., 169.

secrètes. Il m'a donné le titre de lama et, bien que je sois une femme, on me traite ici comme un religieux'[214].

Isabella Bird also shares this need for appropriation of the male space, in particular by not hesitating to engage in physically challenging trips but also by occupying maritime space. She evokes many dangerous boat crossings where she is not only passively present. In her book, *The English Woman in America*, she has to cross the Hillsboro' Creek to visit the Native Americans, and she writes that 'we had a large heavy boat, with cumbrous oars, very ill balanced, and a most inefficient crew, two of them being boys either very idle or very ignorant, and, as they kept tumbling backwards over the thwarts, one gentleman and I were left to do all the work'[215]. She explicitly talks about her active participation. On the same trip she evokes the lobster fishing when she is in the hamlet of Greenshore close to St. Eleanor's: 'We fished for an hour, and caught fifteen of these esteemed creatures, which we took to the house in a wheelbarrow'[216]; using the pronoun 'we' makes readers understand that she participates in fishing in the same way as men. One of the last interesting examples concerning Bird and the marine environment is the one where she implies that she is possibly (or probably) even braver than the men: 'We and our luggage were unceremoniously trundled into two large boats, some of the gentlemen, I am sorry to say, forcing their way into the first, in order to secure for themselves inside places in the stage'[217]. The men scramble to get inside, to get cozy where Bird seems unfazed by a more difficult journey, and handles the situation better. It is also interesting that she ironically apologises for pointing out the men's undignified behaviours, in order to fit the European reader's expectations.

However, she differs from David-Néel and Eberhardt because she emphasises her femininity more in her writing. What is really behind this process? According to Dúnlaith Bird, 'Bird's façade of traditional femininity conceals a gleeful spirit of experimentation which is reflected in the gender and cultural ambiguities of her travelogues'[218]. This is reflected in particular in the way she rides horses, when she shares this anecdote with readers: 'Some

[214] Alexandra David Néel, *Correspondance avec son mari: Édition intégrale 1904-1941* (Paris: Plon, 2016), 88.
[215] Isabella Bird, *The English Woman in America* (London: Global Grey, 2009), 38.
[216] Ibid., 42.
[217] Ibid., 50.
[218] Dúnlaith Bird, *Travelling in Different Skins: Gender Identity in European Women's Oriental Travelogues, 1850-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 12.

ladies, he said, used the horn of the Mexican saddle, but none in this part rode cavalier fashion. I felt abashed. I could not ride any distance in the conventional mode, and was just going to give up this splendid ravage when the man said 'ride your own fashion; here, at Truckee, if anywhere in the world, people can do as they like'[219]. She permits herself the freedom to ride a horse like a man, and not in side-saddle, by specifying that she is doing this because she has no choice, she pretends not to want to go against the conventions, while bypassing them all the same.

Moreover, the appropriation of geographical and anthropological space as an identity process becomes possible because Isabella Bird chooses spaces still little known by Europeans and not well-documented (recalling the attitude of the settler who sets off to discover a new land), where the role of the European woman is not clearly defined[220]. This allows her to redefine her place more or less as she wishes. Furthermore, she finds herself in a masculine social position, which is that of the explorer who sets out into unknown territory to enlighten others about what she sees, what she discovers. She becomes in a way a reference figure for when British people want information on Japan or Korea. In addition, Japan, like Korea, experienced at that time political difficulties that Bird sometimes tackled, giving her the status of a political reporter, as you can see when she writes that 'very wild political rumours are in the air in these outlandish regions, and it is not very wonderful that the peasantry lack confidence in the existing order of things after the changes of the last ten years, and the recent assassination of the Home Minister. I did not believe the rumour, for fanaticism, even in its wildest moods, usually owes some allegiance to common sense; but it was disturbing, as I have naturally come to feel a deep interest in Japanese affairs'[221]. By referring to 'the last ten years' she shows that she has a fairly broad knowledge of the Japanese political context, she also very clearly states that she is interested in it but by giving her opinion, by being subjective and by exposing her feelings (when she says that the situation is 'disturbing') she adheres to one of the characteristics of female writing of the time, which is that of feelings and sensibility, but she applies it to a subject considered as masculine. By always oscillating between the two (feminine and masculine), Bird finds her balance and manages to appropriate the male space.

[219] Isabella Bird, *A Lady's life in the Rocky Mountains* (Berkeley: Mint Editions, 2021), 9-10.
[220] We will discuss his ambiguity with regard to colonial ideas in the second part of this thesis.
[221] Isabella Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (Reno: Pantianos Classics, 2017), 117.

To conclude this section, the geographical appropriation can be said to be achieved by disguise, by the appropriation of social roles, in order to blend into a world that seems to have been made for men. These subterfuges offer a liberation of the self, since they allow a new relationship to space and to the cultures encountered. Hence, diving the self into several roles to live one's nomadism appears to be an essential strategy leading to freedom, as confirmed by Braidotti:

> The nomadic subject I am proposing is a figuration that emphasizes the need for action both at the level of identity, of subjectivity and of differences among women. These different requirements correspond to different moments, that it to say, to different locations in space, that is to say, different practices. This multiplicity is contained in a multilayered temporal sequence, whereby discontinuities and even contradictions can find a place. In order to sustain this process a feminist must start from the recognition of herself as not-one; as a subject that is split time and time again, over multiple axes calls for suitably diversified forms of practice.[222]

Indeed, to be nomadic as a woman is to accept that the identity is multiple, that it changes constantly, it means that different identities exist in us and through us. These multiple identities that can appear for Isabella Bird[223], Alexandra David-Néel and Isabelle Eberhardt through the different social roles they occupy, should not lead to a loss of identity or identity vertigo. The acceptance of the 'not-one' must lead on the contrary to the reinvention of the self, because it is a 'performative metaphor that allows for otherwise unlikely encounters and unsuspected sources of interaction of experience and of knowledge'[224].

[222] Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* (New York: Columbia Press University, 1994), 171.
[223] We have already talked about the different social roles occupied by Eberhardt and David-Néel. Isabella Bird also has several roles: explorer, writer, missionary, photographer, anthropologist...
[224] Ibid., 6.

PART 2: SELF-REINVENTION

The previous chapter allows us to conclude that identity is not only in motion, but it is also multiple. This is confirmed by the different social roles occupied by Isabella Bird, Alexandra David-Néel and Isabelle Eberhardt. They dared to question the notion of the so-called feminine identity and all that implied at the time (maternity and immobility), which allows a reinvention of oneself. The possibility of reinventing oneself (here thanks to travelling) is a real freedom since the construction of a multiple identity breaks down oppositions.

By their ambiguous attitudes they questioned fixed categories such as East/West, masculine/feminine) since they show the very instability of these categories thanks to nomadism[225]. Once this observation is made, how do we appropriate this identity in motion? How do we find unity of the self in its multiplicity? And how does identity evolve when it challenges social criteria that seemed to be immutable?

This multiple identity, which permits a reinvention of the self, raises another question according to Julia Kristeva, who writes about the foreigner (travellers or people in exile): 'Sans foyer, il propage (…) le paradoxe du comédien: multipliant les masques et les "faux selfs"'[226]. If it is true that adapting to a new environment and culture can be perceived as a role, this does not mean that it is something superficial that does not participate in the construction of the self. Indeed, Jean-Claude Kaufmann in *L'invention de soi* explained that identity is a process which, for him, exists thanks to the different social roles people adopt (here travellers, writers, journalists and so on) and these social roles are '[…] autant de grilles de filtrage de l'information et de guidage de l'action'[227]. However, the 'not-one'[228] of the identity is not always positive and can lead to moments of doubt (produced by weakening of identity) as with Eberhardt: 'J'éprouve de plus en plus de dégoût pour ce second moi, voyou et dégingandé moralement, qui fait son apparition de temps en temps'[229]. Yet these moments of doubt seem normal and necessary to be transformed.

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[225] However, we do not deny the importance of these categories since the world can be read through them. The deconstruction of these categories is done according to these categories.
[226] Julia Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-même* (Paris: Gallimard Coll. Folio, 1991), 18.
[227] Jean-Claude Kaufmann, *L'Invention de soi* (Paris: Hachette Littératures, 2005), 75.
[228] Rosi Braidotti's term for an identity that is multiple.
[229] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 321.

Therefore, it is this process of self-reinvention with its positive and negative aspects that we are going to study here. Self-reinvention by breaking binary oppositions as we started to explain earlier: man/woman, East/West and self/other; but also self-reinvention through faith and religious conversion. However, the unity of the 'not-one' identity can be found through particular forms of religion and spirituality when they offer something beyond the self. This chapter about religion will offer a distinct analysis of the three writers, because the Sufism or Tibetan Buddhism they choose to adopt may offer very different readings and understandings to the world. Indeed, the three writers will be separately studied one by one in chapter 3, to analyse the question of religion in depth.

Chapter 2: Breaking Binary Oppositions by Travelling

Isabelle Eberhardt '[…] n'est ni femme ni homme, ni arabe ni européenne, elle ouvre les espaces de jeu où l'on peut s'initier au plaisir du métissage'[230]. She embodies the fluidity of gender and cultures. She is the most convincing example of the breaking of binary oppositions. But she is, of course, not the only one to use this process to reinvent her identity. We will see how Isabella Bird and Alexandra David-Néel succeed more or less in undoing these oppositions and how breaking these oppositions contributes to the reinvention of the self.
In the previous chapter we talked about the appropriation of male spaces and male roles by women, but in this first subsection devoted to gender we will go further in the analysis, since the appropriation of male spaces and male roles is not only and always done by the appropriation of masculine attitudes or characteristics. Indeed, we will see that while they sometimes reproduce the colonial and masculine attitudes of their time, they also offer a different perspective on postcolonial studies due to their gender.

Later, we will explain how they break the East/West opposition by entering the contacts zones, thus focusing more extensively on post-colonial studies. Then, in the last subsection, we will talk about the opposition self/other to understand the relationship that

[230] Kamila Aitsiselmi Ouhibi, 'Re-construction d'une identité à la croisée des cultures,' *Nouvelles Études Francophones,* University of Nebraska Press 13, no. 1 (2016): 155.

Bird, David-Néel and Eberhardt had to others and how this relationship to what is outside of oneself is essential to the invention of oneself[231].

2.a How travelling allows to break gender oppositions

> 'Aucun homme ne consentirait à être une femme, mais tous souhaitent qu'il y ait des femmes'[232]

It is essential, since this thesis focuses on the concept of identity, to question gender since, as Judith Butler says in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*: 'It would be wrong to think that the discussion of identity ought to proceed prior to a discussion of gender identity for the simple reason that 'persons' only become intelligible through becoming gendered in conformity with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility'[233]. In the previous subchapter we showed how Eberhardt, Bird and David-Néel 'adopted' some characteristics qualified as masculine according to the standards of their time, thus approaching the idea of gender as Simone de Beauvoir understands it, that is to say by emphasising the 'equality' between men and women. This 'equality' can be seen as a lack of distinction between men and women based on their shared 'human' quality – we are all striving to become successful human beings by moving beyond societal gender stereotypes and by overcoming our physiological sexual determinism –, basically meaning women are free to bypass their biological and sexual identity in order to assert their equality (become more like men). But in this subsection, we will study the three writers with the help of the movement called *Le Féminisme de la différence* which began in the 1970s and emphasised 'difference' or the specificity of the woman's body and her biological or physiological makeup. The main figures of this movement are Julia Kristeva and Hélène Cixous who do not totally reject the idea of Beauvoir (that is to say a universalist and egalitarian vision of gender where women could free themselves from social constructions linked to their sex in order to achieve a neutral egality) , but they see a richness in the cultural feminine identity that they do not want to

[231] By choosing the term 'invention', we are following Jean-Claude Kaufmann's analysis, for whom identity is a dynamic and a non-substantialist conception of the self.
[232] Simone De Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième sexe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), 200.
[233] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1989), 33.

erase: 'Il ne s'agit pas d'opposer une identité féminine à une identité masculine, mais d'accueillir la différence comme fondement du sujet'[234]

What particularly interests us is the idea of performance as explained by Butler: 'Gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts'[235]. Gender as pure social construction could therefore be achieved by the repetition of acts, and this 'performance' leads to what Butler calls 'performativity'. While performance is closer to the 'role' that one can play (like the different social roles that the three writers occupy), performativity would rather be defined as 'doing' which includes the way of speaking, the way of dressing but also the language in everyday life. In another way, performance implies a certain intentionality and awareness in the action and performativity refers to the involuntary process by which gender identities are constructed through repeated acts that give the illusion of an essence, as this quote of Butler confirms: '[…] that gender reality is created through sustained social performances means that the very notions of an essential sex, a true or abiding masculinity or femininity, are also constituted as part of the strategy by which the performative aspect of gender is concealed. As a consequence, gender cannot be understood as a role which either expresses or disguises an interior "self", whether that "self" is conceived as sexed or not'[236].

Then how to achieve the subversion of oppressive norms? For Butler, 'the possibilities of gender transformation are to be found in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a different sort of repeating, in the breaking or subversive repetition of that style'[237]. The performance permits the blurring of gender identities such as the drag queen who, with an ephemeral performance, can break the binary opposition man/woman through parody and exaggeration of gendered characteristics. However, there are other ways to break up the repetition of acts other than a theatrical performance. How do Bird, David-Néel and Eberhardt do this? To this we must add the importance of geographical displacement, since the definition of the male gender and the definition of the female gender '[…] changent

[234] Julia Kristeva, 'Entretien avec Julia Kristeva', *Les Cahiers du GRIF*, n°32 (1985), 14.
[235] Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist theory,' *Theatre Journal*, no. 40 (1988): 519.
[236] Linda McDowell, *Gender, Identity and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 529.
[237] Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution,' 521.

radicalement suivant les frontières géopolitiques et les contraintes'[238]. And it is precisely thanks to this change of definition – in the geographical areas of culture – that the three writers were able to free themselves (partially or totally) from the norms linked to their gender.

If it is true that '[…] une conception restrictive du genre, qui insiste sur la binarité homme/femme en tant que seul moyen de comprendre le champ du genre, performe ainsi une opération régulatrice du pouvoir qui naturalise son hégémonie et forclos la possibilité de penser son bouleversement'[239], Eberhardt is not afraid to subvert this normative system by alternating between the repetition of acts which would qualify her as a man and acts which would qualify her as a woman, but unlike a drag queen, she is not always playing a role. Both 'roles' constitute what she is and offer her opportunities for different experiences. As we have already said, her disguise as an Arab man grants her freedom of movement, but more than a disguise it is a part of her identity: 'En cet instant, comme d'ailleurs à toute heure de ma vie, je n'ai qu'un désir : revêtir le plus vite possible la personnalité aimée qui, en réalité, est la *vraie*, et de retourner là-bas, en Afrique, reprendre cette vie-là …'[240]. The word 'revêtir' – as the term 'disguise' that we used previously – implies the idea of performance, while we could call this performativity since this gender hybridity becomes the norm for her. Sometimes she leaves her male alter ego aside to interact with others as Isabelle: 'Les indigènes instruits prennent facilement une femme comme moi pour confidente et parlent avec elle comme certainement ils ne parlent à aucun homme'[241]. It is probably her husband who best sums up this gender fluidity by presenting her like this: 'Je vous présente Si Mahmoud Saadi (…) C'est là son nom de guerre; en réalité il s'agit de Mme Ehnni, ma femme'[242]. If this hybridity will arouse a lot of hatred and mistrust in her, it is also sometimes accepted as in this moment that she shared with *les Saphis* during *Ramadhan*:

> Si Mahmoud, disaient-ils, reste parmi nous. Nous nous sommes habitués à toi ; nous sommes tes frères à présent, et nous te regretterons si tu pars, parce que tu es un brave garçon, parce que tu as mangé le pain et le sel et que tu es monté à cheval avec nous.

[238] Judith Butler, *Défaire le genre* (Paris: Éditions Amsterdam, 2016), 23.
[239] Ibid., 68.
[240] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable*, (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 131.
[241] Ibid., 225.
[242] Christiane Chaulet-Achour, 'Isabelle Eberhardt ou le jeu très sérieux du masculin/féminin,' *Frontières des genres*, (2006) : 4, https://doi.org/10.4000/books.pub.3710.

> Ils savaient bien, par tant d'indiscrétions européennes, que Si Mahmoud était une femme. Mais, avec la belle discrétion arabe, ils se disaient que cela ne les regardait pas, qu'il eût été malséant d'y faire allusion, et ils continuaient à me traiter comme aux premiers jours, en camarade lettré et un peu supérieur.[243]

For Jean-Xavier Ridon, 'ce n'est pas le travestissement en lui-même qui est subversif mais le fait qu'il soit reconnu comme tel, c'est-à-dire qu'il soit discerné comme une mise en scène de l'identité'[244]. Effectively it is through the gaze of others that the performance of gender or its performativity can shock and therefore be considered as a reversal of norms (and perceived as a committed act). But, in this scene that Eberhardt describes, the discovery of her feminine self by the Arabs is not a subversive element. That being said, it is important to remember the many difficulties that this gender hybridity caused her – when this is discovered, which is not always the case – since many colonists thought she was a spy wishing to destabilise the order put in place by the French. After being the victim of an assassination attempt which injures her arm in 1901, she was expelled and obliged to go to France, settling for a while in Marseille. However, the colonial authorities mistrust of her was not only due to her gender hybridity but also because of her conversion to Sufism, as she had joined the powerful *Qadiriyya* community. That said, she did not need Algeria to explore gender fluidity. She had already been wearing male sailor's clothing in Switzerland, both to assert her identity and to gain freedom. This was likely influenced by the progressive and 'masculine' education she received from childhood, guided by her tutor with anarchist ideals. As explained earlier, she grew up in an intellectual world where the emancipation of the individual and the rejection of convention were advocated. This exceptional educational background enabled her to develop her personality outside the gendered norms of her time, and largely explains her freedom of tone, thought and life, including in her choice of appearance and travel. For her, men's clothing was not just a functional disguise (although it could also be), but a genuine act of self-definition, existential and literary.

To come back to this idea of trouble in the gender, the sociologist Éric Fassin writes in the preface to Judith Butler's *Trouble dans le genre* that: 'La sexualité est liée au genre, car les normes de genre traversent la sexualité. Pour autant, elle n'est pas simplement la confirmation du genre : loin de l'affermir, elle peut l'ébranler […] : c'est lorsque

[243] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable*, (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 116.
[244] Ibid., 34.

s'entrechoquent genre et sexualité que naît le trouble du genre'[245]. If sexuality is linked to gender and gender is a social construction, then we can conceivably argue that desire responds to societal norms. In this case, it may be interesting to ask whether the addition of genders made by Eberhardt has an impact on her sexuality. She did not know any homosexual relationship and even seemed to correspond to a 'classic' heterosexual pattern – what Butler calls 'the regulatory fiction of heterosexual coherence'[246] – when she describes her relationship with Slimène. She writes that she has: 'Le désir de partir le plus vite possible, de revoir Slimène et de ne plus jamais le quitter ; pour le garder jalousement'[247], she also confesses 'je me sens incapable de m'en aller, de quitter Slimène pour jamais. Pourquoi, d'ailleurs?'[248], which shows that love has an influence even on her mobility. What comes to nuance this self-reflection is, before her marriage, the great sexual freedom she has since she is known to have many partners, something that she stands by completely: 'J'ai aimé avec frénésie, avec ivresse, avec une sorte de besoin physique et d'ardeur mystique'[249], she expressed an assumed sexuality, an intense relationship with the body, but always fuelled by a mystical quest.

If Eberhardt seems to break away from normative models, a criticism underlined by Jean-Xavier Ridon can be made of her. Indeed, if she breaks gender norms through her way of life, the representation she has and makes of the Arab man corresponds to a stereotypical image: 'L'image qu'elle se fait de l'homme arabe, être fier, droit et courageux, est une image idéale qui, comme le fait remarquer Bhedad, correspond plus au fantasme d'une femme occidentale qu'à la réalité'[250]. It is true that the young woman seems fascinated by Arab virility and speaks of the Arabic language in these terms: '[…] cette belle langue arabe, sonore et virile'[251]. This idealized image of the Arab man is primarily used to describe the Algerians and the various nomadic peoples she encounters in the desert; she is indeed less tender towards the Tunisians since she writes: '[…] citadins efféminés de Tunis et de Sousse, qui n'ont plus

[245] Éric Fassin, 'Préface à l'édition française. Trouble-genre,' in *Trouble dans le genre. Le féminisme et la subversion de l'identité*, La Découverte (Paris, 2012), 12-13.
[246] Linda McDowell, *Gender, Identity and Place: Understanding Feminist Geographies* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 54.
[247] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 132.
[248] Ibid., 66.
[249] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Journaliers* (Bussigny: Bourlapapey, 1923), 94, www.ebooks-bnr.com
[250] Jean-Xavier Ridon, *L'Étrangement du voyageur* (Paris: Kimé, 2018), 39.
[251] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Lettres et journaliers* (Paris: Babel, 2003), 63.

rien de la majesté âpre de la vie arabe née pour le rêve et la guerre'[252]. The word 'efféminés' used in a pejorative way also shows that the feminine characteristics, because they are feminine, are less noble in her mind than what is masculine.

If she depicts the Arab man in this way, how does she represent herself? We know already she often writes about herself using the masculine, presenting herself as an Arab man. We will talk about writing processes more precisely later in this study, but it is important to start an analysis from this point since, as Butler explains, there are no innate sexual and gender identities, it is the law, discourses and languages that make gender. For her, there is no gender identity that precedes language. Thus, the way in which writers use the language (especially to speak about themselves) takes a great importance. We can note that Eberhardt defines herself as an '[…] homme d'action'[253], joining the virile ideal described above. However, the fact that she also speaks of herself in the feminine counterbalances that: 'Ils m'ont laissée seule dans la maison jusqu'à 10h'[254], ' une fois habillée en femme, je trouverais certainement quelques petits travails à faire en attendant'[255], 'je suis allée porter une lettre pour Slimène'[256] or 'j'étais allée, seule, attendre Si Embarek près de la mosquée située sur le bord de l'oued'[257]. She offers a hybrid identity even through writing. By this use of language she once again breaks the gender binary opposition and adheres to the idea developed by Julia Kristeva: 'On peut avancer que le recours aux éléments sémiotiques dans l'écriture tend à supprimer la polarité des rôles sexuels pour laisser s'exprimer une combinaison androgyne de tous les possibles d'un être à la recherche de l'intégrité'[258]. Indeed, it is thanks to this androgynous combination that she reinvents herself and gradually achieves her identity. Dunlaith Bird will conclude by saying of Eberhardt: 'The hybrid gender identities produced in her travel writing combine layers of theatrical cross-dressed performance with performativity, the social regulation of gender'[259].

[252] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Lettres et journaliers* (Paris: Babel, 2003), 95.
[253] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 319.
[254] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Journaliers* (Bussigny: Bourlapapey, 1923), 191, www.ebooks-bnr.co
[255] Ibid., 166.
[256] Ibid.
[257] Ibid., 216.
[258] Julia Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-même* (Paris: Gallimard Coll. Folio, 1991), 78.
[259] Dúnlaith Bird, *Travelling in Different Skins : Gender Identity in European Women's Oriental Travelogues, 1850-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 72.

Eberhardt is the most obvious example of this gender hybridity and of the freedom it presupposes, but, in her own way, Isabella Bird also plays with gender norms. As we have mentioned, she is the first woman to become a member of the Royal Geographical Society in 1891, an up to that point exclusively male institution. For this reason, during the Victorian era, many women did not want to be part of this kind of institution, for fear of a virulent welcome. Bird decided to integrate into this politically male institution using ambiguous strategies, showing that she wants to explore the advantages of this position while not wanting to show it too much. This institution therefore gave her a certain power and credibility in the scientific circle. It also gave her a greater freedom in writing, although she had to correspond to a certain image of women in order to be published. But before that, what interests us is her approach to gender norms. In her book *Travelling in Different Skins: Gender Identity in European Women's Oriental Travelogues*, Dúnlaith Bird writes: 'Bird plays with cultural definitions of femininity, revealing the unsettling fluidity that lies behind the apparently stable categories of Victorian sexuality. The variety of personas and bodies Bird assumes in her travel writing are an attempt to circumnavigate her trouble with her own female body'[260]. This reflection on the female body evokes Michel Foucault's idea that the body is a social and historical construction - 'le corps est un produit de l'Histoire'[261]- and is therefore not predetermined by a kind of essence 'but the body gains its meaning through concrete and historically mediated expression in the world'[262]. Always having the desire to meet the expectations of Victorian society, the representation of the female body in Isabella Bird's works is one where the desire to appropriate her body is felt without being fully admitted. A scene in a village among the foothills of the Nantaizan mountains (Nikko, north Japan) in *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* illustrates this very well and shows the signs of gender hybridity: 'It is a doll's street with small low houses, so finely matted, so exquisitely clean, so finically neat, so light and delicate, that even when I entered them without my boots I felt like a bull in a china shop'[263]. Here, the femininity of the street -emphasised by these words 'doll' and 'exquisitely'- clashes with her own femininity, which possesses a power considered masculine,

[260] Dúnlaith Bird, *Travelling in Different Skins : Gender Identity in European Women's Oriental Travelogues, 1850-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 104.
[261] Michel Foucault, *La Volonté de savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, N.R.F, 1976), 12
[262] Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist theory,' *Theatre Journal*, no. 40 (1988): 526.
[263] Isabella Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (Reno: Pantianos Classics, 2017), 89.

as she is described as being 'like a bull'. She constantly risks altering or even destroying the décor of the room with the powerful feminine body that is hers. Bird goes on to further emphasise the strength of her body: 'I almost wish that the rooms were a little less exquisite, for I am in constant dread of spilling the ink, indenting the mats, or tearing the paper windows'[264]. For Dúnlaith Bird, the fact that Isabella Bird describes her body as a colossal destructive force can be explained: 'Passive femininity is transferred to the room, a synecdoche of Japan, while Bird assumes a hermaphroditic role that achieves a masculine process of conquest and destruction'[265]. Despite her short stature (4 feet 11 inches/150cm) Isabella Bird often describes herself in these terms. Although some researchers present this type of description as the result of a disease from which Bird was affected – a disease called distressed micropsia (size distortion) –, as the researcher Jenny Holt does, we choose to join Dúnlaith Bird's view and see this as a questioning of the female body.

This questioning is a way for Isabella Bird to reinvent herself but let us not forget that the fear of being badly received by her readers was constantly present; which is why she sometimes came to accentuate gender characteristics excessively. In 1878, a *Times* journalist accused her of dressing in masculine habiliments during her trips[266]. Bird was hurt by this comment and decided, with the help of her publisher John Murray, to publish a very feminine sketch of herself as the frontispiece of each edition of her book *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains*. We see her in a dress, next to a horse to emphasise her smallness:

[264] Isabella Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (Reno: Pantianos Classics, 2017), 89.
[265] Dúnlaith Bird, *Travelling in Different Skins : Gender identity in European Women's Oriental Travelogues, 1850-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 51.
[266] This anecdote is explained by Dúnlaith Bird in *Travelling in Different Skins: Gender identity in European Women's Oriental Travelogues, 1850-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

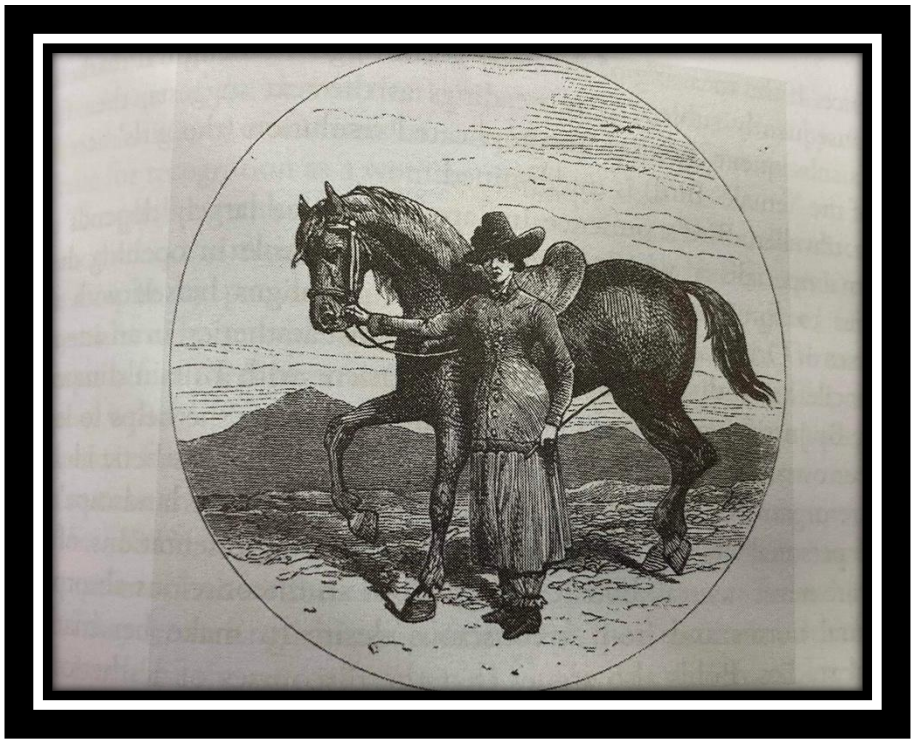

Illustration n°1[267]

Another point that shows that Bird, despite certain publication strategies[268], breaks gender norms is the link we can make out between her and The New Woman feminist movement that emerged in the late 19th century. Indeed, N. Sujae MacCloskey defines The New Woman in these terms: 'Mobility was typically thought of as an attribute only possessed by white, Christian, male colonisers. The New Woman therefore needed to use her whiteness and Christianity as much as possible in order to reject her femininity and use her agency to express modernity, disruptiveness, and mobility.'[269] Bird did not always insist on her femininity, thus asserting her whiteness if only by the title of the book *The English Woman in America*. She also insisted on her Christianity: 'I was reading my Bible'[270]. She mentioned her Christianity in a more indirect way sometimes, by valuing that of others: 'The child said that it was a beautiful book, and persuaded her mother to borrow a Bible from a neighbour; she read it, and became a Protestant'[271]. That said, it is important to specify that Bird never considered

[267] Unknown. *Isabella Bird's Hawaiian riding-dress. Frontpiece to A Laday's Life in the Rocky Mountains*, 1879, *Travelling in Different Skins : Gender Identity in Women's Oriental Travelogues, 1850-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 105.
[268] We will dedicate an entire sub-section to publication strategies in part 3 of the thesis.
[269] Nathalie McCloskey, *Isabella Bird: An Argument for Mobility and a Changed Definition of New Womanhood* (Ottawa: Carleton University, 2017), 4.
[270] Isabella Bird, *The English Woman in America* (London: Global Grey, 2019), 11.
[271] Ibid., 245.

herself as a 'New Woman', but her modernity can be interpreted as part of a form of feminism. She oscillates between modernity and conservativeness as confirmed by Pat Barr, who worked for Bird and explains to us that during her journey to Hawaii she wore pants and 'she could gallop comfortably at last—at one with the steed, instead of perched inflexibly on its side'[272]. This is a story she never talked about in her books, showing that she broke gender norms but did not make it a cause to defend, rather it was about a happiness and fulfilment that belonged only to her.

There is another social norm that Bird but also Isabelle Eberhardt and Alexandra David-Néel challenge and do not follow, it is that of being a mother. At the time, women were defined by their role as mothers : 'On attend d'une union qu'elle soit féconde'[273], 'la maternité est en effet considérée comme un devoir. Les femmes ont pour mission de donner la vie, notamment un fils qui perpétuera la lignée et qui héritera du patrimoine familial'[274]. In such a context, the choice of these three writers is destabilising. David-Néel is the only one who expresses herself explicitly about this topic. She writes to her husband Philippe: '[…] beaucoup de prévoyance dans ma volonté de n'être pas mère' and later in the same letter '[…] j'ai trop conscience de la mère que je serai pour risquer la terrible aventure'[275]. But more than a personal choice, David-Néel makes motherhood a central subject of her feminist commitment. In 1906, she gave a speech during the congress of Italian women: 'Incontestablement, la maternité est l'obstacle grave qui s'oppose à l'émancipation complète de la femme'[276]. For her, this is what has distanced women from the idea of mobility since prehistoric times, '[…] c'est elle qui la fait tendre faire l'existence sédentaire'[277]. Moreover, she said that she was happy to have made her trip to Tibet after the menopause since it finally freed her from all the maternal duties. Yet she eventually becomes a mother by adopting Yongden, creating her own motherhood. This chosen motherhood is a way of prolonging her journey indefinitely by giving it a physical existence, but is it also and above all an opposition to natural heredity that

[272] Pat Barr, *A Curios Life for a Lady: The Story of Isabella Bird* (London: Macmillin & Company Limited and John Murray Limited, 1970), 29.
[273] Emmanuelle Berthiaud, 'Grosses désirée, grossesse imposée : le vécu de la grossesse aux XVIII-XIXe siècles en France dans les écrits féminins privés', *Histoire, Économie et Société*, n°12 (2019) : 35.
[274] Ibid.
[275] Jacqueline Ursch, 'La Revue sur les chemins d'Alexandra David-Néel', Digne les Bains, Fréquence Mistral, 15 juin 2023, 4 min., 45 sec., http://frequencemistral.com.
[276] Ibid.
[277] Ibid.

goes hand in hand with her own attempt to reconstruct her identity. Indeed, according to Valérie Boulain, '[…] en devenant mère adoptive d'un enfant de l'ailleurs, de l'Himalaya, Alexandra David-Néel apporte la dernière pierre à son lent processus de guérison et de détachement à son propre lien maternel'[278]. Questioning the norm of motherhood therefore allows a reinvention of the self, since it permits her mobility and allows the role of mother to no longer be the ultimate goal of a woman's life : 'Je suis venue ici, pour faire quelque chose comme écrivain, quelque chose qui me serve dans la carrière que je poursuis, je pense qu'il est sage de placer ce but en première ligne. Je vois de "beaux gros livres" dansant devant mes yeux… il ne reste plus qu'à les écrire et à les faire publier'[279](letter from Calcutta, june 1912).

But what about a possible fluidity of gender norms? David-Néel is aware of the instability of these norms but also the importance these norms have in self-definition and is in accordance with the idea of Butler which will be formulated like this later: 'In as much as "identity" is assured through the stabilising concepts of sex, gender and sexuality, the very notion of 'the person' is called into question by the cultural emergence of those "incoherent" or "discontinuous" gendered norms of cultural intelligibility by which persons are defined'[280]. This instability and inconsistency linked to gender norms is illustrated by David-Néel through the same process as Bird, by not insisting on her femininity. Unlike Bird, she does not emphasise her European identity -except perhaps when she claims to be the first European to enter Lhasa- revealing a colonial mindset by adopting the posture of a settler discovering new territory. Nonetheless, she primarily sees herself as a Buddhist. In fact, she even explains that the interest she has in Buddhism comes from her childhood. In *Au coeur des Himalayas*, she told the legend of the Buddha known to all Buddhists and writes 'elle m'a été familière dès ma petite jeunesse. Je la savais dans la maison de mes parents où il n'existait aucun livre concernant le bouddhisme'[281], no doubt a way for her to justify her role as *lama*. Thus, she assumes the role of explorer and religious savant (*lama*) without claiming her gender, she embraces it as if it were inherent to her gender, without ever denying her femininity[282].

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[278] Valérie Boulain, *Femmes en aventure. De la voyageuse à la sportive (1850-1936)* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2012), 121.
[279] Alexandra David-Néel, *Journal de voyage. Lettres à son mari, 11 août 1904-27 décembre 1917* (Paris: Plon, 2019), 109.
[280] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1989), 22.
[281] Alexandra David-Néel, *Au Cœur des Himalayas* (Paris: Payot, 2016), 130.
[282] We are talking here about her state of mind during her travels in Asia. Before that she insisted on her gender since she was an active feminist.

For the three writers, it is by questioning this male/female gendered opposition that they manage to create other norms which are a possible fluidity between binary oppositions. As we have seen, they never completely get rid of their female identity because 'to deconstruct' is not 'to destroy'. In fact, we have seen that Eberhardt alternates between writing about herself in the masculine form and writing about herself in the feminine form: 'Les indigènes instruits prennent facilement une femme comme moi pour confidente'[283]. David-Néel does not insist on her gender but never denies it and her disguise sends her back to her role as an old Tibetan woman: 'En ma qualité de mère d'un lama lettré'[284]. Bird alternates between so-called masculine practices and emphasising her title of Lady: 'After this meal I went into the "house-room," or parlour, a general "rendezvous" of lady visitors'[285]. Another opposition they wish to deconstruct is that of the West vs the East, and a parallel between gender studies and postcolonial studies is possible, as Jami explains regarding Judith Butler:

> Dans *Bodies That Matter*, Butler se demande comment ce qu'elle dit du genre dans *Gender Trouble* peut s'appliquer à la race. Comme le sexe et le genre, la race n'est pas naturelle, mais construite en réponse à l'interpellation par le discours et la loi. Dans la production de hiérarchies, de pouvoir, de normes, impératifs raciaux et hétérosexuels fonctionnent conjointement et en étroite imbrication.[286]

2.b Questioning the 'East/West' opposition: were the three authors able to break away from the colonialist viewpoint?

'J'accepte mes origines, mais que vais-je en faire ?'[287]

Gender norms set up an opposition of genders as well as a hierarchy of genders (the masculine dominates the feminine). This phenomenon is comparable to that of the

[283] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Journaliers* (Bussigny: Bourlapapey, 1923), 225, www.ebooks-bnr.com
[284] Alexandra David-Néel, *Voyage d'une Parisienne à Lhassa* (Paris: Pocket, 2004), 157.
[285] Isabella Bird, *The English Woman in America* (London: Global Grey, 2009), 47.
[286] Irène Jami, 'Judith Butler, théoricienne du genre,' *Cahier du genre*, no. 44 (2008) : 205, https://shs.cairn.info/revue-cahiers-du-genre-2008-1-page-205?lang=fr.
[287] Aimé, Césaire,'Interview Aimé Césaire' *L'INA*. *RFO Réseau France Outremer*, october 28, 1990, video, 1min27, https://www.ina.fr/ina-eclaire-actu/video/cac93070647/interview-aime-cesaire.

West/East[288] opposition as Judith Butler explained[289]. In the previous chapters, we have discussed the notion of Orientalism – in particular by using Edward Said's studies[290] – which is important to use in order to better understand postcolonial studies and the position of Isabella Bird, Alexandra David-Néel and Isabelle Eberhardt. For Said, Orientalism is an ideology of Westerners whose goal is to structure relations between the West and the East in order to extend their political and cultural power over other continents. Orientalism is therefore an ideological process which integrates subjects into a relation of comparison in which the East is seen as an entity inferior to the West. Postcolonial studies aim to understand this phenomenon and move beyond the colonial model of representing the other by deconstructing the structures of power inherited from colonial domination.

In the book *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism*, Sara Mills speaks about Said's theory in these terms: 'Saïd's basic thesis is that Western writers, especially since the 18th century, have constructed the Orient as the other, and have, in doing so, attempted to contain and make powerless the inhabitants of colonised countries by fixing them in an object position, and hence to retaining the subject, powerful position for Westerners'[291]. For Said, travel writing itself finds it difficult to detach itself from this Western prism. Jean-Xavier Ridon in *L'Étrangement du voyageur* suggests that the journey rarely strays from the colonial approach, whether it is done consciously or not: 'Cette mythologie de la découverte est inséparable d'une idéologie conquérante qui a directement participé à la création des empires coloniaux occidentaux'[292]. Indeed, at the beginning of the concept of Orientalism, there is first of all a fascination, a search for exoticism which develops in the 19th century during the colonial expansion. The domination of the West over the East is therefore also linked to fantasy. To what extent can one move away from Orientalism, then? How can the West change its perception of the East while carrying the colonial heritage? According to the theoretician Gayatri Spivak and based in particular on the ideas that she develops in her essay 'Can the subaltern speak?' published in 1985, this is a difficult process

[288] As we explained in the introduction, we are aware that these terms are the legacy of colonisation and therefore can be problematic. We use them here because they reflect the times in which Bird, David-Néel and Eberhardt lived.
[289] As we said previously, she speaks about that in her book *Bodies That Matter* (London: Routledge, 2011).
[290] We refer to *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 1994).
[291] Sara Mills, Discourses *of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1991), 48.
[292] Jean-Xavier Ridon, *L'Étrangement du voyageur* (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 2018), 31.

as there is no precolonial past, 'there is no "pure" precolonial past to recover; it has been changed by colonialism. What we can do is only understand the "worlding" of the "Third World". Worlding is a process through which the local population was 'persuaded' to accept the European version of reality for understanding their social world'[293].

However, there is a factor too often forgotten when theoreticians speak about post-colonial studies, which is that of gender. Said's studies are one example of theory which does not address gender adequately. For him, Orientalism is '[…] a male conception of the world'[294]. Yet the female travel writers offer a very interesting look at Orientalism and colonial ideas. Female travellers oscillate between two positions: on the one hand complicity with the colonial system, of which they were often the cultural representatives, on the other hand a resistance presented more or less openly. While the woman is the figure of otherness in European Culture, in the colonialist discourse she becomes '[…] en même temps, centre et périphérie, identité et altérité'[295].

We will try to understand how Bird, David-Néel and Eberhardt place themselves in relation to this Western prism and how the questioning of Orientalism allows a reinvention of the self. What consequences does this West/East binary opposition have on the relationship between female travellers and locals? According to Alison Blunt and Gilian Rose, who were interested in the question of female travellers in the 19th century in the context of the expansion of the British Empire, 'women travel writers often adopted a maternal role in relation to indigenous women, a role that challenged neither the imperial assertion of superiority nor the type of knowledge that asserted that "natives" were childlike'[296]. We will see to what extent this statement can be true for our three authors. According to the previous chapters we can already say that this attitude is sometimes present in the works of Bird, but we will see that her position is more ambiguous than it seems.

Bird has in mind the myth of the *bon sauvage*, a mixture of affection towards the Ainu people that she met during her journey at Hokkaido, while asserting a superiority of Western

[293] Vijaykumar Ambesange Praveen, 'Postcolonialism: Edaward Said & Gayatri Spivak,' *Research Journal of Recent Sciences*, no. 5 (2016): 49.
[294] Sara Mills, Discourses *of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1991), 57.
[295] Maria Dolors Garcia-Ramon and Abel Albet, 'Los relatos de mujeres viajeras : una mirada critica sobre el colonialismo ? Isabelle Eberhardt,' *Finisterra, Revista Portuguesa de Geografia* XXXIII/65 (1998): 100.
[296] Gillian Rose and Alison Blunt, *Writing Women and Space* (London: Guilford Press, 1994), 41.

cultures. But to really understand her position, it is necessary to bring a variation to the concept of Orientalism, a variation that was often forgotten by postcolonial studies. Indeed, there is an intra-Asian orientalism that defines the Japanese as the superior race in Asia, at least, for the Japanese themselves. Japan, that Marc Kober called 'l'autre Orient' in 'Pourquoi l'orientalisme d'Edward W. Said n'est-il pas un japonisme?', is not a country considered part of the West, yet Japan was '[…] longtemps au cœur d'un dispositif d'expansion impériale'[297], comparable to Europe. Therefore, Japan has an ambiguous position since it remains a place of fantasy for the West but the other countries of Asia, in particular Korea, '[…] considèrent bien le japonisme oriental comme une forme d'hégémonie culturelle, suivie d'un sentiment de supériorité à l'égard du reste de l'Asie'[298]. In her book *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan*, Bird is influenced both by her European vision and by this feeling of superiority disclosed by the Japanese themselves. Indeed, the Japanese reproduced western colonial codes : 'La création d'un empire colonial devait permettre au Japon de résister à la domination occidentale et de se tailler une place à la table des grandes nations'[299] so 'les colonisateurs Japonais ont commencé à représenter les Coréens comme appartenant à une race inférieure afin de justifier leur exploitation'[300], as well as the other peoples of Asia, especially indigenous peoples. This led to the extinction of Ainu and to the colonisation of Korea by Japan in 1910: 'Korea was not defined as a 'colony' (shokuminchi), but as an integral part of the Japanese territory. Like Algeria for France, Korea was seen as one of the major achievements of modern Japan'[301]. Thus, Isabella Bird describes the Ainu as the Japanese present them; it seems to repeat the myth of the savage which must be enlightened by civilised peoples:

> They have no history, their traditions are scarcely worth the name, they claim descent from a dog, their houses and persons swarm with vermin, they are sunk in the grossest ignorance, they have no letters or any numbers above a thousand, they are clothed in the bark of trees and the untanned skins of beasts, that worship the bear, the sun, moon, fire, water (…) they are uncivilizable and altogether irreclaimable savages.[302]

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[297] Marc Kober, 'Pourquoi l'orientalisme d'Edward W. Said n'est-il pas un japonisme ?,' *Sociétés et représentations*, no. 37 (2014): 97, https://shs.cairn.info/revue-societes-et-representations-2014-1-page-91?lang=fr.
[298] Ibid.
[299] Xavier Robillard Martel, 'Le racisme envers les Coréens Japonais', *Bulletin d'analyse sur l'Asie de l'Est et du Sud-Est*, (2017) : 2.
[300] Ibid.
[301] Lionel Babicz, 'Japan-Korea, France-Algeria: Colonialism and Post-colonialism', *Japanese Studies*, no. 33 (2013): 203.
[302] Isabella Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (Reno: Pantianos Classics, 2017), 75.

By insisting on the fact that these people have no writing or numbers above a thousand, she underlines the Ainu's animality in opposition to cultures considered civilised by the orientalist gaze. In addition, the lexicon of animals is used to describe the Ainus peoples and their way of life: 'dog', 'beats', 'bears', and 'savages', which emphasises the fact that she does not consider them to be civilised. Moreover, she even speaks of the kindness that the Japanese government has towards them, showing the need for the intervention of a civilised people; she writes, the local administration '[…] treats them far more humanely and equitably than the U.S. Government, for instance, treats the North American Indians'[303]; which means that she does not always understand the reaction of the Ainu towards the Japanese: 'They have a singular, and I hope an unreasonable fear of the Japanese government'[304]. The verb 'hope' also shows that she leaves room for doubt, and we will see later that she can criticise the attitude of the Japanese. In the article 'Missing link found: the rhetoric of colonial progress in Isabella Bird's *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan*', Joohyun Jade Park puts forward an interesting theory by drawing a parallel between the two agricultures: that of the Japanese and that of the Ainu. The description made by Bird of these two agricultures shows the relationship she has to these two populations. The Japanese are associated with the concept of 'dwelling', 'to dwell which is to securitize, cultivate, colonise nature efficiently'[305].While the Ainu are associated with the idea of 'to hide', which shows that they lack 'control over nature and leave it uncultivated'[306]. The Ainu failed to dominate nature, their forest or fields are not liveable, unlike the very organised and productive fields of the Japanese. In this sense Bird seems to say once again that the Ainu do not have a real culture, thus she values the Japanese people, who embody colonialist-capitalist values by the conquest of nature, since this is very much related to the colonialist expansion. As mentioned earlier, Japan adopted the same colonial codes as the West. Therefore, the Ainu people had almost all disappeared, notably through cultural assimilation, the immigration of Japanese of Yamato ethnicity into their territory and the Japaneseisation of their people as a result of the centralist policy pursued by the Japanese state, which can be perceived as ethnocide or even ethnico-cultural genocide. Indeed, during the Meiji era (in the 19th century), the Japanese government set about building a unified

[303] Isabella Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (Reno: Pantianos Classics, 2017), 71.
[304] Ibid.
[305] Jade Park Joohyun, 'Missing link found, 1880: the Rhetoric of Colonial Progress in Isabella Bird's *Unbeaten tracks in Japan,' Victorian Literature and Culture,* no. 43 (2015): 375.
[306] Ibid.

Japanese nation. The Ainu became subjects of the Emperor and their customs were forbidden. The Japanese exercised 'forced assimilation', among other things on the Ainu: the clothing, religion and education of all populations in Japanese territory had to be Japanese: 'The colonization of Hokkaido was nothing less than a cultural genocide against the Ainu'[307]. However, as we mentioned at the beginning of this subsection, Isabella Bird has an attachment to these 'savages' whom she tends to infantilize. She creates, despite a colonialist approach, moments of sharing as in the following text, where she meets Ainu women:

> I was left for some hours alone with the women [...] It turns out that two of them, though they would not divulge it before men, speak Japanese, and they prattled to Ito with great vivacity and merriment [...] I got a number of words from them, and they laughed heartily at my erroneous pronunciation. They even asked me a number of questions regarding their own sex among ourselves, but few of these would bear repetition, and they answered a number of mine.[308]

This moment is particularly interesting because it serves as a counterexample to what we said previously (the argument that Bird values Japanese culture more). The word 'vivacity' is used to underline the intelligence of the Ainu. It is a conversation between equals where Bird does not judge or laugh at the customs of the Ainu, on the contrary she is the one who is laughed at because of her accent, because of her inability to speak the language so that the locals master their own language as well as Japanese, and she laughs at herself. Here she moves away from intra-Asian Orientalism, but she also breaks the West/East opposition by showing it is overall a moment between women who discuss and share intimate things.

There are other moments during her trip to Japan where Bird departs from the Japanese vision or from the European vision. She writes for example (speaking of the Ainu): '[…] this politeness is savage, not civilized'[309], which should here be understood as a compliment. Indeed, little by little the idea emerging is that the savage state of these peoples is their most precious quality. The commitment of Bird is made against the civilisation of which she tells the perverse effects: '[…] contact with civilisation only debases them'[310], 'the Aino has been contaminated by the four or five foreigners he has seen'[311] and, 'savage virtue […] is

[307] Richard Siddle, *Race, Resistance and the Ainu of Japan*, (Routledge: London, 1996), 14.
[308] Isabella Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (Reno: Pantianos Classics, 2017), 66-67.
[309] Ibid., 267.
[310] Ibid., 302.
[311] Ibid., 270.

not strong enough to survive much contact with civilisation'[312]. It is reminiscent of a form of primitivism based on the idea that 'modern civilisation' has corrupted human beings, and that it would be preferable to return to something more natural, instinctive and authentic, while at the same time sometimes conveying very Eurocentric or colonialist clichés, and idealising cultures such as the Ainus in this case. Indeed, Bird develops the idea that humans 'in their natural state' possess pure qualities (moral strength, simplicity, authenticity) that are fragile in the face of the corrupting effects of progress, trade and modern institutions. Having said that, for Bird, the peoples she describes are often purer as long as they remain outside civilisation. This is tantamount to freezing them in a primitive state, as if their value depended on the fact that they remained immutable: a view typical of colonialism, which denies colonised peoples any possibility of autonomous evolution.

Another way for Bird to make readers understand that she does not believe in Japanese superiority is to draw a parallel between the Japanese and the Ainu, because the resemblance cancels out the supposed superiority: 'Japanese and Aino alike when they are drunk are reduced to a beastly equality'[313]. Beyond this parallel which reduces the Japanese to the status of savages, it is important to specify that the consumption of alcohol was moderate among the Ainu and that it was following the importation of Japanese sake that the Ainu increased their consumption of alcohol, showing the perversion of the *bon sauvage* by the coloniser. The idea of the *bon sauvage* is a myth, a philosophical and literary construct, especially associated with the *le siècle des Lumières*, which idealises indigenous peoples in their state of nature, as opposed to 'civilised' men corrupted by society. It contributed to the exoticism of Eastern countries and it is a colonial stereotype, which confines indigenous peoples to a romantic, fixed and often false image. As Nathan Wachtel explained: 'Le bon sauvage est une figure ambiguë, oscillant entre l'innocence paradisiaque et l'infantilisation politique'[314] .

Later in the book, Bird refers to the myth of the hairy savage since the Ainu are known for their exceptional hairiness, contrasting with the hairless appearance of the Japanese and associating the Ainu with a primitive animality. Bird denounces this form of essentialism by explaining that the Japanese have exaggerated the hairiness of the Ainu: 'I think that the

[312] Isabella Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (Reno: Pantianos Classics, 2017), 264.
[313] Ibid.
[314] Nathan Wachtel, *La Vision des vaincus* (Gallimard : Paris, 1971), 215.

hairiness of the race as a distinctive feature has been exaggerated partly by the smooth-skinned Japanese'[315]. She also writes about the Japanese language: 'I exchanged the silence or low musical speech of Aino guides for the harsh and ceaseless clatter of Japanese'[316], associating delicacy and beauty with the Ainu people and not with their colonisers. Therefore, she has, despite everything, an empathetic discourse and she denounces the Japanese coloniser by indirectly exposing his mistreatment of the Ainu people. Indeed, '[…] en 1869-1870, le gouvernement Japonais issu de la Restauration de Meiji décida de coloniser la grande île du Nord'[317]. Thus, 'les Japonais obéissaient à la loi du plus fort sans qu'ils (Ainu people) soient en mesure d'opposer une véritable résistance' as explained the ethnologist Fosco Maraini in 'Une renaissance Aïnoue ?'[318]. By denouncing a colonial attitude, does Bird also criticise the West and the British Empire? If she does move away from Japanese Orientalism, what about Western Orientalism? She sometimes seems to convey the idea of the superiority of the Caucasian race for example by considering that Christianity is the path of truth, that Japanese Buddhism only leads people away from the truth. Bird doubted Christianity's future in Japan and writes that she did not believe that Japan was '[…] ripe for the reception of Christianity'[319]. For her, Japan appropriates Christian civilization without incorporating Christianity itself. It is important to remember that Christianity has struggled to spread in Japan. It was only in 1549 that the first Christian missionary arrived in Japan: Francis Xavier. The late arrival of this religion followed by its prohibition until the mid-1800s (the end of the Edo period) never allowed a real anchoring.

Bird actually had a very ambiguous position. She seemed to believe in British superiority while not always corresponding to Orientalist writings by presenting a different image of the Ainu people. Floriane Reviron-Piégay, in 'Isabella Bird's *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* ou le récit de voyage comme autoportrait d'une aventurière engagée' writes about Bird : 'Il s'agit pour elle par ailleurs de porter un regard critique sur les Japonais, qui, dans leur attitude envers les Aïnous, lui rappellent celle des Anglais envers les Écossais et donc *in fine* de critiquer de manière voilée toute forme d'impérialisme'[320]. Thus, if some theoreticians perceive Bird as

[315] Isabella Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (Reno: Pantianos Classics, 2017), 139.
[316] Ibid., 336.
[317] Fosco Maraini, 'Une Renaissance Aïnoue ?,' *L'Homme, Chine : facettes d'identité*, no. 137 (1996) : 196.
[318] Ibid., 197.
[319] Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan*, 331.
[320] Floriane Piegay Reviron, 'Isabella Bird's *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* ou le récit de voyage comme autoportrait d'une aventurière engagée,' *E-rea, no.* 14 (2016) : 13, https://journals.openedition.org/erea/5493.

a colonial author, Floriane Reviron-Piégay sees in her description of the Japanese a way of questioning. This analysis can be a possible explanation but, in this thesis, we would like to bring a nuance to the idea of Reviron-Piégay. Indeed, Bird may seem to have a mixed position regarding Orientalism since she shares moments of otherness with the Ainu, she criticises the attitude of the Japanese, but despite this we decide in our study to still perceive Bird as carrying the Orientalist gaze, because she questions it without rejecting it. If she calls into question the superiority of the Japanese over the Ainu, she does not question the superiority of the West over the East. Furthermore, her 'benevolence' towards the Ainu is seen here as paternalistic, part of a primitivist idealisation of their culture. When she takes a step back from certain situations that she observes, it is a desire on her part to adopt a scientific and anthropological perspective, rather than a way of criticising colonialism. Moreover, the fact that she does not learn Japanese, unlike David-Néel and Eberhardt who learn other languages, is also a reflection of a colonial attitude. For Bird, the self-reinvention is done thanks to the freedom that the travels offered her, but not thanks to the assimilation of another culture.

Alexandra David-Néel, unlike Bird, cannot travel as a European, so locals do not communicate with her in the same way and this influences her approach to the East. She is as close as possible to the customs of the countries she crosses since she has to embody them. That said, this does not prevent her, at least at first, from sometimes laughing at Tibetan beliefs, like when Yongden claims to read the future: 'Lama, savez-vous consulter le sort?' asks a man who lost his cow; David-Néel writes about it 'Bon! Un de plus' … 'Marmottant les formules, les écourtant autant qu'il est possible, mon jeune compagnon compte et recompte les grains de son chapelet'[321]. It shows the habit they have of this little show which relies on the credulity of the people they meet. It is with this colonial heritage that she enters the Eastern world.

Despite her criticism of Christian missionaries, David-Néel does not question the principle of colonialism and she even reproduces the attitude of the conqueror in wanting to discover new lands. This is an idea confirmed by Valérie Boulain in her book *Femmes en aventure. De la voyageuse à la sportive,* who writes that David-Néel '[…] s'autorise même à encourager l'action du gouvernement français à Pondichéry, pour y contrer, par l'éducation

[321] Alexandra David-Néel, *Voyage d'une Parisienne à Lhassa* (Paris: Pocket, 2004), 140.

et l'humanisme auprès des "indigènes", les méfaits du système anglais en Inde'[322]. In 1912, she writes to her husband Philippe that 'la plupart de ces nationalistes [Indiens] sont de bien vilains réactionnaires et non pas du tout des patriotes généreux et épris de progrès, comme on le croit souvent. […] Les Anglais expulsés de l'Inde, ce serait un effroyable carnage et un retour à la barbarie'[323], confirming her point of view on the colonial question. It is not a question of demonstrating that David-Néel values colonial ideas through her books, but rather of showing the difficulty there is in deconstructing the Western gaze. It is thanks to the journey that her perspective evolves, allowing for a reinvention of the self as she embraces a different point of view and intermingles the West and East. She begins by criticising this binary opposition and by condemning the concept of forbidden land: 'Je souhaitais, bien davantage, attirer l'attention sur le phénomène, singulier à notre époque, de territoires devenant interdits'[324]; then she says, speaking of Western politicians who substitute for the Chinese government 'quel droit avaient-ils d'ériger des barrières autour d'une contrée qui, légalement, ne leur appartenait même pas ?'[325] … '"On ne passe pas !" Vraiment ? une femme passerait'[326]. We also understand as we read *Voyage d'une Parisienne à Lhassa*, that the distance she puts between herself and the locals is not always a choice, but a principle imposed by her status as a European: 'Tout étranger qui, comme je le fais, fréquente les milieux indigènes est étroitement surveillé et je puis être sûre que tous mes faits et gestes sont connus'[327]. This is even clearer when she confesses:

> Un Européen, et encore davantage une Européenne sont, dans l'Inde la priorité des autres "Blancs". On est très gentil pour vous à condition que vous vous comportiez suivant le cadre présent pour les gens de la "race supérieure". Je ne l'enfreins déjà que trop. Mes relations avec les natifs, bien que ceux-ci soient de race princière, paraissent empreintes d'une idée trop égalitaire ; il faudrait que je laissasse sentir au bon vieux maharadjah qu'il n'est qu'un Jaune, un Tibétain et que moi j'ai "du sang bleu" dans les veines.[328]

The West/East opposition governs all kinds of relationships, so much so that even colonised people have integrated this idea. David-Néel notices this phenomenon and circumvents it by

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[322] Valérie Boulain, *Femmes en aventure. De la voyageuse à la sportive* (Rennes: PU Rennes, 2012), 121.
[323] Alexandra David-Néel, *Correspondance avec son mari 1904-1941: Édition intégrale 1904-1941* (Paris: Plon, 2016), 124.
[324] Alexandra David-Néel, *Voyage d'une Parisienne à Lhassa* (Paris: Pocket, 2004), 14.
[325] Ibid., 28.
[326] Ibid.
[327] David-Néel, *Correspondance avec son mari 1904-1941: Édition intégrale 1904-1941*, 200.
[328] Ibid., 199.

disguising herself as a poor Tibetan. We have seen in the previous chapter that the costume could not allow her to express herself fully, but we see here that it is a way for her to question the West/East binary opposition. This situation permits her to shift her gaze and to be more tolerant of the different cultures she encounters (although it is not totally detached from its colonial heritage): 'Il faut avoir vécu longtemps parmi les Tibétains pour comprendre combien leur foi est sincère, combien leurs croyances sont intimement mêlées à toute leur vie'[329]. Indeed, if we have seen that she sometimes criticises Tibetan beliefs, we see in *Mystiques et magiciens du Tibet*, that she ends up embracing them; it is something that has been badly received by some readers. In the book *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism*, Mills explained that the literary critic Jeanne Denys[330] accused David-Néel of being unscientific: 'We enter, with our romancière into the domain of the supernatural, of the extraordinary. She believes in communication between the world of men and that of the gods (…). She tells us of miracles, mirages, of apparitions (…) of her knowledge of "Thumo" which allows one to bear extreme cold'[331].

David-Néel incorporates in her book a reality full of mysticism, which cannot be accepted by Europeans such as Jeanne Denys. This criticism made of her lack of realism shows the separation between the West and the East, with science on one side, and the faith on the other. For David-Néel the reality of Tibetans is different but no less valid than another's. She writes for example 'le Tibet est le pays des démons. (…) Ils vagabondent pour leur plaisir à travers les steppes et les forêts, et tout voyageur risque de se trouver subitement face à face avec l'un deux'[332]; she does not necessarily say she believes in demons, but she also does not specify that it is just the Tibetan point of view. She presents this almost as a scientific fact, as a reality that is an integral part of the place. More than that, the fact that she practices *thumo* – a buddhist breathwork practice for inner heat – also shows that she integrates a reality coming from the East into her world of Western origin. She wrote 'la connaissance profonde d'un people ne peut s'acquérir que par une familiarité prolongée avec lui, sans arrière-pensée de prosélytisme ni de réforme'[333] . This mix of the two worlds (West/East) also underlines a

[329] Alexandra David-Néel, *Mystiques et magiciens du Tibet* (Paris: Pocket, 2019), 18.
[330] She studied the journey of Alexandra David-Néel and wrote a book called *A. David-Néel au Tibet, une supercherie dévoilée* in 1972, aimed at demystifying the David-Néel's trip to Tibet.
[331] Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1991), 132.
[332] David-Néel, *Mystiques et magiciens du Tibet*, 133.
[333] Ibid., 76.

refusal of David-Néel to accept determinism, therefore adhering to Deleuze's idea that we developed earlier when he says that nomads have no past, because they are defined by the spaces they cross.

Finally, the duality of David-Néel which is on the one hand the non-criticism of the colonial system and on the other hand the desire to be part of the Eastern Oriental world, also takes shape in her way of writing about her journey, since we can recognise two voices there. As Mills explains: 'The first is an objective voice, and more obviously determined by colonial discourse, and the other is more personal and determined by the feminine discourses'[334]. This more 'personal' discourse would therefore be linked to the second part of our analysis on this desire to see the world through a different prism than that of the Western world. But we can add a nuance to Mill's explanation since, David-Néel, during her trip to Lhasa, travels above all as a Buddhist and not as a woman.

Isabelle Eberhardt has a much clearer anti-colonial position than Bird and David-Néel. However, this does not prevent the young Swiss woman from having initially believed in the benefit of the presence of the French colonial occupant in Algeria. Indeed, she first thought that the presence of the French government was beneficial, contrary to the Turkish domination[335]. She dreams of a meeting between settlers and the colonised so that there could be a union between the humanism of the West (school, human rights, freedom of women) and the mysticism of Islam: 'Il faudrait que la France, au lieu de détruire ce qu'elle trouve de bon, sût s'assimiler l'âme de l'Islam et la noblesse de cette race fière'[336], 'J'aurais voulu être un trait d'union entre deux races, deux mondes'[337]. She has real hope since she meets anarchist settlers, but she understands little by little that this meeting will not take place because of the behaviour of the French: 'L'influence française donne des avortons'[338]. It is partly by this desire to unite the Arab world and the French world, but also, as we have already said, by the use of a sometimes-fantasised image of the Arab world, that Eberhardt

[334] Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (London: Routledge, 1991), 136.
[335] When Isabelle Eberhardt arrived in Algeria, the period of three centuries of Algerian history as an autonomous province of the Ottoman Empire was over.
[336] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 99.
[337] Ibid., 112
[338] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Lettres et journaliers* (Paris: Babel, 2003), 35.

corresponds to the criteria of Orientalism. As Jean-Xavier Ridon remarks: 'La particularité de la voix d'Eberhardt est qu'elle semble participer des deux perspectives simultanément : d'une part , il est impossible de la séparer d'une tradition orientaliste et, d'autre part, elle est une des premières à remettre en cause la réalité coloniale'[339].

What we can call an ambiguity or a paradox also comes from the very special relationship that Eberhardt has with the French government. The extravagances of the young woman bother the settlers a lot and she becomes suspicious, having to justify her relationship with the Algerian people: 'Jamais je n'ai participé ni eu connaissance d'aucune action antifrançaise, soit dans le Sahara, soit dans le Tell (…) J'ai toujours et partout parlé aux indigènes en faveur de la France qui est ma patrie adoptive'[340]. Other settlers use the young woman to get information, since she is the only one who has a privileged relationship with this eastern world. Irmgard Scharold explains that Eberhardt must deal, at least a little bit, with settlers because '[…] sa liberté s'appuie sur ce système. Elle n'a pas le choix de s'approprier l'espace infini d'une manière analogue à celle du système colonial'[341]. Despite this, she does not hesitate to denounce the attitude of the French government, giving rise to very committed texts. These anti-colonial ideas are even found in her short stories such as 'Yasmina'[342]:

> Il y avait bien une fontaine [...] mais le gardien roumi [...] ne permettait point aux gens de la tribu de puiser l'eau pure et fraîche dans cette fontaine. Ils étaient donc réduits à se servir de l'eau saumâtre de l'oued où piétinaient, matin et soir, les troupeaux. De là, l'aspect maladif des gens de la tribu continuellement atteints de fièvres malignes.[343]

The symbolic function of water shows that colonialism is a poison that seizes everyone. This system takes hold the settlers themselves who are not always aware of what they do because they are locked in this harmful system as well. Eberhardt explains the mechanism by which the colonial administration carried out its policy of expropriation of Algerian peasants. The lands are bought at low prices and then allocated to settlers who are sometimes unaware of

[339] Jean-Xavier Ridon, *Le Voyage en son miroir* (Paris: Kimé, 2002), 26.
[340] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Amours nomades* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008), 150.
[341] Irmgard Scharold, 'Le Désert comme emblème du non-lieu de la femme : Isabelle Eberhardt et sa construction de soi en musulman nomade,' *Scènes des genres au Maghreb*, no. 11 (2013) : 65.
[342] Which was published in the press in 1902.
[343] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 96.

the conditions under which the lands were taken from its Algerian owners. She writes about this process in her short story 'Criminel'[344]:

> Le colon se demandait avec une stupeur douloureuse ce qu'il avait fait à cet Arabe à qui il donnait du travail, pour en être haï à ce point… Ils ne se doutaient guère, l'un et l'autre, qu'ils étaient maintenant les solidaires victimes d'une même iniquité grotesquement triste ! Le colon, proche et inaccessible, avait payé pour les fonctionnaires lointains, bien tranquilles dans leurs palais d'Alger…Et le fellah ruiné avait frappé, car le crime est souvent, surtout chez les humiliés, un dernier geste de liberté[345].

With this critical look towards the colonial system, she reinvents herself as she uses her Muslim identity. If she criticises over all a system, it is also a European state of mind that she criticises since she does not always recognize herself in it: 'Malgré tous leurs défauts et toute l'obscurité où ils vivent, les plus infimes Bédouins sont bien supérieurs et surtout plus supportables que les imbéciles Européens qui empoisonnent le pays de leur présence. Où les fuir, où aller vivre, loin de ces êtres malfaisants, indiscrets et arrogants, s'imaginant qu'ils ont le droit de tout niveler, de tout rendre semblable à leur vilaine effigie ?'[346]. From 1902 – which corresponds to her return to Algeria – her writings are more and more virulent. She said to her husband: 'Chacun de nous a un devoir sacré en ce monde. Le tien, le mien, celui de tous les musulmans est de travailler bravement, infatigablement à nous réhabiliter devant l'Occident, à nous imposer par notre intelligence et notre savoir'[347]; by expressing this, we understand that she makes the Arab world her homeland and that she presents herself as one of them. Hence, she questioned the West/East binary opposition. Unlike many writers who have been disappointed in Africa[348] while travelling there (because their mind was full of fantasised images), Eberhardt accepts this country with its complex reality, gradually moving away from her fantasised vison of Algeria[349].

For Eberhardt, trying to become one of them is the only way to really get to know a culture; she affirms 'c'est une grave erreur, en effet, que de croire que l'on peut faire des

[344] Which was published in the press in 1902.
[345] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Inédits et textes originaux* (Bibliothèque numérique romande, 2021), 62. http://www.bibliothèquenumériqueromande.com.
[346] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Lettres et Journaliers* (Paris: Babel, 2003), 290.
[347] Ibid
[348] For example: Pierre Loti, Gérard de Nerval, Arthur Rimbaud.
[349] We shall see that she does not always manage to detach herself from this orientalist outlook, even if she is the one who does so the most of the three authors studied.

études de mœurs populaires sans se mêler aux milieux que l'on étudie, sans vivre leur vie' [350]. The young woman aspires to embody a fusion of West and East. In seeking to transcend the binary opposition between the two, through a singular relationship with the Other, Eberhardt reveals a profound sense of alterity that is vital to her project of self-reinvention, even if her efforts to dissolve this divide are not always fully realised.

In conclusion, there is a questioning of the West/East opposition among the three women travellers we studied. This questioning seems necessary to understand the other. Indeed, they feel the need to move away from this binary way of reading the world. However, we have seen that Isabella Bird is an exception in this study. Analysing Bird allows us to better understand the Orientalist approach to Victorian society. For David-Néel and Eberhardt, self-reinvention involves becoming other or becoming the other. In all three cases – colonial attitude, becoming other or becoming the other – it is interesting to understand what relationship they can have with the locals by adopting these different positions. To what extent the other has an important place in the identity process of the three writers? This is what we will see in the next subsection.

2.c Self vs other: otherness as a condition of the journey

'For Derrida difference does not mean binary opposition but a differentiation with all other possible absent meanings rather than oppositions'[351]

As we have shown in the previous sub-sections, the encounter with the other can be disrupted by questions of gender, race and inequality of power imposed by the colonial reality. If Isabella Bird, Alexandra David-Néel and Isabelle Eberhardt try to break down or to lessen gender barriers and those of the East/West opposition, this does not mean that it is enough to have easy access to the other. The other that they meet during travelling can also be difficult to understand because they have another way of reading the world and another language.

According to Tzvetan Todorov[352], the relationship with the Other can be understood through three distinct modes of approach: the first one has as result the impossible equality, since the traveller will issue a value judgement when arriving at the conclusion that the other

[350] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Amours nomades* (Paris: Gallimard, 2008), 59.
[351] David Evans, *Language, Identity and Symbolic Culture* (London: Bloomsbury,2018), 21.
[352] This idea is developed throughout his book *Nous et les autres* (Paris: Seuil, 1989).

is inferior to themselves. The second one happens when the traveller tries to get closer to the other by identifying with the other to the point of denying their own difference or when the traveller tries to change the other by imposing their own values. The last approach is when the traveller stays completely indifferent. Thus, for Todorov, equality seems to be impossible. Jean-Xavier Ridon is more nuanced with regard to the impossible equality. Although he admits the great difficulty of meeting the other, he writes in *L'Étrangement du voyageur* : 'L'étrangeté du voyageur fait en sorte que son identité n'est jamais totalement établie et qu'elle oscille entre un mode de reconnaissance et le refus d'une distance parfois irréconciliable'[353]. How to find a form of stability during the encounter with the other? Is equality actually impossible?

Hélène Cixous in *Le Rire de la méduse* speaks about the '[…] ability to receive otherness as a new science, a new discourse based on the idea of respectful affinity between self and other'[354]. This ability to receive otherness can be reached through empathy as Julia Kristeva seems to say in her book *Étrangers à nous-même*: 'Il ne s'agit pas simplement – humanistement – de notre aptitude à accepter l'autre; mais *d'être à sa place*, ce qui revient à se penser et à se faire autre à soi-même'[355]; an empathy that goes so far as to become the other, or at least to become other. Thus, according to the theories that we have just seen, the meeting with the other is either impossible, or it does pass through a total transformation of the self. Therefore, to what extent do we become other to understand the other? Is this a process that Bird, David-Néel and Eberhardt have experienced? Before continuing, it is important to remember that 'il convient de bien distinguer l'endotisme de l'exotisme : la démarche endotique consiste à devenir l'autre, la démarche exotique à devenir autre'[356], as explained by Ridon, referring to the analysis of Frank Michel. It is also important to specify that, becoming the other or becoming other is not always and necessarily negative – contrary to what Todorov suggests – since it can be part of the identity process. Indeed, 'il s'agit en effet désormais de faire de l'identité un concept permettant l'analyse des formes de changements'[357]. Thus, the encounter with the other becomes essential for travellers, 'la rencontre équilibre l'errance'[358].

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[353] Jean-Xavier Ridon, *L'Étrangement du voyageur* (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 2018), 116.
[354] Hélène Cixous, *Le Rire de la méduse* (Paris: Galilée, 2010), 194.
[355] Julia Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-même* (Paris: Gallimard Coll. Folio, 1991), 25.
[356] Ridon, *L'Étrangement du voyageur*, 40.
[357] Claude Dubar, 'Polyphinie et métamorphoses de la notion d'identité,' *Revue Française des affaires sociales*, no. 2 (2007) : 9, https://shs.cairn.info/revue-francaise-des-affaires-sociales-2007-2-page-9?lang=fr.
[358] Julia Kristeva, *Étrangers à nous-même* (Paris: Gallimard Coll. Folio, 1991), 21.

However, another type of traveler exists, the one who does not try to hide their differences, because 'son statut d'habitant provisoire ou de visiteur lui laisse une marge dans laquelle il lui est loisible de demeurer étranger'[359]. It is not indifference as Torodov suggests, but another way of presenting oneself to the other. Ridon develops this idea: 'Ce que l'étrangement propose c'est de sortir de la dualité entre le soi et l'autre pour établir l'étrangeté comme mode de connaissance de l'autre'[360]. This position is very often adopted by Bird: 'The people had evidently never seen a European woman before, and they crowded round me, touching my clothes and hair; but their curiosity was perfectly good-natured, and I felt proud to represent England in their eyes'[361]. In any case, it must be understood, as Hegel explains, that the question of identity cannot be separated from the relationship with the other because 'ce que l'on reconnait d'un soi au cours de cet échange, c'est que le soi est le type d'être qui ne peut rester en lui-même. (…) je découvre que la seule façon de me connaître passe par une médiation qui a lieu en dehors de moi'[362]. This idea is confirmed by Judith Butler in *Le Récit de Soi* when she writes: 'Le "je" n'a aucune histoire propre qui ne soit en même temps l'histoire d'une relation'[363].

In this subsection, a linguistic approach will be added to the question of the relationship to the other. As Braidotti said in the book *Nomadic Subject*, knowing another language is '[…] not only a process of constant translation, but also of successive adaptations to different cultural realities'[364]. Understanding the reality of the other and becoming other/the other through language is a phenomenon that contributes to the construction of identity (and which, moreover, as a woman, allows a rare independence for the time). For Edward Sapir: 'Language is purely human and a non- instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions, and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols'[365]; he concurs with the idea of Braidotti[366] and explains that language is a social construction, a cultural reference. By learning another language, Eberhardt and David-Néel enter a new cultural continuity, since it is a community agreement. The sociolinguist John Edwards in his

[359] Jean-Xavier Ridon, *L'Étrangement du voyageur* (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 2018), 1.
[360] Ibid., 118.
[361] Isabella Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (Reno: Pantianos Classics, 2017), 56.
[362] Judith Butler, *Le Récit de soi* (Paris: PUF, 2007), 27-28.
[363] Ibid., 7.
[364] Rosi Braidotti, *Nomadic Subjects* (New York: Columbia Press University, 1994), 16.
[365] Edward Sapir, *Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 7.
[366] In fact, she takes her inspiration from Edward Sapir.

book *Language and Identity* affirms that 'different languages carve up reality in different ways and that, therefore, the language you speak will determine the way you think'[367], thus confirming the impact of language in the reinvention of the Self.

David-Néel affirms that 'celui qui voyage sans rencontrer l'autre ne voyage pas, il se déplace'[368], making the meeting with the other an essential element of the journey. Nonetheless, we can wonder how she has access to the other when we know that she must disguise herself, stay hidden and avoid interactions for fear of arousing suspicion. We think for example of this moment during her first attempt to reach Lhasa from Amdo in 1921: 'La terreur nous cloua sur place. Quelqu'un était là et, justement, en discutant ensemble, Yongden et moi avions parlé en anglais, même parlé très haut'[369]. In this specific case, as sometimes in her journey, the meeting is not desired, it is synonymous with panic and it is to be avoided. However, it is, as we have already underlined, difficult for her to keep this role of an old Tibetan and to stay away from others. At the beginning of her journey to Tibet, she meets a sick old man on the banks of the river Salouen, right after the village of Lhakhangra, who was abandoned by his travelling companions:

> Alors il me fut impossible de me tenir, comme la prudence me l'ordonnait, à mon rôle de vieille mère un peu simple d'esprit. En quelques mots je rappelai au malade les croyances de la religion qu'il avait pratiquée depuis son enfance (…) Le vieillard m'écouta attentivement (…) toucha le bas de ma robe avec son front, ainsi que le font les Thibétains aux lamas qu'ils vénèrent[370].

Her knowledge of the other's culture enables her to appease him. This extreme situation allows the meeting, more daily, David-Néel seems to tell us that the foreigner has a complicated position in Asia: 'Les Tibétains imaginent que la plupart des voyageurs trainent un ou plusieurs démons à leur suite' [371]. While in Tibet it may be a matter of belief, she even wonders whether mistrust of strangers might be instinctive throughout Asia. She writes in *Au Coeur des Himalayas*: 'Le sentiment que l'étranger éveille chez ces xénophobes n'est pas précisément de la haine mais, plutôt, une hostilité instinctive ; celle qui existe entre des animaux d'espèces différentes et dont le chien et le chat sont des exemples courants'[372]. She

[367] Edward Sapir, *Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 60.
[368] Alexandra David-Néel, *Voyage d'une Parisienne à Lhassa* (Paris: Pocket, 2004), 48.
[369] Ibid., 35.
[370] Ibid., 69.
[371] Ibid., 254.
[372] Alexandra David-Néel, *Au Cœur des Himalayas* (Paris: Payot, 2016), 25.

continues her point by adding: 'L'on peut se demander si l'idée, nourrie par de nombreux Asiatiques, que l'étranger est un instru indésirable dont la présence est néfaste, peut expliquer leur hostilité, à défaut d'aucun grief patent, ou bien si c'est, au contraire, cette hostilité instinctive que l'indigène tente de s'expliquer par la croyance en l'influence maléfique de l'étranger'[373].

Thus, she can hardly use her position as a foreigner to meet others. In such a context (beyond her desire to go to the forbidden land), she seeks a form of invisibility thanks to her costume and to all the practises that it offered. Indeed it is a '[…] processus de mimétisation'[374], '[…] rendu possible que grâce à sa connaissance de la langue parlée par le peuple tibétain et de ses modes de comportements'[375]. This idea is also developped by Jean-Xavier Ridon: 'L'identité d'emprunt permet d'entrer, comme par effraction, dans l'espace culturel de l'autre'[376]. The 'identité d'emprunt' is a very interesting term because it underlines an important question: what does she do with this identity on returning home? As far as David-Néel is concerned, she is situated in a subtle balance where European identity feeds on 'l'identité d'emprunt'. Indeed, it is not about theatrical self-presentation, but a sincere interest that shapes her own identity: ' Alexandra David-Néel s'est confrontée à l'expérience de *l'autre tibétain* sous toutes ses formes, réussissant par là à s'assimiler complètement à cet autre'[377] ; but we can qualify the analyse of Ledesma Pedraz , since, even if it is a question of a sincere interest in Tibetan culture and that it shapes her identity, David-Néel had to disguise herself and therefore play a sort of role to have access to this new culture.

Because of this position, the strongest encounters she makes are those with people who are aware of her 'two faces'. Yongden is the perfect example. He is the witness of her Tibetan identity and helped her in this process, while at the same time being aware of her European identity. He even returned to France with her when she adopted him (he arrived in France in 1925 and settled in Digne-les-Bains in 1928). But for others, she must continue to attenuate her 'Western self' by learning the language, by understanding the customs, but above all by mobility. For David-Néel, the occupation of geographical space goes hand in hand

[373] Alexandra David-Néel, *Au Cœur des Himalayas* (Paris: Payot, 2016), 25.
[374] Manuela Ledesma Pedraz, 'Alexandra David-Néel ou l'art de la fugue et du déguisement,' *Femmes, Genre, Histoire*, no.28 (2008): 214, https://doi.org/10.4000/clio.8712.
[375] Ibid
[376] Jean-Xavier Ridon, *Le Voyage en son miroir* (Paris: Kimé, 2002), 35.
[377] Ledesma Pedraz, 'Alexandra David-Néel ou l'art de la fugue et du déguisement,' 215.

with the real understanding of the other: 'Je t'assure que lorsqu'on rumine les théories hindoues dans la jungle où elles sont nées, on les voit sous un tout autre jour que les éminents chers maîtres qui ne les ont jamais connues dans un cabinet de travail européen'[378]. Ideas and culture are tied to geographical space.

Therefore, the encounter with the space of the other already made it possible to understand them even before having an interlocution with them. Asia, this continent foreign to David-Néel, as evidenced by this moment: 'Je n'ai jamais rien vu qui ressemble à ce pays-ci. Il y a entre 4000 et 6000 m d'altitude, des paysages extraordinaires, gigantesques, qui paraissent appartenir à un autre monde. Oui c'est bien là, le mot propre, on avance, à travers ces solitudes, timidement, comme un intrus qui s'est faufilé dans une demeure étrangère'[379], became her home, thanks to her peregrinations. This discovery of the geographical space allows the meeting with others and this nourishes the identity of David-Néel. She writes that '[…] quand je parle, ici, avec les brahmanes, ils sentent que je parle la même langue, que je comprends les choses auxquelles correspondent les termes dont ils se servent'[380]; emphasising the importance of language since it is through language that she achieves cultural understanding, impacting her own way of thinking. David Evans in his book *Language, Identity and Symbolic Culture* develops the idea that language is a meeting place. For this it refers to the thought of the Russian theorist Mikhail Bakhtin: 'Bakhtin maintains that words are half the property of others in that they are borrowed with their pre-existent meanings but then adapted by individuals and groups to their own situations. Therefore, one appropriates the words of others and personalises them with one's own meanings and ideologies'[381]. Through this process it is also the idea of 'recognition' that is evoked. Language is what makes us belong to a group, as John Edwards confirms in his book *Language and Identity*: 'La langue peut permettre à l'identité individuel de se rattacher à un groupe'[382]. Indeed, if the language is first of all a way for David-Néel to access knowledge (for example reading books in Sanskrit), it is also what will allow her to reinvent herself by questioning a European thought thanks to the understanding and the appropriation of the Tibetan way of life.

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[378] Alexandra David-Néel, *Correspondance avec son mari: Édition intégrale 1904-1941* (Paris: Plon, 2016), 129.
[379] Ibid., 375.
[380] Ibid.
[381] Alexandra David-Néel, *Au Cœur des Himalayas* (Paris: Payot, 2016), 15.
[382] John Edwards, *Language and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 15.

Despite her mastery of Tibetan, she shares the difficulty of this exercise in *Voyage d'une Parisienne à Lhassa.* During their travels, David-Néel and Yongden are often interpellated, since Yongden claims to read the future. When he sets up this fake moment of divination, he often asks David-Néel to sing: 'C'est par des injonctions de cette sorte que Yongden m'épargne, habituellement, l'épreuve fatigante des longues causeries au cours desquelles, soit ma prononciation, soit l'emploi – dont je suis coutumière – de termes du langage littéraire, pourraient étonner les villageois'[383]. Her way of speaking Tibetan could betray her since 'languages are also potent boundary markers, highlighting and labeling particular social memberships: they are symbols of group identity'[384]. She oscillates between recognition by language and, on the contrary, language as an element of exclusion. She can be excluded because, here, she must pretend to be a Tibetan and not a European who speaks Tibetan.

How is she integrated into a group when she drops the mask? During her trip to Nepal, she meets Tibetans in Boudhanath and she writes about this meeting in *Au Cœur des Himalayas*: 'Tous bavardaient à la fois, menant grand tapage, riant et s'exclamant en entendant une étrangère parler leur langue. À Katmandou ou dans l'Inde, certaines d'entre eux avaient entendu des étrangers parler hindi ou népalais, mais jamais tibétain. Tibétain, vraiment !... je parlais tibétain !... quel évènement !'[385]. The contrast between her nationality and the language used creates the encounter with others; it also allows her to insist on the fact that she is one of the rare Europeans who knows how to speak Tibetan. The exclamatory sentence as well as the '…' can be the transcription of the astonishment of the people she meets but also of her own astonishment as to what she has managed to do. About bilingualism, John Edwards says that: '[…] speaking two or more may imply some sort of dual citizenship. Since language is a central personality trait, one possibility is that bilinguals have an identity woven out of more than one linguistic thread'[386]. David-Néel, by speaking their language, shows that identity is not genetic, an attribute but a process. Identity is '[…] un objet que nous construisons petit à petit dans le contact avec les autres, par identifications et

[383] Alexandra David-Néel, *Voyage d'une Parisienne à Lhassa* (Paris: Pocket, 2004), 143.
[384] John Edwards, *Language and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 10.
[385] Alexandra David-Néel, *Au Cœur des Himalayas* (Paris: Payot, 2016), 69.
[386] Ibid., 82.

différenciations successives à ce qu'ils sont, à ce que nous croyons qu'ils sont et à ce que nous percevons de l'image qu'ils ont de nous'[387].

By deciding to integrate the culture of the other in her own identity process, David-Néel joins the idea of Sylvain Tesson who writes 'un voyageur digne de ce nom ne peut s'intéresser à lui-même et cherche hors de soi matière à l'émerveillement. Pourquoi partir si c'est pour faire le tour de soi ?'[388]. Much more than 'émerveillement', it is the understanding of a world that she seeks, and this understanding of difference contributes to the understanding of her own self. When she travels in Japan she writes that 'j'ai le mal du pays pour un pays qui n'est pas le mien. Les steppes, les solitudes, les neiges éternelles et le grand ciel clair de là-haut me hantent !'[389], she belongs to this world from a personal point of view but also in the eyes of others, which validates her identity because, as Hegel explains, the desire to be is only satisfied through the desire to be recognized. Fanny Martin Quatremare confirms this idea in the article 'Identités plurielles au cours des voyages d'Alexandra David Néel': 'La reconnaissance est l'une des caractéristiques constitutives de la quête identitaire'[390]. This recognition came not only from Westerners, who saw her as both a specialist in Oriental studies and an intrepid adventurer - a persona she carefully crafted and projected in her writings - but also from Tibetans and Buddhists, who recognised her as a lama. For David-Néel, it was an even more remarkable triumph that she was held in such high esteem by the Eastern world.

Eberhardt, like David-Néel, yearns to be acknowledged by the locals as one of their own; yet, her relationship with others differs markedly from that of David-Néel. In Eberhardt's life there lies a certain paradox: a profound desire for acceptance within the community, coupled with an equally powerful need for solitude. In *Sud Ouranais* she confesses: 'Être seul, c'est être libre, et la liberté était le seul bonheur nécessaire à ma nature. Alors je me dis que ma solitude était un bien'[391]. She also writes that 'pourquoi, au lieu de chercher en moi-même les satisfactions dont mon âme à besoin, vais-je les chercher chez les autres, là où je suis sûr

[387] Dominique Picard, 'Quête identitaire et conflits interpersonnels,' *Connexion*, no. 89 (2008) : 76, https://shs.cairn.info/revue-connexions-2008-1-page-75?lang=fr.
[388] Sylvain Tesson, *Petit traité sur l'immensité du monde* (Paris: Éditions des Équateurs, 2005), 39.
[389] Alexandra David-Néel, *Grand Tibet et vaste Chine* (Paris: Plon, 1999), 78.
[390] Fanny Martín Quatremare, 'Identités plurielles au cours des voyages d'Alexandra David-Neel,' *Hybrida*, no. 4 (2022) : 210, https://www.jstor.org/stable/48765794.
[391] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 244.

de ne pas les trouver ?'[392]. If we stick to these two confessions, the encounter with the other seems to be an obstacle to a form of inner peace. Loneliness is not a withdrawal into oneself but rather a way of being free and of settling one's ills. Therefore, she goes so far as to voluntarily avoid others and she speaks often about her '[…] vie volontairement recluse et solitaire'[393]. However, as we have already said in the introduction of this subsection, we cannot not speak of the other when we speak of identity. 'L'existence toute arabe'[394] described by Eberhardt also exists because it is validated by the other, since 'le sujet n'est lui-même que pour un autre, son "identité" est donnée par l'Autre. En ce sens le sujet ne se décrira pas à partir de l'intentionnalité et de son mouvement toujours centripète, mais à partir de l'exposition à l'Autre'[395]. Thus, she confronts herself with others (including the reader) and, even if solitude remains something precious, she takes pleasure in meeting people. In El-hamel (small town in the north of Algeria), she spends a privileged moment with the Chorfa tribe: 'Je retrouve les conversations calmes, secrètes et polies qui font passer les heures longues des jours'[396]. Then, she adds that:

> Pour vivre avec ces hommes renfermés et susceptibles, il faut avoir pénétré leurs idées, les avoir faites siennes, les avoir purifiées en les faisant remonter à leur source antique… alors la vie est très facile et très doucement berceuse dans ce monde des burnous et des turbans, fermé à jamais à l'observation du touriste, quelque attentive et intelligente qu'elle soit.[397]

Eberhardt joins the process of David-Néel which consists of adopting the other to live in harmony. But it is not just a question of integrating the ideas of others but 'les avoir faites siennes', therefore to appropriate the culture of the other, to integrate it into one's self without forgetting one's own specificity. According to Ridon 'le voyageur est celui qui recherche à atténuer son étrangeté pour avoir accès à celle de l'autre'[398]. This is what Eberhardt does during her journey to Algeria, but by reducing her strangeness she does not seem to become the other but rather to find herself in several identities. This multiplicity of identities is not a mask, but a way of being in the world. The identity of Eberhardt is fluid:

[392] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Lettres et journaliers* (Paris: Babel, 2003), 147.
[393] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 36.
[394] Expression often used by Eberhardt to talk about her life in Algeria.
[395] Silvano Petrosino and Jacques Rolland, *La Vérité nomade* (Paris: La Découverte, 1979), 49.
[396] Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable*, 121.
[397] Ibid.
[398] Jean-Xavier Ridon, *L'Étrangement du voyageur* (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 2018), 21.

European and Muslim, woman and man (socially), traveler and inhabitant, foreigner and insider. Each role does not cancel it out, but enriches it. She deals with these contradictions without trying to resolve them. This idea of multiple identities – that we evoked previously – is confirmed by Bakhtin, as David Evans explains: 'Therefore for Bakhtin, human existence, like language and meaning, is open-ended, always "yet-to-be". The open-endedness of identity depends on its location in time and place, because identity, firstly, can be multiple according to social context; therefore identities can exist as a plural rather than a singular unitary concept'[399]. It is reminiscent of this quotation from Pierre Loti, who explains that 'lorsque je rencontre un autre moi-même, il y a chez moi accroissement des forces, il semblerait que les forces pareilles de l'un et de l'autre s'ajoutent'[400]. We are far from the idea of Todorov who seemed to tell us that to become the other meant erasing the self. Here, the encounter with the other and the change that it brings, confers greater stability of the self and permits to accept the multiplicity of the self. What constitutes the identity of Eberhardt (and of people in general) is the existence claimed by oneself and that attributed by others.

To return more precisely to Eberhardt's life, we can notice that her relationships with others are sometimes non-verbal. She is touched and marked by others without necessarily going through a conversation, we think for example of her meeting with Mériéma in Beni-Ounif (a town in Béchar Province, north of Algeria), a former slave: 'Elle prie, elle psalmodie, elle pleure, retranchée à jamais de la communion des êtres, plongée dans la solitude lugubre de son âme obscurcie. (…) Et Mériéma dansait, toute nue et toute noire, seule, sur une dune basse'[401]. It is first of all interesting to underline that this moment highlights the meeting with another woman, whom Eberhardt seems to admire for the freedom she represents, but above all this scene underlines that the meeting with the other is done also by a passive observation. The author often steps aside to highlight the people she meets. We also notice this when she talks about nomads walking in the dunes of Zousfana (south west Algeria): 'Depuis longtemps, ils marchent ainsi à travers le désert, avec les colonnes et les convois (…). Maintenant l'hiver va venir, le sombre hiver glacial, les nuits sans abris, près des brasiers sans chaleur. Et, avec la grande résignation de leur race, ils se sont habitués à cette vie, parce que comme tout ici-bas,

[399] David Evans, *Language, Identity and Symbolic Culture* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 16.
[400] Pierre Loti, *Aziyadé* (Paris: Folio,1991), 170.
[401] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 155.

elle vient de Dieu'[402]. We should not have an anthropological reading of this observation (unlike Isabella Bird), but rather as a way of seeing the other without being seen, a way of living her loneliness while integrating the other into her way of life. This confirms that Eberhardt desires to confront her own mind with that of others, without making herself too accessible to others. We can also note that she refers to God and we will see that, indeed, many of her encounters are related to religion[403], since 'language and religion have been the two most important markers of ethnonational identity'[404]. Indeed, religion and language are for Eberhardt a mark of group affiliation. It can explain why she feels the need to lean Arabic when she could have been satisfied with the use of French. In Algeria at this time, French is the language of opportunity and privilege. By refusing to only use French, she symbolically refuses the power and the domination that this language implies. That being said, Eberhardt writes in French. Indeed, for her, Arabic is the language of experience, of daily immersion, of fraternity with the people she comes into contact with. Writing in French about a life lived in Arabic reveals a tension: she has a profound experience of another world, but her relationship with literary language is mediated by the cultural tool of the colonial power. This highlights a fundamental fracture in her being: even in her most sincere immersion, she remains torn between two worlds. As a result, her writing becomes a hybrid space, in which we feel both loyalty to her Arab experiences and the impossibility of escaping her primary roots in European culture.

Another aspect differentiates Eberhardt from the two other writers we are studying: it is the fact that, despite her arrival in unknown landscapes, we do not have the impression that she is discovering another country, but rather that she has always been part of this world, that she finally finds her *patrie*. This could be explained first of all by the warm welcome given to foreigners in Algeria (contrary to what David-Néel describes in Asia):'Pour l'Arabe, quelque pauvre qu'il soit, l'hospitalité n'est pas un devoir religieux rempli de mauvaise grâce, c'est une foi, un honneur, et l'arrivée d'un hôte est toujours considérée comme un évènement heureux'[405]. But if Eberhardt is part of the Arab community so quickly and feels as one of theirs so easily, it is mainly because she recognizes herself in these people. It reminds us of the

[402] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 165.
[403] The next chapter will be entirely dedicated to this topic.
[404] John Edwards, *Language and Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 100.
[405] Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable*, 62.

sensation described by Camus in the short story 'Le Femme adultère' in *L'Exil et le royaume*: 'Là-bas, plus au sud encore, à cet endroit où le ciel et la terre se rejoignaient dans une ligne pure, là-bas, lui semblait-il soudain, quelque chose l'attendait qu'elle avait ignorée jusqu'à ce jour et qui pourtant n'avait cessé de lui manquer'[406] and 'après tant d'années où, fuyant devant la peur, elle avait couru follement sans but, elle s'arrêtait enfin. En même temps, il lui semblait retrouver ses racines, la sève montait à nouveau dans son corps qui ne tremblait plus'[407]. 'Retrouver ses racines', this is exactly what Eberhardt feels when she arrives in Algeria. She explains in her book *Écrits sur le sable* that leaving North Africa is 'contraire à ma nature'[408].

Isabella Bird has a different position, since she has a view that is similar to that of an anthropologist. She observes a lot, even if we have already mentioned some moments of sharing that she can experience with the locals, especially with Ainu women. She does not try to become other nor the other, her way of understanding the other is based on observation. In addition, she avoids places that are too Europeanised. For example, she writes about Nikko (a small town north of Tokyo, in the prefecture of Tochigi) that the place is 'too much Europeanised'[409]. She explains later 'the people are so quiet and kindly, though almost too still, and I have learned to know something of the externals of village life, and have become quite fond of the place'[410]. Knowing the place well allows her to have access to information normally known only by locals. However, as we see here, she insists more on the information gathered than on the way she knows the information. She does not describe her verbal interactions with others often, which may also derive from the fact that she does not learn Japanese and depends on Ito, her interpreter.

Nevertheless, it is interesting to see the relationship she creates with her interpreter. He speaks English, she can easily communicate with him and know Japanese traditions through his eyes: 'His name is Ito, and you will doubtless hear much more of him, as he will be my good or evil genius of the next three months'[411]. From this introduction we immediately

[406] Albert Camus, *L'Exil et le royaume* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957), 27.
[407] Ibid., 34.
[408] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 83.
[409] Isabella Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (Reno: Pantianos Classics, 2017), 45.
[410] Ibid., 45.
[411] Ibid., 17.

understand the complicity that is created between her and him as well as his importance in this journey. However, this way of presenting Ito to the readers is more like the presentation of a new character in a novel than the description of a friendly encounter. The fact that she experiences her meetings with the locals via Ito can put a distance between her and others, especially when Ito expresses his point of view. For example, as a Japanese, the young man is not always pleasant with the Ainu – he says about them: '[…] they're just dogs, not men'[412] – Bird will blame him for that by saying: 'Treat Ainos politely!'[413]. Suddenly the book *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* highlights the voice of the interpreter and not only of the traveller. It seems to become a polyphonic[414] book that offers us the point of view of a Japanese and a British person. Thus, if she seems to be the writer who of the three mixes the least with others, she finally creates a strong bond with the other by leaving him a large place in her literary work.

Regarding her relationship with other Japanese as well as with the Ainu, her attitude appears to correspond to what Kristeva explains in *Making Other, Making the Self*: 'Being a stranger creates both melancholy and power. The ethical responsibility is not only to accept this otherness but also to use it constructively and productively'[415]. Indeed, as we already explained, her European nationality gives her the power to be critical towards the colonial attitude of the Japanese while taking a critical look at the Ainu way of life. She also has the opportunity to develop a relationship with the two communities. But the idea that interests us in Kristeva's analysis is the idea of traveller's responsibility. She uses her own otherness to approach the Ainu and decides to share this with the readers in Great Britain. She made a documentary in the form of letters, which could have facilitated an intercultural dialogue, since the cultural differences of the Ainu (and Japanese) were transmitted to the British by one of their own (Bird herself). From a more personal point of view, she seems to keep a certain distance with the locals despite moments of sharing. Even when she wears a kimono, it is never to become the other but rather as a sign of respect. We prefer to talk about multiple identity rather than the idea of becoming other since, as Ridon explains: 'On peut vouloir et tout faire pour devenir autre, cette transformation est toujours davantage de l'ordre du

[412] Isabella Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (Reno: Pantianos Classics, 2017), 145.
[413] Ibid.
[414] We will develop this idea in part III of this thesis.
[415] Inger Birkeland, *Making Place, Making Self: Travel, Subjectivity and Sexual Difference* (Farnham: Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005), 23.

fantasme'[416]. This relationship with the other that we have tried to explain in this subsection joins the thought of Jacques Derrida, who offers us a post-structuralist approach to language and identity:

> Derrida points out that we cannot name the world but only form ideas of it which in turn become signs. He states therefore that all meanings are signs. Therefore everything that has a meaning is a signifier which creates a meaning that in turn becomes a signifier and so on. The result is that there is no final meaning because we live in time and time itself in always unfinished; meanings therefore always move on with time and identities are always in flux[417].

The absence of final meanings obliges the three women we study to have a great knowledge of the different places and environments they cross in order to grasp meaning in its context. Their multiple identities continue to be built over time and encounters. To find a stability and unity in this movement and this multiplicity, it is towards religions and spirituality that they turn.

Chapter 3: Religion and Spirituality as a Process of Self-reinvention

Religion is at the centre of self-reinvention for Isabelle Eberhardt and Alexandra David-Néel. Their different peregrinations play their part in this religious and spiritual quest. The journey, since the Middle Ages, has a strong link with religion via the figure of the pilgrim. Perhaps even before then, the Greeks, although they had no word for it, knew the practice of periodic and ritualised journeys towards a place of memory or healing waters. For example, they organised pilgrimages to sanctuaries like to the Oracle of Apollo at Delphi: 'For all of its history Delphi attracted both public delegations (*theo¯riai*) representing their city-states and private individuals, motivated by a desire either to consult the oracle, or to attend festivals, and to perform sacrifices'[418]. Thus, for a long time the journey has been linked to religion as well as the idea of contemplation. Pilgrims become the witness of the inconstancy of things thanks to their travels and their observation of nature. They travel with the aim of reaching a precise Holy place. This is reminiscent of Alexandra David-Néel, who wishes to reach Lhasa. Isabelle Eberhardt, although she also travels through Algeria with the desire of meeting Sufis,

[416] Jean-Xavier Ridon, *L'Étrangement du voyageur* (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 2018), 18.
[417] David Evans, *Language, Identity and Symbolic Culture* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 21.
[418] Elsner Jas and Ian Rutherford, *Pilgrimage in Graeco-Roman and early Christian Antiquity: Seeing the Gods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 99.

corresponds more to the idea of *errance* as we have already said in chapter 1. The writer Kenneth White, in *Coast to coast*, explains this relationship to wandering which differs from the pilgrim: 'The pilgrim trip has an aim, the sacred spot. But beyond the sacred, there's emptiness. I'm not out to cover kilometres, or to reach a particular place, I'm out for a kind of spatial poetics, with emptiness at its centre. And you begin again, for the pleasure, to get at an even finer sense of emptiness-plenitude'[419].

But in this chapter, it is not a question of opposing the pilgrim to other forms of nomadism. Indeed, Alexandra David-Néel and Isabelle Eberhardt link religion to travel but they are not pilgrims even if, as we said, there are some similarities. They are also seeking plenitude, but they see religion as a way to find it. It is also essential to recognise the uniqueness of their situation, as they have embraced spiritual traditions (Buddhism and Sufism) that contrast sharply with the religious heritage of their countries of origin, Switzerland and France. Thereby, the central question of this chapter is how converting to a new religion contributes to self-reinvention. 'Se convertir', according to Larousse dictionary, is adhering to a religion that we hold to be true, but it also means adopting other opinions than those which we adhere before, this therefore implies a form of change and of transformation. Thus, they convert to a cultural heritage, to a way of reading the world and themselves, as we will see in the next subsections (b and c).

Alexandra David-Néel and Isabelle Eberhardt grew up in very different contexts. Indeed, David-Néel's mother was very catholic and wanted her daughter to follow a strict catholic education, while her father had her secretly baptised in the protestant faith. David-Néel spent the beginning of her childhood in a Calvinist boarding school before being educated at the Catholic convent of Bois fleuri (Ixelles, Belgium). As a teenager, she had a theoretical interest in all religions, reading the Koran, the Bible and the Talmud: 'J'étais déiste à ma manière'[420]. She only connected with Buddhism during her university years. She spent an enormous amount of time at the Musée Guimet, which confirmed her interest in this religion as explained Laure Dominique Agniel: 'Son cheminement devient plus clair: sur le plan

[419] Kenneth White, *Coast to Coast*, Open World (Glasgow: Mythic Horse Press, 1991), 37.
[420] Alexandra David-Néel, *Le Sortilège du mystère* (Paris: Plon, 1972), 15.

spirituel, elle est atttirée par le Boudhisme'[421]. This change of religion can be perceived as a way of rejecting the family heritage.

Eberhardt grew up in a much less traditional family since, as we have already said, she grew up in an anarchist environment. The avant-garde education she receives already differentiates her from the young Swiss of her age who are, for the most part, raised on Catholic or Protestant education. Fascinated by Algeria from a very early age, her trip there and her conversion to Sufism were the confirmation of an identity that she had always sought: 'La seule chose consolante que l'on puisse y découvrir, c'est la croissante résignation islamique... En mon âme, je remarque enfin le commencement de l'indifférence envers les choses et les êtres indifférents, ce qui est l'affirmation plus puissante de mon moi'[422]. The 'résignation islamique' referred to here should not be understood in a passive or fatalistic sense, but rather as a process of voluntary submission to destiny, a lucid and transcendent acceptance of the world as it is. In this posture, it finds consolation, not an easy or naive consolation, but the austere and demanding consolation offered by faith experienced as the annihilation of the ego. Moreover, indifference to things and beings is not coldness, but inner conquest, a paradoxical affirmation of the self through its purification. This stripping away of the superfluous, in the Sufi tradition, could lead to a sovereign affirmation of the self, a self that is lucid, free and spiritually fulfilled. Finally, the rhythm of the sentence, its slow ascent towards a final affirmation, mimics this inner asceticism: the journey towards oneself involves renouncing the superfluous, in a solitude that is no longer suffering but strength.

Finally, to get a deeper look in a relevant way into what is Sufism for Eberhardt and what is Buddhism for David-Néel, we decided in this chapter to devote one sub-section per writer, as the comparative method used hitherto would seem too artificial in this section, since the three religions analysed are too different.

Before looking at the idea of converting to another religion, we will evoke the non-conversion of Isabella Bird, which offers a counterexample.

[421] Laure Dominique Agniel, *Alexandra David-Néel exploratrice au féminin* (Paris: Tallandier, 2018), 42.
[422] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 67.

3.a The Missionary role of Isabella Bird: using religion to travel

Isabella Bird, as we have seen in previous chapters, takes an anthropological look at her environment during her travels. Because of this, she does not have the desire to become the other. On the contrary, she seems to reinvent herself by asserting her European identity abroad. Religion still had an important place in Bird's life even though she did not convert to a new faith. Indeed, both her father and her grandfather were Anglican clergymen. She was therefore raised in a very religious environment. It should also be remembered that she grew up in the middle of the Victorian period, during the peak of the Industrial Revolution and the apogee of the British Empire. It was also a period with strong religious values, in particular because of evangelism. Isabella Bird carried within her this heritage that she did not really question. Thereby, as we will see, Bird spent a lot of time with the missionaries and even hoped to convert the Japanese to Christianity, as Natalie Sujae Macloskey explains in the thesis *Isabella Bird: An Argument for Mobility and a Changed Definition of New Womanhood*: 'Her time in Japan also cemented her association between Christianity, imperialism, and modernity. For her, and potentially others of her time, Christianity was modernity'[423].

If Isabella Bird was interested in the history of Buddhism, she nonetheless continued to believe in the superiority of Christianity and did not take Buddhism very seriously: 'There, too, they pray, if that can be called prayer which frequently consists only in the repetition of an uncomprehended phrase in a foreign tongue'[424]. Therefore, Bird hoped to see the Japanese convert to her religion. This was why, when she first arrived in Hirosaki, she was very happy to meet three Christian students who participated in the conversion of the Japanese to Christianity and became very optimistic for the future of the country: '[…] thirty young men have embraced Christianity'[425]. However, she was aware of the difficulty of this mission and worried about the lack of faith in Japan. As she explained: 'The "religious faculty" appears to be lost out of the Japanese nature. It is a complete mistake to suppose that because the old faiths are decaying Japan is ripe for the introduction of a new one'[426]. It is necessary to understand the religious context in which Bird arrived.

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[423] Nathalie McCloskey, *Isabella Bird: An Argument for Mobility and a Changed Definition of New Womanhood* (Ottowa: Carleton University, 2017), 65.
[424] Isabella Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (Reno: Pantianos Classics, 2017), 21.
[425] Ibid, 127.
[426] Ibid, 205.

To begin with, Mahayana Buddhism was imported to Japan from China and Korea. The Japanese imperial court adopted the religion in the 6th century AD and it was very quickly appropriated in the country. Indeed, Japanese Buddhism is influenced by Shintoism, a religion that was present before and with a philosophy quite close to Buddhism. When Bird arrived, Buddhism was not the official religion of the country, which was marked by the Meiji restoration. In that period, Shinto was declared as the national religion. However, Buddhism remained very present in the habits of life and customs, as shown by the following encounter that Bird had with a priest: 'An old priest who took me over it on my first visit, on passing the gods of wind and thunder said, 'we used to believe in these things, but we don't now'[427] but he '[…] requested me, however, to take off my hat as well as my shoes at the door of the temple'[428].

In the article 'Isabella Bird and her travels in Nineteenth-century Japan', Pr. Kanasaka Kiyonori explains that Bird believes in the value of spreading Christianity and that she '[…] wanted to investigate the potential for missionary efforts in Japan'[429]. Kanasaka Kiyonori further emphasises Bird's connection to Christians in Japan by observing the places she stays at: 'Outside Tokyo, five of the eight places where she spent the most time were establishments with connections to Christianity, including missionary houses and the Dōshisha Girl's School'[430]. It should also be noted that Bird referred to the American Board (the first missionary organisation in North America) when she arrived in Kyoto and Kobe. She referred to the Kobe Christians who do not drink sake anymore, '[…] that abstinence from sake, though not an article of membership, is tacitly required, the missionaries of the American Board being, without an exception, rigid teetotallers'[431], showing a change in customs, evidence of the influence of missionaries. But if Isabella Bird met and encouraged missionaries, did she also try to convert the Japanese or the Ainu? The first time Bird mentioned her religion to the Ainu people, she seemed to simply be faithful to her beliefs without imposing them: 'They asked me to worship their god, but when I declined on the ground that I could only worship my own

[427] Isabella Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (Reno: Pantianos Classics, 2017), 41.
[428] Ibid.
[429] Kanasaka Kiyonori, 'Isabella Bird and her travels in nineteenth century Japan,' Nippon (online), (2020): 3, https://www.nippon.com/en/japan-topics/g00829.
[430] Ibid.
[431] Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan*, 237.

God, the Lord of Earth and Heaven, of the dead and the living, they were too courteous to press their request'[432]. But according to Kiyonori, she participated actively in the conversion:

> The Ainu settlement of Biratori was seventh on the list of places she visited by length of stay (the same as Osaka). She stayed for three nights and four days in the home of the local chieftain Benri and worked energetically to learn as much as she could about all aspects of Ainu life and culture. She left a remarkably rich record—and one that was closely linked to missionary efforts to convert the Ainu to Christianity[433].

However, when the reader looks at the last letters of Bird's book *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan*, a more ambiguous position seems to appear, as often in Bird's work. Indeed, on several occasions she values Ainu people to the detriment of Catholics. She wrote in a letter in Shirasawa: 'In living altogether among this courteous, industrious, and civilised people, one comes to forget that one is doing them a gross injustice in comparing their manners and ways with those of people moulded by many centuries of Christianity. Would to God that we were so Christianised that the comparison might always be favourable to us, which it is not!'[434]. Bird seems to be aware of the biased gaze of Westerners who always refer to themselves as the standard to follow. By writing 'us', she includes herself in this process of comparison and, for the first time, questions this orientalist way of thinking. Later in the book she goes even further by saying:

> The glamour which at first disguises the inherent barrenness of savage life has had time to pass away, and I see it in all its nakedness as a life not much raised above the necessities of animal existence, timid, monotonous, barren of good, dark, dull, without hope, and without God in the world though at its lowest and worst considerably higher and better than that of many other aboriginal races, and, must I say it? considerably higher and better than that of thousands of the lapsed masses of our own great cities, who are baptized into Christ's name.[435]

Isabella Bird begins by listing the negative aspects of Ainu life in order to highlight more clearly the second part of her thinking. It is also a way for her to remember the clichés that the British readers (including herself) have in mind. But what Bird seems to say afterwards is that she manages to go beyond prejudice and even goes so far as to make a statement that can be considered blasphemous, since it gives the Ainu superiority to the detriment of countries of

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[432] Isabella Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (Reno: Pantianos Classics, 2017), 156.
[433] Kanasaka Kiyonori, 'Isabella Bird and her travels in nineteenth century Japan,' Nippon (online), (2020): 5, https://www.nippon.com/en/japan-topics/g00829.
[434] Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan*, 117.
[435] Ibid., 157.

Catholic culture. She knows that what she says about the Ainu is unmentionable by writing 'must I say it?', preparing the reader for this confession. Moreover, this form of preterition[436] is a way for Bird to defuse possible objections while conveying a paradox (or what may seem like a paradox for Westerners since the Ainu, not being Catholic, cannot be considered equal or superior to Catholics themselves). This writing process reveals a criticism of the Western Christian world.

Once again, she values the nature of the Ainu, as we had already mentioned in the previous chapter where Bird openly criticised the Japanese influence of the indigenous people. It is not a question of proposing a counter-hypothesis by affirming that Bird did not really support the missionaries but rather of bringing nuance. Maybe she was just not that Christian? Rather, we can consider that Bird insisted on her Christianity to justify her journey. In her thesis *Isabella Bird*: *An Argument for Mobility and a Changed Definition of New Womanhood*, Natalie Sujae McCloskey affirms that 'Bird was introduced to the idea that missionaries and mobility went hand in hand'[437]. Moreover, as we said previously, McCloskey establishes a link between Bird and the New Woman movement which can explain that Bird 'placed her whiteness and Christianity in the foreground of her books'[438] to obtain mobility. Whether it was deeply held beliefs or publishing strategies (although it could probably have been both at the same time), Bird remained observant and did not convert to another religion or to another culture. She reinvented herself by embracing her mobility and her position as an intellectual, since it must be remembered that this journey to Japan allowed her to be part of the Royal Geographical Society. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of reinventing the self through religion discussed in this subsection does not speak about the idea of conversion to a new religion. What happens in that case? To understand this, we will first look at the case of Alexandra David-Néel.

[436] She pretends she cannot say something while saying it immediately afterwards.
[437] Nathalie McCloskey, *Isabella Bird: An Argument for Mobility and a Changed Definition of New Womanhood* (Ottowa: Carleton University, 2017), 29.
[438] Ibid., 7.

3.b Buddhism for Alexandra David-Néel: the negation of the self as a way to reinvent the self

'Le bouddhisme du Bouddha se résume en trois choses : la permanence, la souffrance et le non-moi'[439].

If Isabelle Eberhardt converted to Sufism during her trip to Algeria, this was not the case of Alexandra David-Néel who became Buddhist while still in France, more precisely in Paris. This was thanks to her studies – '[…] sur les bancs d'une université européenne en étudiant la philosophie orientale'[440] – as she explained later to the Dalai Lama in Kalimpong. David-Néel had, from childhood, an attraction to mysticism. Indeed, according to Joëlle Désiré Marchand, who wrote a biography on David-Néel, *la femme aux semelles de vent* abandoned the Catholic religion from the age of eight for the reformed church[441]. Then, she '[…] oscille entre le nihilisme et le mysticisme'[442], being aware that '[…] son manque de foi la menace de mort spirituelle'[443] before becoming Buddhist and thanks to that finding a '[…] vie libérée de l'angoisse de la mort, d'une mort dénuée de cette morbidité qui caractérise l'approche occidentale de l'anéantissement'[444].

Therefore, she questioned her spirituality very early on. Thus, the journey itself, even before it took place, was motivated by religion. Buddhism therefore is important to Alexandra David-Néel in two ways: it is both a field of study which allows her to assert herself in the intellectual and spiritual sphere as well as a possibility of more personal and intimate reinvention. Accordingly, it is these two approaches to religion that we will discuss in this subsection.

Above all, the trip to Tibet for David-Néel was a way to deepen her knowledge of Buddhism. She achieved this notably thanks to Professor Dawa Sandup, who recommended that she follow the tantric teachings of *Gomtchén de Lachen* in 1912. Her meeting with the

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[439] Arnaud Desjardins, 'Interview Alexandra David-Néel' *L'INA*. November 2, 1969, video, 2:15 https://www.ina.fr/ina-eclaire-actu/video/i17097658/interview-d-alexandra-david-neel.
[440] Alexandra David-Néel, *Journal de voyage. Lettres à son mari, 11 août 1904-27 décembre 1917*, vol. I (Paris: Plon, 2019), 124.
[441] Joëlle Marchand, *Alexandra David-Néel vie et voyages, Itinéraires géographiques et spirituels* (Paris: Arthaud, 2009), 33.
[442] Françoise Bonardel, *Voyager c'est apprendre à mourir : les mille et une morts d'Alexandra David-Néel* (Paris: Fage Editions, 2020), 18.
[443] Ibid.
[444] Ibid., 19.

Gomtchén germinated an idea in her mind after she asked him about *nirvana*: 'C'est l'absence de toutes croyances, de toutes imaginations, la cessation. De l'activité qui crée des mirages'[445], he explained, adding 'vous devriez aller au Tibet et être initiée par un maitre du Sentier direct'[446]. She answered 'et comment pourrai-je aller au Tibet ? répliquai-je, les étrangers n'y sont pas admis'[447], 'Bah ! fit-il, il existe beaucoup de routes pour entrer au Tibet'[448]. She will later write in her book *Mystiques et magiciens du Tibet* that at that time she was not yet considering her famous trip to Tibet, but this conversation confirms the idea that different stages of her trip are marked by Buddhist encounters. Thus, she evokes several stays in different monasteries like the one of Chörten Nyima, an uninhabited region where she meets four nuns: 'La bravoure tranquille de ces femmes m'a toujours étonné'[449].

It is necessary to differentiate here the moments of religious life lived under the Tibetan costume and those lived when she is presented to the world as European. If, as we have seen, disguises make it possible to go unnoticed and therefore to have access to religious practices reserved for locals, the exceptionality of her position – a French woman alone in Asia – also permits her encounters like the one with the Dalai Lama in Kalimpong. The contemporary Dalai Lama – T'ub Bstan Rgya Mts'o – usually never met non-Tibetan women, 'je fus la première en faveur de qui il fit une exception et j'ai tout lieu de croire que je suis restée la seule'[450]. She explains further that 'une occidentale versée dans les doctrines bouddhiques lui parut un phénomène inconcevable'[451], 'c'était la réalité de ma personne qui le surprenait'[452]. If in the eyes of the *moine-roi*, she is a European, David-Néel nonetheless presents herself as a Buddhist in front of him. Although David-Néel refuses to kneel in front of the Dalai Lama albeit it was the custom. The interpreter Laden La talked about it around him to find a solution. Ultimately, she only bowed her head. This attitude shows that David-Néel, despite being Buddhist, had not yet succeeded in putting aside her ego. There may also be a refusal to submit to a form of Eastern authority and a more or less conscious assimilation of the idea of a superior West (remember that David-Néel never really criticised colonialism).

[445] Alexandra David-Néel, *Mystiques et magiciens du Tibet* (Paris: Pocket, 2019), 64.
[446] Ibid.
[447] Ibid.
[448] Ibid.
[449] Ibid., 72.
[450] Ibid., 14.
[451] Ibid.
[452] Ibid.

This is also reflected in her way of speaking about her meeting with the Dalai lama. Indeed, he must have been fascinated by the idea of meeting a European woman who had become a Buddhist. Nevertheless, it is important to specify that, beyond curiosity, this meeting can also be seen as a 'strategy' on the part of the Dalai Lama who wishes to get closer to Westerners to '[…] trouver des "alliés" dans sa lutte contre les chinois'[453], as Joelle Désiré Marchant suggests. This analysis questions – or attenuates – the importance that the Dalai Lama gave to his meeting with David-Néel.

If she fascinates some, others doubt her sincerity or the authenticity of her beliefs, like the Lama of Gangtok: 'Il n'avait pas cru que j'étais boudhiste comme je l'affirmais'[454]. However, during her trip she becomes Lama, 'the spiritually accomplished teacher who is […] motivated and prepared to act in the service of the world at large'[455]. Moreover, when she writes *Mystiques et magiciens du Tibet* (published in 1929), she takes the position of an expert who tries to be a pedagogue and transmit her knowledge to Europeans readers. For example, in her chapter on Lamaism, she uses the word 'esprit' instead of *Yid ky rnampar chespa* because 'il a l'avantage d'être familier aux Occidentaux et, du reste, je suis forcée de l'employer faute d'en trouver un autre dans les langues européennes'[456]. Furthermore, her knowledge of Buddhism is also fed by the experiences she lived through during her trip, in the costume of a Tibetan. In *Voyage d'une Parisienne à Lhassa*, she writes: 'Je m'étais décidée à adopter le déguisement d'ardjopa parce qu'il me fournissait le meilleur moyen possible de circuler sans attirer attention'[457]. The *ardjopa* is a pilgrim who crosses Tibet on foot; this status allowed her to benefit from several advantages. The religious role of pilgrim, as for Isabelle Eberhardt, justified the trip, permitted her to travel unnoticed and 'l'acte de montrer le chemin à un voyageur ou de le guider, s'il s'égare, est considéré au Tibet comme très méritoire du point de vue religieux'[458]. Thus, David-Néel's Buddhism was not only theoretical, she appropriated the beliefs and philosophy developed by this religion[459], for example by reciting the Buddhist vow at each mountain peak she reached: 'Je répète le vœu bouddhiste : que tous

[453] Joëlle Marchand, *Alexandra David-Néel vie et voyages, itinéraires géographiques et spirituels* (Paris: Arthaud, 2009), 156.
[454] Alexandra David-Néel, *Mystiques et magiciens du Tibet* (Paris: Pocket, 2019), 31.
[455] Matthew Kapstein, *Tibetan Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), 3.
[456] David-Néel, *Mystiques et magiciens du Tibet*, 35.
[457] Alexandra David-Néel, *Voyage d'une Parisienne à Lhassa* (Paris: Pocket, 2004), 39.
[458] Ibid., 126.
[459] We will speak about religious practices later in this chapter.

les êtres soient heureux'[460]. Yet she had an ambiguous view of certain Buddhist practices that she observed during her travels. She was, of course, fascinated by rituals she discovered, like the religious songs she heard in Podang (located in India, near Gangtok): 'La mélodie en mineur, coulait unie comme les eaux d'un fleuve profond'[461]; or by certain ceremonies 'j'eus l'occasion, à Podang, d'assister à certaines cérémonies annuelles concernant les démons'[462].

However, during these ceremonies, notably in Lachen (north Sikkim, India), she judged their theatricality: 'J'ai l'impression d'être sur une scène de théâtre'[463], she also wrote 'c'est long, long, interminable, entrecoupé de multiples prosternations'[464]. Her reaction can be explained by the great variety of Buddhism. According to Cathy Cantwell, 'there was a Tibetan saying that every lama has his own practice, as every district has its own dialect'[465]; the ceremonies she attended were sometimes far from the traditional Buddhism to which Alexandra David-Néel aspired. Indeed, it should be remembered that she was formed by Buddhist studies such as that of the Tibetologists Philippe Édouard Foucaux (1811-1894) and Léon Féer (1830-1902), therefore ancient doctrines, supposed to be closer to the Buddha. They are interested in the ancient doctrines from a philological and philosophical perspective. Fascinated by the logical rigor and ethical depth of Mahāyāna Buddhism, they seek to demonstrate that these texts contain conceptions of existence. Indeed, for them, the ancient doctrines allow people to turn towards universal compassion. The central figure of this form of Buddhism is Bodhisittva, who renounces nirvana to help others achieve enlightenment. David Néel followed the *Hinayana* doctrines. This is also a form of Buddhism based on ancient doctrines, but unlike Mahāyāna, it focuses more on personal awakening (introspection) accompanied by a high level of ethical discipline. The central figure is the Arhat, the person who attains liberation by following the Buddha's teachings. 'Ainsi, le mahâyâna ne s'oppose pas au hinayâna comme s'opposeraient deux écoles rivales'[466], since they share the idea of nirvana, of karma, and are based, as we have said, on ancient doctrines, although one is a philosophy turned towards otherness and the other more towards self-knowledge. During her journey, David-Néel met many people practising the tantric *Vajrayana* (also called Lamaism).

[460] Alexandra David-Néel, *Voyage d'une Parisienne à Lhassa* (Paris: Pocket, 2004), 49.
[461] Ibid., 56.
[462] Ibid., 57.
[463] Ibid., 156.
[464] Ibid., 158.
[465] Cathy Cantwell, *Buddhism: The Basics* (London: Routledge, 2009), 58.
[466] Alexis Lavis, 'Une histoire du Grand Véhicule', *Les Grands Dossiers des Sciences Humaines*, n°51 (2018) : 12.

It incorporates all the principles of the Mahāyāna (universal compassion, bodhisattva ideal, emptiness of phenomena) but adds specific ritual and esoteric methods. It is these rituals that David-Néel will sometimes judge, or even mock, even if it does share ideas in common with her own beliefs. Indeed, *Vajrayana* was 'taxé de forme dégénérescente, on inventa pour lui une appellation spécifique, lamaïsme'[467]. Thereby, 'not surprisingly, there has been a marked discrepancy between descriptions of Tibetan Buddhism based primarily on doctrinal texts and those derived from anthropological studies of life in traditional Tibetan and Himalayan communities'[468] as confirmed by Matthew T. Kapstein.

Indeed, Alexandra David-Néel, at this point of her life, found herself in an in-between position, since we cannot exclude the Western critical distance toward the other culture. In the book *Le Bouddhisme du Buddha*, David-Néel exhibits a certain form of scorn towards popular rituals by explaining that 'la doctrine du Bouddha ne demande rien de merveilleux, au surnaturel, elle s'adresse uniquement à notre intelligence'[469]. Consequently, she smiled ironically at the sight of certain beliefs and sometimes played with them during her trip to Lhasa (we have already mentioned the tricks used by Yogden and her). For example, in Tibet, she pretended to be a *pamo* (a medium woman possessed by spirits and demons) in order to be better welcomed by the locals: 'La nouvelle personnalité que je venais de revêtir paraissait, aux crédules tibétains, digne d'un repas plus friand'[470]. The word 'crédules' can be seen as a certain mark of condescension and also a form of paternalism that Westerners have towards Easterners. Self-reinvention through religion is therefore directly linked to postcolonial studies and echoes chapter three of this thesis. Marc Kober in 'Pourquoi l'Orientalisme d'Edward W. Said n'est-il pas un japonisme ?'explained that: 'L'Orient indien est à cette époque valorisé, sans doute parce que c'est celui où la France est peu présente comme puissance coloniale et qui peut donc servir de source spirituelle compensatrice pour une époque tourmentée'[471]; which shows that the fascination that David-Néel has for India and for Buddhism is itself influenced by the West-East relationship and is not completely detached from an Orientalist gaze.

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[467] Anne Marie Blondeau, 'Le Boudhisme des Tibétains', *Pékin 2008, A qui est le Tibet ?*, n°4 (2008) : 129.
[468] Matthew Kapstein, *Tibetan Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), 3.
[469] Alexandra David-Néel, *Le Bouddhisme du Bouddha* (Paris: Pocket, 2019), 29.
[470] Alexandra David-Néel, *Voyage d'une Parisienne à Lhassa* (Paris: Pocket, 2004), 56 -57.
[471] Marc Kober, 'Pourquoi l'Orientalisme d'Edward W. Said n'est-il pas un japonisme?,' *Sociétés et représentations*, La Sorbonne, no. 37 (2014) : 16, https://shs.cairn.info/revue-societes-et-representations-2014-1-page-91?lang=fr.

Another religious ritual that made David-Néel sceptical is the one called *ngagspa*. In the ritual, the awakening of the corpse is done thanks to the sorcerer who sticks his tongue to that of the corpse. The two tongues must stick together for the process to start. After witnessing this ritual, she wrote ' n'était-ce pas l'effet d'une de ces visions auxquelles les mystiques tibétains sont très sujets et qu'ils cultivent aussi de propos délibéré ?'[472] and she added:

> La sorcellerie tibétaine comporte, heureusement, des manifestations d'un genre moins repoussant. Je me suis plus d'une fois trouvé obligée d'en user, soit pour complaire à des hôtes aimables, soit dans mon propre intérêt. Je raconterai un de ces cas dont le souvenir m'amuse encore aujourd'hui'[473].

This ritual probably comes from a more archaic religion of Tibet, called Bön and which was, for David-Néel, closer to witchcraft than to authentic Buddhism. Despite this, she defined herself as a Buddhist and was respectful towards different forms of Buddhism. Moreover, she criticised the European attitude, more precisely the missionaries who used religion to serve European expansionist policy. For David-Néel, this attitude was responsible for the latent revolts of the peoples in Asia, because it stifled any form of Buddhist or Hindu spirituality. Thus, as we have already mentioned in the sub-section 'Questioning the East-West opposition', she has an ambiguous position and an attitude which we can qualify as cultural appropriation, since she takes what is beneficial in the culture of the other – certain aspects of Buddhism – to bring it back to the West.

She achieves her ends in the sense that she becomes an intellectual figure of Buddhism. Yet, despite her persistent desire for public recognition, Buddhism constitutes a vital source of sustenance in David-Néel's life; through her immersion in its doctrines and practices, she undertakes a process of self-reinvention and appropriation of identity; paradoxically achieved through a movement toward self-negation, whereby the dissolution of the ego becomes a path to transformation. This philosophy of life permits her to evolve from a more intimate and personal point of view. We will see that – despite a certain judgement as we mentioned above in this chapter – she participates in and assimilates rites and religious practices in which she believes. She finds her place in the world thanks to a key concept: *Dharma*. This concept is found in Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism and Jainism and can have

[472] Alexandra David-Néel, *Mystiques et magiciens du Tibet* (Paris: Pocket, 2019), 170.
[473] Ibid., 171.

different definitions. Indeed, 'in Buddhism, Dharma means the Buddha's teaching, the Truth they embody and the path to realise them. It can also be used as a technical term to mean the fundamental elements of existence'[474], whereas for Hinduism it rather evokes the idea of universal cosmic order, one's duty and way of life, as suggested by Cathy Cantwell in *Buddhism: The Basics*. Whether Buddhism or Hinduism, *Dharma* is a form of duty that we owe to the world to participate in the harmony of the universe. It requires detaching oneself from one's individuality to belong to a whole. This connects with one of the main ideas of Buddhism which is: '[…] l'abscence complète d'ego en toutes choses'[475]. About it, during an interview with Jean Fléchet for her 100th birthday, David-Néel said: 'Mais être seule, oui être... j'appelais ça être "soi". Je voulais être "moi". Et alors c'est comme ça, c'est assez comique que, (plus tard) j'ai compris une philosophie dans laquelle on dit qu'il n'y a pas de moi : le bouddhisme'[476]. But does she really manage to put aside her ego when we know that her trip was also motivated by a desire to prove that a European woman can access Lhasa? We note an evolution of her character thanks to Buddhism since the cultural and religious immersion allows her the awakening of the self, as explained by Fanny Martín Quatremare in 'Alexandra David-Néel et les identités plurielles': 'Bien qu'elle renonce à des caractéristiques personnelles que nous imaginions intangibles, c'est avec et contre elle-même qu'elle lutte dans ce nouveau rôle de disciple. En réalité, elle se prouve à elle-même, qu'elle est capable de tout. Finalement, elle acquiert au cours de cette période une nouvelle façon de vivre et de penser'[477].

This evolution of her identity is reached through religious practices, such as contemplative and meditative retreats, like in Burma where she did a '[…] retraite sur les monts Sagain auprès des Kamatangs, les moines contemplatifs de la secte bouddhique la plus austère'[478], or in Japan where she stayed in Tôfoku-Ji monastery with a group belonging to the country's intellectual aristocracy. During her stay in Korea, she visited Panya-an and discovered the life of a hermit in the forest: '[…] où quelques penseurs solitaires vivent une vie de tranquille ascétisme sans emphase'[479]. But it is above all the spiritual retreat in a cave

[474] Cathy Cantwell, *Buddhism: The Basics* (London: Routledge, 2009), 180.
[475] Alexandra David-Néel, *Mystiques et magiciens du Tibet* (Paris: Pocket, 2019), 12.
[476] Jean Fléchet, *Alexandra David-Néel entretiens* (Paris: Collection Opus, 2015), 23.
[477] Fanny Martin Quatremare, 'Identités plurielles au cours des voyages d'Alexandra David-Néel', *Hybrida*, no. 4 (2022) : 205, https://www.jstor.org/stable/48765794.
[478] David-Néel, *Mystiques et magiciens du Tibet*, 95.
[479] Ibid.

in the Himalayas that changes David Néel, who writes: 'Le gomtchén s'enferma pour une longue période de retraite. Je fis de même'[480], and she adds '[…] solitude, encore, toujours. L'esprit et les sens s'affinent à mener cette vie, toute contemplative, d'observations et de réflexions continuelles. Devient-on visionnaire ou n'est-ce pas plutôt que jusque-là on a été aveugle ?'[481]. Buddhism taught her immobility, which may sound like a paradox for this adventurer. Indeed, it is immobility that allowed her a better reading of the world but also a better reading of herself: 'Cette solitude que j'imaginais absolue, répandait en moi des vagues de félicité. Les transports les plus exaltés des mystiques peuvent-ils égaler cet état de calme infini dans lequel toute agitation physique ou mentale a disparu et où la vie coule sans heurts, sans se fragmenter en sensations ou en idées, sans autre goût que l'existence ?'[482]. In this quotation, David-Néel describes an experience of extreme solitude not as a deprivation, but as a source of bliss. This paradox underlines a radical break with Western values of movement, noise and action. Far from being a sterile retreat, immobility here becomes a means of inner transformation. In the stillness, her body and mind grow silent, enabling a complete immersion in the present moment. She no longer analyses, no longer feels distinct stimuli: life 'coule sans heurts' in an unfragmented unity, stripped of the usual landmarks of the self. A comparison with the 'transports exaltés des mystiques' reveals that this experience of calm goes beyond emotional or ecstatic outbursts; it reaches a level of pure consciousness. By suspending the flow of thoughts and sensations, David-Néel enters a state of being in which the ego seems to fade away, a form of negation of the self that is not annihilating but liberating. It is only by withdrawing from the world that she is able to fully embrace her existence, and, through it, a form of the absolute. Another quote supports this idea when she writes: 'Je demeurai assise, immobile, savourant les délices de mon isolement dans le calme parfait, le silence absolu de cette étrange contrée blanche : l'esprit détaché de tout, plongée dans une sérénité indicible'[483], she explains when she arrives in the Himalayas.

David-Néel seems to tell that she had to leave to reinvent herself, but she needed to stop to distil what the journey had to offer. However, she does not see the retreat as an end in itself: 'Je savais que la personnalité d'anachorète que je m'étais faite ne pouvait être qu'un épisode de ma vie de voyageuse, tout au plus une préparation à une libération future et,

[480] Alexandra David-Néel, *Mystiques et magiciens du Tibet* (Paris: Pocket, 2019), 82.
[481] Ibid.
[482] Ibid., 122.
[483] Alexandra David-Néel, *Voyage d'une Parisienne à Lhassa* (Paris: Pocket, 2004), 98.

souvent, je regardais navrée et presque avec terreur le sentier qui descendait vers la vallée'[484]. Immobility and loneliness are essential stages in the initiatory journey of David-Néel but she feels the need to also confront the world so that what she calls 'future libération' becomes possible. We may also wonder what she means by 'future libération': we can see this as a future journey to come, but it can also be the experience of the *bardo* which is a state that allows access to rebirth among Buddhists[485]. This means then, that she thinks of her current life as one among others, moving away from the European vision of considering existence.

In any case, this retreat freed her from certain prejudices that she may sometimes had with regard to the beliefs of Tibetans. Following her trip, her spirituality was strengthened and she testified: 'Je suis certaine d'avoir reçu des messages télépathiques émanant de lamas avec qui j'avais été en relation'[486]. The spiritual evolution of David-Néel also involves learning practical Tibetan yogi methods such as the already mentioned *toumo*. This practice consists of mobilising the internal energy to produce heat and shows that the spiritual understanding can also been done through the body. About the secret teachings that she received during her retreat, she said nothing, but her spiritual master seemed satisfied. After her apprenticeship, the *Gomchen* gave to David-Néel the religious name of Yishé Tön-me (*lampe de sagesse*). It is a baptism that she received and from which this new religious name was born, reminding us of the process of Eberhardt's pseudonym; although here, David-Néel still used her name 'Alexandra'. Her religious name is the symbol of recognition. It is interesting to see the function of linguistic denomination to make a new self. This new name was also providing a cultural and religious appropriation of the other culture, but it was a validation from the Buddhist hierarchy as well. She shared her metamorphosis in a letter in 1914 that she wrote when she was at the monastery of Lachen:

> N'est-ce pas un rêve pour une Parisienne d'être ici, sur cette pente de montagne escarpée, nichant son lit de camp sous une voûte de rochers et d'avoir pour unique compagnie celle d'un être qui passe aux yeux des villageois de la région pour un prodigieux sorcier, qui a passé plus de vingt ans de sa vie seul dans des endroits déserts, qui a vécu dans des cimetières, mangé du cadavre que sais-je ? N'est-ce pas là de l'invraisemblable, comment ne l'appellerais-je pas rêve.[487]

[484] Alexandra David-Néel, *Mystiques et magiciens du Tibet* (Paris: Pocket, 2019), 83.
[485] We will talk about the *bardo* later in this subsection.
[486] Ibid., 242.
[487] Alexandra David-Néel, *Correspondance avec son mari : Édition intégrale 1904-1941* (Paris: Plon, 2016), 335-336.

She usually defined herself as a Buddhist, but here she decided to insist on her Parisian origins to create a strong contrast between the 'self' of the past and the woman she was at that point. This permits to highlight her evolution for the readers. Thus, she was interested in many other practices such as *Tcheud* that she saw for the first time practised by the *Gomchen* of Lachen. This practice represents the sacrifice of the self, given as food to the demons. It involves music – tambourine and trumpet – and the recitation of sacred texts. Following her retreat into a cave, David-Néel was less judgmental and indulged in Mahayana practices. She also took the time to describe to the readers the ritual of *Phowa*, which is a preparation for death among the master yogis. This ritual allows to release what they call the subtle entity present in the body so that it can join the pure land of Buddha. This process is done through breathing exercises and the exclamation of a syllable (*Hik*) which opens the fontanel which will thus be able to permit to leave a passage to this subtle entity, when another syllable (*Phet*) will complete, at the desired moment, to break the links which attached it to the body. She was at this point seen as part of the Buddhist community since only a Buddhist can be present during this kind of ceremony: 'Deux moines étaient là, assis par terre, sous les arbres, les yeux baissés (…) dans l'attitude de la méditation. Hik ! exclamait l'un deux, d'une singulière voix de tête. Hik ! répété l'autre quelques instants après. Et ils continuaient ainsi sans parler ni bouger, espaçant leurs cris par de longs intervalles de silence'[488].

In Buddhism, there is no eternity as we understand it in the West but rather the idea of *la non mort* where spiritual energy lives on, what is more commonly called reincarnation. Hence, David-Néel was fascinated by *tulkus*, Tibetan masters who reincarnate as Tibetan masters to remain both themselves and another and this in order to ensure the continuity of a spiritual lineage. Thanks to this idea of continuity, she saw death with different eyes as she wrote to her husband Philippe: 'L'idée des réincarnations donne l'habitude de mourir. On se dit qu'on est mort tant de fois déjà que cette formalité à remplir perd de son épouvante'[489]. Therefore, just like for Isabelle Eberhardt, religion permits David Néel to tame the question of death: 'La philosophie que je professe, la vie de méditation que j'ai menée me permettent de regarder la mort d'un autre œil que ne le font la plupart des gens'[490]. She moves away from

[488] Alexandra David-Neel, *Mystiques et magiciens du Tibet* (Paris: Pocket, 2019), 23.
[489] Françoise Bonardel, *Voyager c'est apprendre à mourir : les mille et une morts d'Alexandra David-Néel* (Paris: Fage Editions, 2020), 140.
[490] David-Neel, *Mystiques et magiciens du Tibet*, 23.

the Western vision of death thanks to Buddhist philosophy, and it goes through the abandonment of the self, this self which fears death. This renunciation of the self is accessible through religious practices, through the renunciation of material goods, but also, for David Néel, through the reading of texts such as *Dhammapada*, a major text of ancient Buddhism, that she often quotes:

> Tout est impermanent. Il faut se résigner à cette loi ou bien passer au-delà d'elle, mais elle signifie passer au-delà du monde, au-delà de la vie et de la mort, au-delà de l'illusion du 'Moi'. Car la mort n'a de prise que sur le 'Moi' qui, craignant de disparaître et saisissant pour se rassurer ce qui passe à sa portée, s'accroche désespérément à la vie : tant que subsiste l'idée de ce Moi permanent, simple agrégat d'éléments que des causes ont provisoirement réunis et que d'autres causes sépareront, la mort subsiste aussi[491].

In her book *Mystiques et magiciens du Tibet*, she also dedicates many commentaries to the Tibetan book of the dead: *Bardo Thodol* written by Padmasambhava. This book describes the successive states of consciousness and perceptions during the period extending from death to rebirth. The subtle entity travels through different *bardos* – intermediate states – to access a rebirth or a definitive exit from the cycle of existences. 'Majorité des Bouddhistes voit dans les vies successives les pérégrinations d'une entité vagabonde'[492], and as it is explained by Françoise Bonardel in *Voyager c'est apprendre à mourir*, David-Néel was inspired by this since she did not only learn how to die well while traveling, but she also already lived in anticipation of the experience of *bardos*: complicated journeys, stripping of material goods, spiritual encounters etc. Moreover, as the Bardo Thodol advises, she is not afraid of danger, as shown when encountering a panther while camping with Yogden: 'Je pouvais maintenant voir distinctement son pelage moucheté. Il n'était pas de très grande taille et me parut être soit un jeune léopard, soit une panthère'[493],' j'ai toujours eu l'intime certitude qu'ils me respecteraient, moi et ceux qui m'accompagnent'[494]. So it was full of confidence that she addressed the animal: ' Petit ami, murmurai-je en regardant le gracieux animal, j'ai vu de tout près un bien plus gros prince de la jungle que toi, va dormir et sois heureux'[495]. She trusted in

[491] Alexandra David-Neel, *Mystiques et magiciens du Tibet* (Paris: Pocket, 2019), 28.
[492] Ibid., 77.
[493] Alexandra David-Néel, *Voyage d'une Parisienne à Lhassa* (Paris: Pocket, 2004), 25.
[494] Ibid.
[495] Ibid.

fate and found harmony in nature. The feeling that she was already in a *bardo* can be found in her way of writing. There are a lot moments 'd'entre deux':

> La Dokar *la* se dresse maintenant devant nous, découpant une impressionnante silhouette, sur un ciel gris crépusculaire. C'est une molle dépression dans une muraille cyclopéenne dont l'arête aiguë s'affaisse, à cet endroit, à la façon des câbles tendus, à travers les rivières, pour servir de pont. Le fait qu'elle marque le seuil de la région défendue, ajoute pour nous à la sévérité de son aspect[496].

This twilight atmosphere that she crosses can be linked to the wanderer who crosses the *bardo*. The river acts as a symbol, it separates two worlds, one of which is 'défendue' and therefore unknown, just like the one who is about to leave the *bardo*. Indeed, the metaphor of the river is something that comes up very often in her book *Voyage d'une Parisienne à Lhassa*: 'Vers le soir, nous passâmes sur la rive gauche de la rivière et le paysage changea complètement'[497] or like here when she walks towards the mountain Kha-Kar-Po 'Des cyprès s'alignaient en avenue mystique, close, au loin, par la ligne turquoise de la rivière. Un air de gracieux mystère enveloppait toutes chose'[498]. Even the end of her journey is marked by the crossing of a river: 'Les voyageurs se dirigeant vers Lhassa doivent traverser la rivière à Giamda, sur un pont où un péage est exigé'[499]. Each river that she crosses beings her close to 'l'au-delà' and therefore brings her closer to the Buddha's teachings. Religion leads David-Néel into a paradoxical but complementary position. which is that between a concrete attachment to the world and the *errance* that wants to be a detachment from everything. This position, for David-Néel, leads to the following conclusion about identity: 'Il n'y a pas de personnalité homogène qui existe dans l'individu.... Une personnalité chez les bouddhistes c'est un amalgame, une composition de différentes choses, des idées, des sensations etc… C'est ça l'illumination, c'est d'arriver à voir des choses que l'on ne voyait pas auparavant'[500].

To conclude, for Alexandra David-Néel, the negation of the self through Buddhism seems to be a way of reinventing herself and accessing a plural identity that is critical of certain Lama practices while embracing a religious identity that is performative (she participated in

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[496] Alexandra David-Néel, *Voyage d'une Parisienne à Lhassa* (Paris: Pocket, 2004), 24.
[497] Ibid., 30.
[498] Ibid., 51.
[499] Ibid., 142.
[500] Arnaud Desjardins, 'Interview Alexandra David-Néel' *L'INA*, November 2, 1969, video,2:28. https://www.ina.fr/ina-eclaire-actu/video/i17097658/interview-d-alexandra-david-neel.

many religious practices) but also narrative – or at least has a linguistic existence – since this identity is asserted through the use of her nickname Yishé Ton. This being said, she does not write under this name but rather continues to assert herself as Alexandra David-Néel in her writings, although she insists on her status as a lama. David-Néel differs from Eberhardt, for whom the alter ego plays a large part in the narrative, which enables her to live a fully masculine and Muslim existence, making religion (Sufism) a central point of her identity.

3.c Isabelle Eberhardt and Sufism: religion as a way of belonging to a community

'Être dans le monde et non pas du monde'[501]

Isabelle Eberhardt converted to Sufism while still very young (in 1897, during her first trip to Algeria). 'Sufism is used in Western academia to refer to the wide set of beliefs, attitudes, and practices describing Muslim devotional and contemplative traditions'[502]. More exactly, Eberhardt joined the *Qâdiriyya* religious group[503]. This religious fraternity is the oldest established in Algeria and the one that showed the most resistance to the French government during the colonial period. Thus, the presence of France, contrary to what we might think, does not prevent the development of Sufism, which was very powerful at the time. Indeed, the Sufi brotherhood Tijäniyya is a good exemple since 'pas moins de trente millions d'Africains sont entrés dans l'Islam par le truchement de cette confrérie'[504], 'il prouve en tout cas que la présence coloniale n'a pas inhibé l'action de cette confrérie'[505]. According to Omar Benaissa : 'Le Soufisme se manifeste comme la dernière énergie, la ressource ultime, c'est-à-dire la plus enracinée de la société musulmane'[506]. The importance of Sufism can be explained by this desire for self-affirmation among the Muslim community in this colonial context. Isabelle Eberhardt joins this process since, for her, religion is '[…] un épanouissement d'un mysticisme qui pourra seul l'aider à donner un sens aux évènements qui la frappent et qu'elle ne maîtrise pas'[507], as confirmed by the note of Eglal Errera in *Journaliers*.

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[501] Habib Sharifi, *Le Soufisme. Mystique de l'Orient* (Paris: Grancher, 2000), 202.
[502] Sophia Rose Arjana, *Pilgrimage in Islam* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2017), 104.
[503] From the 12th century, Sufism was structured around a number of brotherhoods like Qädiriyya, Melamis,Bektashiyya, Naqshbandiyya, Shâdhiliyya and Tijâniyya.
[504] Omar Benaissa, 'Le Soufisme Algérien à l'époque coloniale,' *Horizons Maghrébins*, no. 41 (1999): 92.
[505] Ibid.
[506] Ibid., 96.
[507] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Lettres et journaliers* (Paris: Babel, 2003), 59.

Before talking more about Sufism, it is interesting to return to the Russian origins of Eberhardt, as they can explain her attraction to and her need for religion and spirituality. The figure of the pilgrim in Orthodox Russia is very important. The pilgrim is the one who develops the idea of pious wandering. Pilgrims have the legitimacy to travel and can transcend norms and access more freedom since they travel with the aim of rising towards something greater than them and the world. We think in particular of books such as *Récits d'un pèlerin Russe*, published in 1881 and written by anonymous author (but this is probably the testimony of the pilgrim Mihail Kozlov), where the writer goes to Mount Athos to learn about Hesychasm. This testimony also reminds us of the importance of the moral and physical trials that the pilgrim or believer must go through to achieve purity of heart; this is reminiscent of Sufism.

Thanks to the figure of the pilgrim we understand that nomadism and religion sometimes go hand in hand. In *Le Soufisme*, Habib Sharafi explains that there are two types of travel for the Sufis: *les derviches* who travel for a short term and *les galandars,* seen as *vagabond*. In both cases, travel is seen as a ritual, a difficult experience. They don't hesitate to walk without any shoes in the desert or to live in a cave. This way of travelling teaches equality and humility. For Sharafi, 'il est, en outre, recommandé de n'avoir recours à cette pratique que pour de courtes périodes. Les phases de stabilité permettront alors aux vertus contemplatives acquises dans les moments de mobilité de se manifester et de s'épanouir pleinement'[508]. Eberhardt does not apply Sharafi's vision on traveling and falls into the category of *galandars*, and adheres to the idea of the Sufi philosopher Ibn Arabi who explains that 'l'errant est celui qui circule sur la terre pour y puiser des sujets de méditation et, par ce moyen, s'approche d'Allah, suivant son goût d'isolement qui naît de son penchant même pour la société'[509]. Thus, wandering makes it possible to get closer to God, as confirmed by the *Siyaha* of the Sufis: 'L'errance sans but apparent, que de prier et de rencontrer des hommes voués à l'ascèse et qui a pour effet de détacher l'âme'[510]. Nomadism, when it is combined with faith allows a purification of the soul and the heart; for Eberhardt it also made it possible to find a homeland and fulfilled her need to belong: 'J'étais un errant – car je n'eus point de patrie… j'aimais théoriquement, d'un amour triste, un grand pays du Nord, parce qu'il avait vu naître ma mère (…). En ce Dar al-Islam, j'ai trouvé la patrie tant et si désespérément

[508] Habib Sharifi, *Le Soufisme. Mystique de l'Orient* (Paris: Grancher, 2000), 96.
[509] Ibn 'Arabi, *Les Illuminations de la Mecque* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1997), 52.
[510] Emile Dermenghem, *Le Culte des saints dans l'Islam maghrébin* (Paris: Gallimard, 1982), 29.

désirée… et je l'ai aimée'[511].

Thereby, it was with this heritage in mind that Eberhardt converted to Sufism. Her faith changed her and participated in the reinvention of the self as she wrote herself in *Écrits sur le sable* : '[…] en mon âme je remarque enfin le commencement de *l'indifférence* envers les choses et les êtres *indifférents*, ce qui est l'affirmation la plus puissante de mon moi'[512]. The invention of the self also goes through the change of her name – since she decided to call herself Mahmoud Saadi – which resembles the change of name made by Catholic nuns when they join a religious order. Sufism welcomes her under the identity of man she has chosen, which permits Eberhardt to face life as explained by Himoud Brahimi: 'Le tracé décrit par sa pensée dépasse de loin l'entendement de son époque. Il y avait en elle une illumination permanente qui guidait ses pas et sa plume, là où le regard voit le mieux la proximité du divin dans le cœur humain'[513].

We will try to understand how Sufism allows her what she calls self-affirmation via two approaches: we will first see what religious practices the young woman experiences and how the appropriation of these practices permits her to belong to a new community, focusing on the construction of the self through the performative[514](in this case religious). In a second time we are interested in the search of the Truth, which is central in the philosophy of Sufism, this search being possible only by knowing the Self, joining the Socratic formula 'connais-toi toi-même'.

According to Habib Sharafi, Sufism participates in '[…] fonder chez ses partisans un sentiment valorisant d'appartenance'[515]. This idea of belonging can be done through different practices, as Louis Massignon explains: 'La communauté musulmane primitive a été fondée à Médine sous forme d'une fraternité spirituelle de croyants, supplantant le clan et la famille. Être soufi, c'est retrouver cette vie commune de compagnonnage, dont le bien commun, la prière collective, fait accéder ensemble à Dieu, par l'imitation de Mohammed, et aussi des

[511] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 165.
[512] Ibid, 314.
[513] Marie-Odile Delacour and Jean-René Huleu, *Le Voyage Soufi d'Isabelle Eberhardt* (Paris: Editions Joëlle Losfeld, 2008), 9.
[514] In Kaufmann's sense, as explained in the introduction, that is to say when the very act of doing something produces a reality.
[515] Habib Sharifi, *Le Soufisme. Mystique de l'Orient* (Paris: Grancher, 2000), 70.

autres prophètes'[516] . Thanks to this community strength, the Sufis can have access to an Islam stripped of all dogmatic approach. According to Sara Sviri in *Perspectives on Early Islamic Mysticism: The World of Al-Hakim Al-Tirmidhi and his Contemporaries*, Sufism is a system built around the psychological tension between the self (*nafs*) and the heart (*qalb*) and how to overcome it.

Since we are initially interested in the performative aspect, we will discuss various religious practices, in particular the best-known: *Ramadhan*, practised by all Muslims. We have already mentioned Eberhardt's first *Ramadhan* in the previous chapter; later in *Écrits sur le sable,* she evokes again this practice while she walks in the Aïn Séfra (Naâma Province, Algeria): '[…]des impressions calmes de "chez-moi", qui datent du mois du ramadhan, l'an passé'[517]. Thus, the idea of 'home' is not only associated with a place but with a religious memory, which is moreover a common memory. Community spirit is strengthened through prayer. 'Dès l'entrée c'est une sensation délicieuse de fraîcheur, de clair-obscur bleuâtre, de paix infinie'[518], writes Eberhardt when she enters a mosque. The religious place is linked to a feeling of appeasement and affirmation of the masculine and Muslim self, since it should be remembered that Eberhardt is with men when she prays. However, she does not insist on this point because she defines herself first and foremost as a Muslim, and not via her gender. Thus, prayer is a very codified moment – tout le monde est debout et élève les deux mains à hauteur du visage'[519] – and therefore important because it reinforces belonging to the group. Personal identity is forged through collective identity. In *Écrits sur le sable*, she writes that 'l'imam n'est point un prêtre – l'Islam n'a point de clergé régulier – c'est simplement le plus savant de l'assistance. (…) Dans l'Islam, pas de mystères, pas de sacrements, rien qui nécessite l'intermédiaire d'un prêtre'[520] ; with this comparison to Catholicism (and more generally Christianity), Eberhardt wants to explain that Sufism is stripped of the dogmatic approach. In this, she perceives in Sufism a kindred form of freedom, one that resonates with the philosophy of her nomadism: a deeply personal path that calls for inner transformation rather than a desire to reshape the world.

[516] Habib Sharifi, *Le Soufisme. Mystique de l'Orient* (Paris: Grancher, 2000), 60.
[517] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 225.
[518] Ibid., 257.
[519] Ibid., 258.
[520] Ibid., 258.

However, she respected the religion of others, as this meeting with a German legionnaire in Djenan-ed-Dar (military post established on the border with Morocco) shows: 'J'ai bien un livre … mais voilà, toi, tu n'es pas Chrétien, et tu ne voudrais sans doute pas …'[521], said the young man, referring to the Bible. She answered 'je lui parlais de la proche parenté de l'Islam et du vieux Judaïsme, de leur farouche monothéisme'[522], in a desire to unite and not to divide. That being said, we can also interpret this scene as a reversal of colonial logic, since European colonialism is based on an ideology that promotes a set of Judeo-Christian values, excluding Islam, and Eberhardt expresses her resentment of this tendency, giving a greater value to Islam although she respects other religions.

She also attends religious song ceremonies – some of them are called *sama*[523] – on several occasions, a very important practice among the Sufis. She relates to this in *Écrits sur le sable*, notably when she spends evenings with the Bedouins in the desert: 'C'est le soir, l'heure des chants, des longues mélopées'[524]. She shares with the readers the song lyrics heard that evening:

> *Nul n'obtiendra ce qui n'était pas écrit,*
> *Et ce qui est écrit, nul ne l'évitera…*
> *Calme-toi, mon âme, jusqu'à ce que Dieu ait pitié,*
> *Et si tu ne parviens pas à te calmer, il y a la mort…*[525].

A variant of the text gives us a more detailed description: 'Les voix montent, s'affermissent…'[526] and sings on 'Dieu m'a abandonné car je suis pécheur. (…) Mon cœur est mon avertisseur, il m'annonce une mort prochaine'[527]. These collective songs are intended to make one feel the divine presence. In the cultural tradition of the Arab-Muslim world, singing can lead to ecstasy, which is called *tarab.* In Sufism, music, according to Amélie Pavard, '[…] permettrait de faire naître une empathie musicale entre les adeptes'[528], and therefore to continue to tend towards the harmony of the community. We also note that Eberhardt had

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[521] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 174.
[522] Ibid.
[523] It is a cappella chant, a collection of poems composed by the greatest saints of Islam throughout History, intended as a sincere expression of the purest states of the heart. It is accompanied by a dance in which people turn around. This dance is considered as a prayer.
[524] Ibid., 166.
[525] Ibid.
[526] Ibid., 167.
[527] Ibid.
[528] Amélie Pavard, *Chanter l'extase : approche psycho-cognitive de la musique dans les rituels de transe soufis. Musique, musicologie et arts de la scène* (Université de Strasbourg, 2015), 16.

an Islamic musical culture. Indeed, in her short story 'Heures de Tunis', she refers to a well-known musical theme of the Sufis, that of the reed flute which evokes nostalgia and separation from the loved one: '[…] la petite flûte murmurante des bergers et des chameliers bédouins, le roseau léger qui semble garder en ses mélodies quelque chose du murmure cristallin des ruisseaux où il germa'[529]. The precise knowledge of Sufi art is the proof that she was adopting new cultural references, which changed her perception of things.

However, religious practices do not only pass through the practice of rites but can also result in linguistic assimilation. Eberhardt knows and uses different forms of politeness in Arabic, directly related to Islam, as shown for example by this conversation with Sidi Bou Amana: 'J'écoute et je réponds évasivement : - In châh Allah – que Dieu veuille – j'irai !'[530]. The regular use of *In Châh Allah* highlights that Eberhardt has perfectly integrated the codes that constitute social interactions, and this places her once again in the Muslim community and more broadly in the Arab community. Of course, *In châh Allah* is a common expression, used even by non-Muslim people. In the conversation we can also think that Eberhardt used it because she wanted to avoid committing herself to something, so instead of answering 'yes', she answered *In châh Allah.* This use of this expression shows that Eberhardt knew the linguistic codes of Algeria since this is how Arabic speakers politely say that they will not undertake to comply with their interlocutor's request. Nonetheless, the regular use of *In châh Allah* for someone as religious as Eberhardt can also be interpreted in the original sense of the term found in the Koran (sourate Al-Kahf 22-23): *'*Et ne dit jamais cette phrase : je la ferai demain sans compléter : si Allah le veut, et invoque ton Dieu si tu oublies et dit : je souhaite que mon Seigneur me guide et me mène plus près de ce qui est correct*'*[531]. Eberhardt's linguistic nomadism permits her to reinvent herself.

According to the theory of J.L. Austin in the book *How to Do Things with Words*, language has a performative function, in as much as it creates actions and is not only a medium of communication. In other words, 'a theory of language is a theory of action'[532]. There are three different categories: locutionary act, illocutionary act and perlocutionary act. Greetings

[529] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Dans l'ombre chaude de l'Islam* (Paris: Babel, 1996), 347.
[530] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 178.
[531] 'Sourate 18, verset 24', Le Coran, January 7, 2016, https://www.le-Coran.com.
[532] John Langshaw Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1975), 46.

– such as *In châh Allah* – have illocutionary value: it is a message transmitted by an utterance which goes beyond its immediate meaning and which is the opposite of the descriptive function of language. This illocutionary value reinforced the connection that Eberhardt had with the interlocutor. Her acquisition of the singularity of politeness formula – since it is cultural and even religious – allowed the young Swiss to make language a vector of embracement of religion. 'La langue arabe dispose d'un système socio-interactionnel très élaboré et régi par des conventions socio-culturelles et socio-religieuses assez strictes'[533], that she mastered perfectly. The practice of the language and the use of religious greetings built her religious identity. Indeed, the use of Arabic words in her writings is very often a way for her to speak about her faith: 'Laissons au temps et au Mektoub, c'est-à-dire Dieu, le soin de cette vie'[534], *mektoub* which in Arabic means inescapable fate. The word Zaouïya also appears frequently in the writing of Eberhardt, another Arabic word meaning Sufi place of prayer: 'Zaouïya de Sid-el-Imann, solitaire et délabrée, sur une crête de dunes, entourée de ruines et d'un beau jardin ver- doyant'[535] and 'Arrivés très vite, à la grande Zaouïya du Cheikh Blanc, qui semblait bien vide'[536], also showing her movement from place to place to get closer to God, thus mixing religion and nomadism. Moreover, when she refers more explicitly to the Arabic language, it is again and again by associating it with the idea of religion. Learning Arabic is a way for her to get closer to the divine, in which she believes: 'À l'ombre antique de cette mosquée sainte de l'Islam, des émotions ineffables au son de la voix haute et forte de l'imam psalmodiant ces vieilles paroles de la foi musulmane en cette belle langue arabe'[537].

We can add to this the knowledge of cultural and religious gestures. Indeed, during a walk, Eberhardt passed in front of a group of Berbers and they exchange with each other '[…] le salut de paix qui est comme le mot d'ordre de l'Islam ; le signe de solidarité et de fraternité entre tous les musulmans'[538]. Therefore, the different religious practices participate in the reinvention of the self, since she notices a profound change in herself thanks to Islam: 'Je compris plus intimement que j'aimais l'âme de l'Islam, et je la sentis vibrer en moi. Je goutai

[533] Riham Jaradat, 'Les Formules de politesse à valeur votive : des actes de langage rassurants aux actes menaçants,' *Jerash for Research and Studies Journal*, vol. 21 (2020): 769.
[534] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Inédits et textes originaux* (Bibliothèque numérique romande, 2021), 187, https://ebooks-bnr.com/eberhardt-isabelle-inedits-et-textes-originaux.
[535] Ibid., 167.
[536] Ibid.
[537] Ibid.
[538] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 184.

dans l'apreté splendide du décor, la résignation, le rêve très vague, l'insouciance profonde des choses de la vie et de la mort'[539].

Another thing to note is her application of the practices clearly stated by the sacred texts, such as contemplation. As Cheikh Abul Hasan Kharaghàni, one of the most famous master Sufis, explains, contemplation is a central notion of Sufism: 'Celui qui prie est proche du peuple, alors que celui qui contemple est proche de Dieu'[540]. In Sufism, there are three types of contemplation which correspond to three degrees of mystical elevation: for those in search of spirituality, contemplation is a first step towards faith; for the initiate, contemplation is a revelation and for the confirmed Sufi, contemplation is a way of accessing the divine mystery. On several occasions, Eberhardt makes very meticulous observations of nature, testimonies of her moments of contemplation (here close to the district of Biskra in the north-east of the Algerian Sahara) : 'Sous les palmes recourbées en arceaux, des figuiers se penchaient vers la lumière, avec leurs feuilles dorées par l'automne où se mêlaient les feuilles roussies de la vigne, à côté de celles, rouges encore comme des fleurs épanouies, des grenadiers et des pêchers'[541]. The description of nature is precise but not in a scientific or factual way. What Eberhardt seeks is beauty in all things, what Sufis call *magnification.* However, this idea of contemplation is not only a religious practice. Indeed, it is also linked, especially in Europe, to Romanticism. Indeed, for many Romantics, contemplation is a means of drawing closer to the divine or transcendent. Through contemplation of nature or the universe, they seek to understand spiritual or mystical truths. Contemplation becomes a path to a form of spiritual revelation or ecstasy as we can see in *Hymne à la nuit* by Novalis where he explores the contemplation of night as pathways to the infinite and to the divine mystery. However, it is Eugène Fromentin's work that provides an interesting parallel with Eberhardt's. For him, describing landscapes is a contemplative act. In *Un Été dans le Sahara*, Fromentin contemplates the light, the colour and the shapes of nature, while feeling a sense of immensity.

> Le vent soufflait en tempête, il roulait devant lui des flots de sable qui passaient sur nos têtes comme des fumées d'un incendie. La lumière devenait trouble et pour ainsi dire crue. L'horizon s'éteignait à demi. Les dunes semblaient s'agiter et tourner comme des vagues. Pas un point de repos dans le paysage, rien de fixe, rien de déterminé.

[539] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 185.
[540] Habib Sharifi, *Le Soufisme. Mystique de l'Orient* (Paris: Grancher, 2000), 127.
[541] Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable*, 89.

> L'espace était éblouissant et vide ; c'était du néant lumineux. Je ne pouvais m'empêcher de regarder et de me sentir ému. Un sentiment très doux et très triste s'emparait de moi, fait à la fois de terreur et d'admiration. Cette grandeur vide, cette majesté stérile avaient quelque chose de surnaturel[542].

This contemplation reflects the influence of the Romantic sublime, where nature imposes on the observer a mixture of fascination and humility. Fromentin expresses the way in which contemplation of the desert provokes in him an emotion that is both aesthetic and spiritual. The desert, described as 'néant lumineux' becomes a space for meditation on the human condition. Furthermore, like Eberhardt, he associated landscapes with his states of mind. In this way, we can see the descriptions of Eberhardt as a Romantic heritage. It also seems to be the blending of her identities which overlapped and merged because she was both European and Muslim. Like in the description of Fromentin, the sublime, in Eberhardt's writing, is associated with a form of mysticism insofar as both refer to an experience of going beyond, of transcending, of breaking into reality through the invisible or the unspeakable. The sublime, in the classical sense, is based on extreme emotion, often provoked by forces beyond man's control: the desert, death, infinite silence, great landscapes, the feeling of nothingness. These elements are omnipresent in Eberhardt's work. The Saharan desert, which she roamed as a converted nomad, became the equivalent of a natural temple: a place of radical stripping down, it was the scene of a face-to-face encounter with eternity. The arid immensity, the crushing of the individual in the void, arouses in her a mixture of dread and intoxication - exactly what eighteenth-century philosophers like Burke and Kant called the 'sublime'. But for Eberhardt, this experience is never merely aesthetic: it is mystical. In this context, the sublime becomes a pathway to God: 'J'aime le désert parce qu'il est net, immuable, silencieux. Il semble qu'en ces régions arides et nues, où rien ne distrait ni n'attire l'homme, il doive fatalement songer à Dieu ou à rien… […] J'aime cette paix sauvage du soir, cette paix qui descend du ciel avec le crépuscule, avec l'heure de la prière…'[543].

What we can also say is that contemplation for Eberhardt amounts to reading nature through the prism of religion as well. Saharan nature is inseparable from Islam and wherever her gaze fell, there was a mosque or a mausoleum of a saint : 'A gauche sur la colline (…) un

[542] Eugène Fromentin, *Un Été dans le Sahara* (Paris: Flammarion, 2010), 23.
[543] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Inédits et textes originaux* (Bibliothèque numérique romande, 2021), 56, https://ebooks-bnr.com/eberhardt-isabelle-inedits-et-textes-originaux.

carré de maçonnerie entre de hautes murailles nues et une coupole ovoïde très allongée, le tout d'une blancheur ancienne, vaguement dorée par le soleil'[544] or 'maintenant tout est uniformément bleu, presque diaphane, et les coupoles arrondies et basses se confondent avec le sommets arrondis des dunes'[545]. The flora itself is described through the religion as shown this paragraph from *Sud Ouranais*:

> Le vent léger frissonne dans les palmes dures d'un grand dattier héroïque, dressé derrière le mur comme un buisson de lances. De tous les arbres, le dattier est celui qui ressemble le plus à une colonne de temple. Il y a de la guerre et du mysticisme, une croyance en l'Unique, une aspiration dans cet arbre sans branches. L'islam naquit comme lui d'une idée de droiture et de jaillissement dans la lumière. Il fut l'expression dans le domaine divin des palmes et des jeux d'eau[546].

The prism of Islam is placed on Eberhard's eyes and this description of the 'dattier' is reminiscent of the virile idealisation of the Arab world that she sometimes expressed, represented here by the date palm as a robust soldier.

The other important religious practice among Sufis is that of meditation. The meditation allows self-control but also to be in harmony with the self. In *Le Soufisme*, Habib Sharafi insists on the importance of introspection in the process of meditation. Indeed, he explains that there are different stages of self-examination. For example, at the end of each day, the Sufi must list their actions: if they have done bad things, they will have to improve the very next day. Then, self-examination also involves being aware of God's presence at all times. Sharafi also talks about what he calls the examination of the Divine, which consists of remembering the responsibility the Sufi have towards others and God. Thus, Eberhardt goes into introspection and seems to confirm that it opens her heart and therefore permits access to God according to the Sufis: 'Il faut que le coeur s'ouvre, se vide et s'embrase. Alors seulement peut descendre la lumière'[547]. For Eberhardt, this approach is not theoretical: she experiences it in her wandering lifestyle, her faith without dogma, and her search for a direct link with the divine is at the heart of her nomadism. Access to God also involves letting go of oneself: 'Ma vie est une étranger errance, avec des haltes douloureuses et de soudains éclairs de joie mystique'[548].

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[544] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Inédits et textes originaux* (Bibliothèque numérique romande, 2021), 212, https://ebooks-bnr.com/eberhardt-isabelle-inedits-et-textes-originaux
[545] Ibid., 44.
[546] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Au Pays des sables* (Paris: Edition du Centenaire, 2018), 130.
[547] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Journaliers* (Bussigny : Bourlapapey, 1923), 66.
[548] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Dans l'ombre chaude de l'Islam* (Paris : Babel, 1996), 43.

This sentence illustrates the deliberate instability of her existence, conceived as a spiritual journey. The religious experience is described as alternating between suffering, emptiness and illumination. Her conversion was neither strategic nor superficial: it was an existential plunge, a radical choice to be in the world differently. She also wrote : 'Je me suis donnée à l'Islam comme on se jette dans une mer profonde'[549]. The image of the sea also evokes an act of total abandonment, a leap into the unknown to get closer to God. Paradoxically, this leap into the unknown should lead to self-knowledge. 'From the Sufi perspective, knowing God can only be achieved through self-knowledge, because the purified human heart becomes the mirror in which divine reality is reflected'[550]. Also, we can notice that introspection is done through practicing solitude as we explained in subsection 'Self Vs other: otherness as a condition of the journey'. This is presented as having positive virtues, since the result of it is to understand the self and others: 'J'ai toujours eu le goût de la solitude, non point celle de la cellule ou de l'étude, mais celle des grandes routes, des coins perdus, des tentes éparses dans le désert. [...] Là, je me sens vivre, et comprendre'[551]. Solitude is essential for self-analysis or for practices such as meditation. It goes hand in hand with religion. However, it is also interesting to underline that this approach of solitude is not common for women in the 19th century. The idea of a woman being alone (physically or as a single person) has usually a completely negative connotation that Eberhardt overthrows.

These practices were therefore a way for the young Swiss to practice her faith but also, as we have said, to be part of a community. This idea can appear like a paradox since she also needed to be on her own, but for Eberhardt, knowing that she was part of the Muslim community helped her to embrace her moments of loneliness: 'J'ai soif de la solitude absolue, du silence du désert, où l'âme peut enfin s'épanouir sans entraves et communier avec Dieu'[552]. Hence, the importance of the other in Eberhardt's religious journey must be analysed. We have already spoken of otherness in the previous chapter; this concept should be linked with the idea of Islam. In *Au Pays des sables*, she stages a dialogue in the short story 'Dans la dune' – a short story inspired by her life in the desert-between her and a man called Hama Srir. She

[549] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Journaliers* (Bussigny : Bourlapapey, 1923), 82.
[550] Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts* (Berkeley: University California Press, 2016), 23.
[551] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Inédits et textes originaux* (Bibliothèque numérique romande, 2021), 101, https://ebooks-bnr.com/eberhardt-isabelle-inedits-et-textes-originaux.
[552] Ibid.

asks him about his family and he answers: 'Écoute, Mahmoud, si je ne t'adoptais pas, moi aussi, pour frère, si nous ne l'étions pas déjà par notre cheikh et notre chapelet, et si je ne voyais pas que tu es un taleb, je me serais mis fort en colère au sujet de ta demande, car il n'est pas d'usage, tu le sais, de parler de sa famille'[553]. The speaker is only calming his anger because Eberhardt is of the same religion as he is. Religion opens the door to new forms of relationship. Also, it should be underlined that the interlocutor of Eberhardt thinks that she is a man, which undoubtedly helps the dialogue. Indeed, the religious identity of Eberhardt is masculine (this is also why gender is not the main question in this subsection), although, as we have already seen, some of her friends and acquaintances knew that she was in fact a woman. In this situation, Mahmoud (the alter ego of Eberhardt) is only accepted because he wears '[…] les insignes du véritable Soufi'[554]. Thus, she affirms one more time being part of the Sufi group and by the word 'véritable Sufi' perhaps tries to justify her affiliation to this group. She also implies that there are 'fake' Sufis in opposition to 'véritable Soufi'. Hence, she wants to underline that she correctly follows Sufi rules and practices Sufism with honesty and faith. The need to write this can reveal a more or less conscious impostor syndrome. Since Eberhardt did not grow up in a Muslim country (or a country of Arab culture), she had a lot of work to do to understand and integrate the cultural and religious codes. It seems that she felt the need to show that she deserved her place in the community as much as an Algerian by birth. Eberhardt does not seem to doubt the legitimacy of her attachment to the Arab world, or her vocation to live in Islamic lands. She knows, however, that she was not born into this world, that she is still on its fringes, and this lucidity is sometimes painful. In *Dans l'ombre chaude de l'Islam*, she writes: 'Je suis une étrangère dans ce monde, et pourtant je n'ai d'amour, de foi, que pour lui'[555]. This paradox, between total emotional and spiritual identification and an irreducible otherness of birth, creates tension. She does not make a complex of it, but it tinges her gaze with a form of lucid melancholy. Because of this, the role that the other plays in Eberhardt's life is all the more important since the encounters she makes allow her to know and understand a culture that is not, at the start, hers.

[553] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Au Pays des sables* (Paris: Edition du Centenaire, 2018), 151.
[554] Ibid.
[555] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Dans l'ombre chaude de l'Islam* (Paris : Babel, 1996), 90.

The Marabout Lella Zeyneb was a crucial figure in the religious journey of the young Isabelle. Furthermore, Lella Zeyneb questioned the place of women in Sufism. We can make an interesting parallel with the figure of Rabi'a al-Basri who was considered a saint, but categorised as a man in order to qualify for the position. She was a major figure of Sufism who lived in Iraq between 714 and 801. There is very little information about her life, what we know about her we owe mainly to Farid al-Din Attar who wrote *Memorial of the Saints*. Like Lella, Rabi'a al-Basri never got married, wanting to give herself only to God. Even though women are under-represented in the Sufi religion 'the attitude of Sufism toward the fair sex was ambivalent, and it can even be said that Sufism was more favourable to the development of feminine activities than were other branches of Islam'[556].

Lella Zeyneb is the descendant of the Marabout Sidi Mohammed Belkassem who had no son, so 'il préparait à sa fille un rôle bien différent de celui qui incombe généralement à la femme arabe, et c'est elle qui aujourd'hui dirige la Zaouya, et les Khouan, affiliés de la conférie'[557]. For Eberhardt, who defied all conventions, Lella was an example and an exception : 'Cette personnalité de femme, vivant dans le célibat et jouant un grand rôle religieux est peut-être unique dans l'occident musulman et mériterait, certes, d'être étudiée mieux que je n'ai pu le faire'[558]. Thus, without ever saying it explicitly, Eberhardt has a particular link with Lella because of their feminine gender (even if, as we know, Eberhardt plays with gender) and this is why Lella is a spiritual master[559]: 'Toutes les fois que je vois Lella Zeyneb, j'éprouve une sorte de rajeunissement, de joie sans cause visible, d'apaisement. Je l'ai vue hier deux fois dans la matinée. Elle a été très bonne et très douce pour moi et a manifesté la joie de me revoir'[560]. She values Lella, which is also a way for her to talk about the place of women in the Sufi religion. Eberhardt's Sufi identity is masculine but she does not deny her feminine identity; she writes in a letter to her friend, Ali: 'Je ne me crois nullement obligée pour être une musulmane de revêtir une gandoura ou une mleya et de rester cloîtrée. Ces mesures été imposées aux musulmanes pour les sauvegarder des chutes possibles et les conserver dans la pureté. Ainsi, il suffit de pratiquer cette pureté et l'action n'en sera que plus méritoire parce

[556] Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical dimension of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 426.
[557] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 122.
[558] Ibid., 123.
[559] The role of the master among the Sufis is debatable as we will see later.
[560] Ibid.

que libre et non imposée'[561].

Thus, the journey in the desert brought her the calm she needs but also a form of introspection, as she explains in *Écrits sur le sable*: 'Le désert que j'avais traversé était celui de mes désirs. (…) je rêve d'un sommeil qui serait une mort, et d'où l'on sortirait armé, fort d'une personnalité régénérée par l'oubli, retrempée dans l'inconscience'[562]. 'Une mort' here seems to refer to *Jihad al-nafs*, which means an effort on oneself, a battle with the self, aimed at purifying the heart and leading to spiritual elevation. Also, the different religious practices lead Eberhardt to question death and to have a different apprehension of it.

As explained by Habib Sharifi, Sufism is born from the meeting between Islam and deep mystical aspirations where the most important is 'la quête de la Vérité'[563] and where discipleship training is 'conçu comme un voyage initiatique'[564]. The Truth becomes reachable by knowing the Self, since 'le Soufi considère que le moi est un reflet, une ombre ou un signe de Dieu sur la terre'[565]. But what does the Self mean to Sufis? In Sufi Islamic psychology, the equivalent of the Self is *nafs*, it '[…] is a homonym for a variety of meanings, ranging from "soul" and "spirit" to "appetite" and "desire." It also designates reflexivity; thus, *nafs* denotes "myself," *bi-nafsihi —"by* himself," and so on'[566]. Thereby, it is important to know the *nafs*, to tame it (we refer to the notion of *Jihad al-nafs* that we explained earlier) and to be sure that *nafs* are in harmonie with the *qalb* (heart) and the *ruh* (spirit). It is this Self that Eberhardt wanted to know to gain access to God since the '[…] definition of Sufism could easily be "a practical and devotional path that leads to the transformation of the self from its lowly instinctual nature to the ultimate state of subsistence in God —a state in which all blame-worthy traits fall away'[567].Hence, Sufism is first of all an experience of life which must lead to a perfect knowledge of the Self, as explained in a famous *hadith*: 'Qui se connait lui-même

[561] Leila Hadouche, *La Construction de soi dans l'écriture littéraire. Le cas d'Isabelle Eberhardt* (Bibliothèque Numérique Paris 8, 2010), 196. https://octaviana.fr/document/156366126#?c=&m=&s=&cv=
[562] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 245.
[563] Habib Sharifi, *Le Soufisme. Mystique de l'Orient* (Paris: Grancher, 2000), 13.
[564] Ibid.
[565] Ibid., 73.
[566] David Shulman and Guy G. Stroumsa, *Self and Self-Transformations in the History of Religions* (Oxford: University Press, 2002), 194.
[567] Ibid., 196.

connaît son Seigneur'[568]. This self-knowledge is at the centre of Eberhardt's life, and she does not hesitate to share the difficulties linked to this knowledge:

> Il y a en moi des choses que je ne comprends pas encore ou que je ne fais que commencer à comprendre. Et ces mystères sont nombreux. Cependant je m'étudie de toutes mes forces, je dépense mon énergie pour mettre en pratique l'aphorisme stoïcien 'connais-toi toi-même'. C'est une tâche difficile, attrayante et douloureuse[569].

We understand that the different religious practices that she appropriates integrate her into the Sufi community and contribute to her access to the truth but are not enough for her self-knowledge. How can she know herself better and therefore know God? According to Habib Sharafi, a veil separates the Sufi from the truth, and it is this veil that the Sufi must lift, and it is possible through the purification of the heart. Indeed, it goes through the heart and not through a spiritual master[570] because this truth is not incarnated in a human form. Thus, the knowledge of the heart is the solution because it is not a teaching but the fruit of a purification.

Sufism distances itself from all intellectualism. The writer Djamchid Mortazavi confirmed this idea by explaining that 'pour les soufis, le cœur, n'est pas, bien entendu, seulement une partie du corps, mais c'est la réalité profonde de l'esprit de l'homme. Il est un instrument de connaissance transcendantale'[571]. This approach of Sufism is also explained by Martin Ling:

> Both of East and of West, in attributing vision to the heart and in using this word to indicate not only the bodily organ of that name but also what this corporeal centre gives access to, namely the centre of the soul, which itself is the gateway to a higher 'heart', namely the Spirit. Thus 'heart' is often to be found as a synonym of 'intellect', not in the sense in which this word is misused today but in the full sense of the Latin *intellectus,* that is, the faculty which perceives the transcendent[572].

This purification of the heart as defined by Ling is about changing the Self instead of changing others. This is what Eberhardt decided to do even if she shares again her difficulties: 'À Alger, j'avais dû mépriser des choses et des gens. Je n'aime pas à mépriser. Je voudrai tout comprendre et tout excuser'[573]. Over her writings, we perceive an evolution thanks to her

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[568] Hadith found in Ali Ridha Arfa, 'Conférence de M. Ali Ridha Arfa,' *École pratique des hautes études, Section des sciences religieuses,* no. 93 (1984) : 417.
[569] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 122.
[570] Even if we mentioned the meeting of certain marabouts, this is not the main point of Sufism.
[571] Habib Sharifi, *Le Soufisme. Mystique de l'Orient* (Paris: Grancher, 2000), 74.
[572] Martin Lings, *What is Sufism?* (Lahore: Carvan Press,2005), 43.
[573] Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable*, 224.

faith since she managed to achieve a form of calm: 'J'ai atteint enfin, je crois, la paix du cœur, sinon celle de l'esprit'[574]. It is worth pointing out that she wrote this following her move with Slimène. The stability of her love for her husband participated in self-reinvention and this confirms the Sufi philosophy, which affirms 'trois choses peuvent ouvrir nos yeux à l'éclatante aurore de vérité : la Douleur, la Foi, l'Amour – tout l'amour'[575], love for God of course, but also love for the other.

She gradually arrives at another of Martin Ling's ideas in saying that 'the perfect balance of the primordial soul depends on the harmonious union of the domains of inner and outer man'[576]. Therefore, to access this purity of heart, it is necessary to break with the narcissistic self, to renounce the carnal nature and to be detached from tangible property as remarked Abul Hassan Nouri, a Sufi and great connoisseur of the psalmody of the *Koran*: 'Le Soufi est celui qui n'a rien en sa possession et qui n'est lui-même possédé par rien'[577].

By choosing a nomadic life, Eberhardt detached herself from material things and she also learned to leave the people she frequented: 'Il faut aimer à quitter, puisque les êtres et les choses n'ont de beauté que passagère'[578]. She based her philosophy on the notion of the ephemeral and it gave her '[…] non pas la quiétude du bonheur mais un début de paix à son âme'[579]. Through her rejection of desire -which is perceived as suffering- the trajectory of Eberhardt subtly echoes philosophical themes later systematised by Schopenhauer. Indeed, for Schopenhauer, desire is torment and alienation as he explains in *Le Monde comme volonté et comme représentation* (*Die welt als wille und vorstellung*)*:* 'Le désir satisfait fait place aussitôt à un nouveau désir ; le premier est une déception reconnue, le second est une déception non encore reconnue'[580]. Humanity therefore oscillates between suffering and boredom. Eberhardt, thanks to faith, seems to succeed in accessing happiness far from desire: 'Oh ! la douce sensation de se laisser vivre, de ne plus penser, de ne plus agir, de ne plus s'astreindre à rien, de ne plus désirer, sauf la durée infinie de ce qui est'[581].

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[574] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 346.
[575] Habib Sharifi, *Le Soufisme. Mystique de l'Orient* (Paris: Grancher, 2000), 108.
[576] Lings, *What is Sufism?*, 49.
[577] Sharifi, *Le Soufisme. Mystique de l'Orient*, 78.
[578] Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable*, 225.
[579] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Au Pays des sables* (Paris: Edition du Centenaire, 2018), 127.
[580] Arthur Schopenhauer, *Le Monde comme volonté et comme représentation* (Paris: PUF, 2014), 224.
[581] Ibid., 100.

The inner journey, in order to access self-knowledge is at the centre of the Sufis life because the physical journey is not enough, as Mowlànà says[582]: 'Vous qui êtes allés à la Mecque pour trouver Dieu, vous êtes des étrangers dans celle-ci si Dieu n'est pas déjà dans votre cœur'[583]. Following from that, to structure their mind, the Sufis must go through three types of journeys: 1) the journey to God (see the presence of god in all things, a kind of mystical awakening), 2) the journey in God (spiritual transmutation), 3) the journey through God (died spiritually before dying physically). This is also explained by Ibn Arabi in *Le Dévoilement des effets du voyage*:

> Les voyageurs sont de trois sortes, il n'y en a pas quatre. Tels sont ceux que Dieu reconnaît : le voyage venant de Lui, le voyage vers Lui et le voyage en Lui. Ce dernier est le voyage de l'errance et de la perplexité. Ces voyages, nul ne les accomplit sans s'exposer au danger, à moins d'être porté, comme dans le voyage nocturne. Quiconque est emmené est assuré du Salut ; quiconque voyage par lui-même est en danger[584].

We have already mentioned the first type of journey which translates notably into contemplation and the feeling of the divine in all things. The second type of journey is visible in Eberhardt's writings through the various testimonies she gives to explain that Islam is a revelation for her soul : 'L'Islam m'a jeté ce charme puissant et profond qui, par les fibres les plus mystérieuses de mon être, m'a attaché pour jamais à la terre étrange du Dar el Islam… '[585]. The last type of journey allowed the young woman to affirm at the end of the *Journaliers* that: 'Tout – et moi-même – est changé radicalement…'[586], which sounds like the ultimate result of her Algerian experience. Once these three journeys have been made, there are seven steps to access self-knowledge: *Tobé (*awakening of the soul), *Vara* (virtue), *Zohd* (renunciation), *Faghr* (poverty), *Sabr* (patience), *Tavakol* (trust in God), *Razà* (satisfaction). All these steps allow the Sufis to be aware of themselves and of God. Indeed, although Eberhardt wrote pages about her torment, we can notice inner peace reaching her soul, notably through the hymn of gratitude that she made to Islam. For her, religion '[…] contribue à relever un être et à lui rendre l'énergie et le courage nécessaire pour vivre'[587] and is '[…] le baume salutaire

[582] Word used to refer to the Prophet.
[583] Habib Sharifi, *Le Soufisme. Mystique de l'Orient* (Paris: Grancher, 2000), 84.
[584] Marie-Odile Delacour and Jean-René Huleu, *Le Voyage Soufi d'Isabelle Eberhardt* (Paris: Editions Joëlle Losfeld, 2008), 45.
[585] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 258-259.
[586] Ibid.
[587] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Lettres et journaliers* (Paris: Babel, 2003), 88.

et le remède souverain à tous les maux de l'âme'[588]. Previously, we affirmed that Eberhardt had multiple identities. In this chapter we understand that religion was responsible for the harmony and balance of this multiplicity. This analysis is also expressed by the biographer Raoul Stephan: 'Cette entrée dans la confrérie des Qadriya n'a pas lieu de nous étonner. Isabelle est une conquête de l'Islam qui… la met en présence de cet Un auquel la pousse la détresse de sa multiplicité'[589]. Then, we can conclude that religion has an identity function, not only through the community but through an intimate and personal affirmation.

Therefore, self-knowledge not only helped to be closer to the truth, it also permitted to Eberhardt to approach the idea of death in a different way. Does this mean that self-reinvention leads to an acceptance of finitude? First of all, it must be remembered that death for Sufis means 'mourir à soi-même'[590], that is to say stripping the self, abandoning the old self to prepare the new and leaving behind false pretenses. For Eberhardt, it also meant dying to reinvent herself[591] through all the processes explained above, it is necessary to 'mourir avant de mourir'[592]. Once this reinvention is made, the Sufis can tame physical death. After the assassination attempt on her[593], Eberhardt came close to death and explained 'en elle, il n'est rien d'horrible ou d'effroyable pour moi. Qui sait ! Peut-être m'y laisserai-je glisser un jour très prochain, voluptueusement et sans la moindre inquiétude, sans la moindre angoisse ?[594]. This peaceful approach to death gives birth to the text 'Le Paradis des eaux', which is the only text to have been published in the Algerian newspaper la *Dêpeche* in July 1904 during her journey. Indeed, in this text Eberhardt speaks of her death and imagines being carried away by water, which would eventually end up being the case. Premonitory text or simple coincidence? All we can say about that is Eberhardt had the intuition that she would

[588] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Lettres et journaliers* (Paris: Babel, 2003), 182.
[589] Marie-Odile Delacour and Jean-René Huleu, *Le Voyage Soufi d'Isabelle Eberhardt* (Paris: Editions Joëlle Losfeld, 2008), 114.
[590] Leïla Hadouche, 'La Construction de soi dans l'écriture littéraire. Le cas d'Isabelle Eberhardt', PhD diss., Université Paris 8 (2010): 143. https://octaviana.fr/document/156366126#?c=&m=&s=&cv=
[591] Reinventing the self is not a Sufi precept but it is part of the way Eberhardt lives her spirituality.
[592] Ibid., 143.
[593] She was attacked in 1901 by a member of a rival Sufi brotherhood. After the attack, rather than treating her as a mere victim, the colonial administration began to question her links with insurrectionary circles. She was accused of colluding with agitators and even of orchestrating the attack to deflect suspicion.
[594] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 67.

die young: 'Je sais maintenant que je n'ai pas longtemps à vivre'[595] – joining the proverb of the Sufis which say 'Dieu te fasse mourir jeune'[596].

Sufism allowed Eberhardt to live her Arab identity and thus to reinvent herself. She also experienced the idea of collective identity through the Muslim community while being nomadic, which permitted her '[…] (de) vivre en marge et vivre en vérité'[597]. The application of Sufi philosophy was a way for her to assert herself as a subject, as shown by the evolution of her writing, which we will analyse in the following chapter. We will see how the self of the past slowly disappears to make way for the writing of rebirth: 'Oh ! la bienheureuse annihilation du moi'[598].

[595] Marie-Odile Delacour and Jean-René Huleu, *Le Voyage Soufi d'Isabelle Eberhardt* (Paris: Editions Joëlle Losfeld, 2008), 183.
[596] Ibid., 19.
[597] Christiane Chaulet Achour, 'Isabelle Eberhardt ou le jeu très sérieux du masculin/féminin,' *Frontières des genres*, (2006): 10, https://doi.org/10.4000/books.pub.3710.
[598] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 130.

PART 3: THE REPRESENTATION OF THE SELF

Nomadism, and all the practices that result from this geographic and cultural change, allow an upheaval of the so-called stability of identity. Thus, reinvention of the self is possible, since Isabella Bird, Alexandra David-Néel and Isabelle Eberhardt explore their identity in motion. Their lived experiences make it possible to anchor the new identities that they create in reality. What also permits the existence of theses created identities is the representation of the self, since offering an image of the self to others is allowing an external validation of these created identities. Indeed, the journey for these three women leads to travel writings, short stories, letters and photographs. Self-representation through the various media cited reminds us that the idea of return is at the centre of the journey. Isabella Bird and Alexandra David-Néel (Eberhardt's case is different) both write for the country of origin, in their mother tongue. The return from the journey is a theme found in Ulysses who, having left for a long time, is not recognized anymore. Steve Clark confirms this idea in the book *Travel Writing and the Empire* by saying that 'the travel narrative is addressed to the home culture; by its very nature, however, that to which it refers cannot be verified, hence the ready and habitual equation of traveller and liar'[599].

Are writing and photography practices therefore necessary to maintain a link with their origins? As we said, the need to write and to represent the self can be a desire to anchor the reinvented identity in the country of origin (France and the United Kingdom), but it is also a question of affirming the existence of the reinvented identity in the public sphere. According to Judith Butler in *Le Récit de soi:* 'La narration ne fonctionne pas seulement comme un moyen de transmettre de l'information, mais aussi comme le déploiement rhétorique du langage qui cherche à agir sur l'autre'[600]. Thus, the other has a primordial importance in the definition and reinvention of identity. However, this chapter is not about direct interactions and encounters with others (those encountered during the journey) but rather about what the three writers show to readers and how they put in place a pact of truth. Philippe Lejeune writes in his book *Le Pacte autobiographique* : 'L'image de soi n'a rien à voir avec un contenu d'énoncé, c'est un

[599] Steve Clark, *Travel Writing and the Empire* (London: Zed Books, 1999), 1.
[600] Judith Butler, *Le Récit de soi* (Paris: PUF, 2007), 51.

effet d'énonciation.'[601] This underlines the importance of autobiography or auto-fiction in the identity process.

But writing or *mettre en scène* the self – especially for Isabella Bird, Alexandra David-Néel and Isabelle Eberhardt, who have created a self through another culture – is of course not easy. Judith Butler explains that 'la narration de soi est partielle, hantée par ce dont chacun ne peut concevoir aucune histoire définitive. Je ne peux pas expliquer exactement pourquoi j'ai émergé de telle façon et mes efforts de reconstruction narrative sont toujours sujets à révision'[602]. Therefore, we are going to question the theatricalisation of the self, its implication in autobiographical writing and its impact on readers ; but we are also going to question the construction of the self thanks to writing, by using Paul Ricoeur's theory in particular. The narrative identity will enter into discussion with the social identity, based on Jean Claude Kaufman's analysis. To finish the chapter, we will use the theory of Roland Barthes to speak about the representation of the self through photography.

Chapter 4 : The Narrative Identity and the Reinvention of the Self

In the show 'La Grande librairie', Sylvain Tesson said 'pour moi le voyage réussi c'est un voyage où on a moissonné suffisamment de choses pour écrire', making travel writing an indispensable part of the trip and perhaps even the culmination of the trip. We will see in this chapter that writing (travel writing but also fictional writing) makes it possible to build a coherent self. Indeed, the *identité plurielle* must find a balance so that the identities are not in conflict or in contradiction (for example, the self living in France differs from the self living in Asia). The coherence of the self therefore passes through writing for Isabella Bird, Alexandra David-Néel and Isabelle Eberhardt. Writing permits organising one's memory. This plays an important role in the construction of the self, since the memory seems to evolve to correspond to the present self, the one who is writing. Therefore, what matters more is to create coherence through writing rather than striving to transcribe a memory with precision. We can add to this that writing leads to the creation of a narrative identity which is part of the lived identity. Writing, especially for Eberhardt, is also a form of therapy which helps her to

[601] Philippe Lejeune, *Le Pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Points, 1996), 171.
[602] Judith Butler, *Le Récit de soi (*Paris: PUF, 2007), 40.

reconstruct a fragmented and marginal identity, marked by exile, solitude and a spiritual quest. Hence, we will focus on travel writing as part of the construction of the self, then we will talk about the importance of fictional writing for Eberhardt and end by analysing the strategies of publication in order to exist in the public sphere.

4.a. Travel writings and the reinvention of the self

'Le soi parle lui-même, mais en parlant il devient ce qu'il est'[603].

According to Philippe Lejeune, the autobiography is a '[…] récit rétrospectif en prose qu'une personne réelle fait de sa propre existence, lorsqu'elle met l'accent sur sa vie individuelle, en particulier sur l'histoire de sa personnalité'[604]. If we refer to this definition, travel writings can fit into the autobiographical genre. If travel writing is autobiographical, how do Bird, David-Néel and Eberhardt use it to present their 'I' as narrator? How do they interact with their readers? How do they use the idea of *pacte de verité*[605]? This is what we will see in this subsection, as well as the relationship between the performative dimension (in the Kaufmannian sense of the term) and the narrative dimension (referring to Paul Ricoeur's theory). Moreover, when Lejeune speaks about 'l'histoire de sa personnalité', which personality are we talking about? What do writers decide to show to others, especially in a context of culture difference? Indeed, the self who travels is part of a very different cultural context than that of the reader. Partly because of this, 'tout récit de voyage offre le moment d'une crise de la représentation'[606]. Thus, travel writings can be perceived as an autobiography in a situation of interculturality, '[…] il est déjà transposé dans un espace de fiction qui lui permet de jouer avec les attentes des lecteurs'[607]. Nomadism disturbs the 'pacte de vérité' between the narrator/writer and the reader since each of them evolves in a different culture and language. Thus, we will see how Isabella Bird, Alexandra David-Néel and Isabelle Eberhardt try to represent a self faithful to their reinvention while being understood by the readers of their native culture. The other central question here is: what defines the self? Is it

[603] Judith Butler, *Le Récit de soi* (Paris: PUF, 2007), 114.
[604] Philippe Lejeune, *Le Pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Points, 1996), 14.
[605] A commitment by an author to recount his or her life (or part or aspect of it) directly and truthfully.
[606] Jean-Xavier Ridon, *Le Voyage en son miroir* (Paris: Kimé, 2002), 40.
[607] Ibid.

the performative aspect (as the first part of the thesis seems to suggest since it analyses the different practices) or the narrative aspect, which is the identity of expression (telling oneself and remembering)?

For the sociologist Jean-Claude Kaufmann, it is difficult to picture identity through writing since identity only exists if it is social. What he means by that is that the individuals exist because they belong to a social group and for this, they display a different identity depending on their interlocutors. This does not mean that individuals have dissociated identities but rather that a *identité circonstancielle* must be established[608]. This is what the three women we are studying (especially David-Néel and Eberhardt) did when they played with their different social roles, as we explained earlier. Both this circumstantial identity as well as the evolution of the identity imply rupturing effects whereas the writing precisely seeks coherence. Thus, for Kaufmann 'l'identité biographique a une fonction généralement plus unificatrice'[609], hence the great difference between the autobiographical self and the living self. Thus, what is important for Kaufman is the action, that is to say the performative aspect as an element constituting the identity. For him, writing is not enough to (re)invent the self.

Isabella Bird, Alexandra David-Néel and Isabelle Eberhardt show that it is necessary to have a sociological but also a phenomenological approach. Indeed, these three women move back and forth between the life lived and the writing. Their actions and practices experienced during the journeys reveal that they think of themselves through actions, but writing this allows them to govern their identities through narration. According to Jacqueline Pigeot in *Poétique de l'itinéraire dans la littérature du Japon ancien*, writing and travelling are complementary elements in the construction of identity: '[…] chanter les saisons et pérégriner sont donc deux expériences analogues, non pas deux expériences différentes, mais la même, vécue de deux façons complémentaires'[610]. Thereby, as Paul Ricoeur explained in *Soi-même comme un autre*, writing about their own life allows them to give meaning to what they lived through. By choosing words to describe the actions, there is a linguistic filtering that takes place, and which helps to construct the self. We should remember that for Paul Ricoeur, there are two types of identities: *l'idem* (mêmeté) et *l'ipse* (ipséité). *Idem* corresponds to what is

[608] Kaufmann's term for the idea of multiple identity.
[609] Jean-Claude Kaufmann, *L'Invention de soi* (Paris: Hachette Littératures, 2005), 163.
[610] Jacqueline Pigeot, *Michiyuki-bun, Poétique de l'itinéraire dans la littérature du Japon ancien* (Paris: Institut des Hautes Études Japonaises, Collège de France, 2009), 410.

constant, unchanging, while the *ipse* symbolises change. *L'idem* and *l'ipse* complement each other thanks to the narrative identity since there is a '[…] relation dialectique unissant l'idem et l'ipse'[611]. Indeed, 'l'identité narrative fait tenir ensemble les deux bouts de la chaine : la permanence dans le temps du caractère et le maintien de soi'[612]. Thus, as we said previously, we believe that what constitutes the identity of the authors studied is the back and forth between the performative dimension and the narrative dimension.

The importance of narrative identity is all the more evident for Isabelle Eberhardt. As Marie Odile Delacour explains in *Le Voyage Soufi d'Isabelle Eberhardt*, 'son écriture trace son destin. (…) elle a passé sa vie à rattraper sa destinée, anticipée dans son écriture. (…) elle est dans le tableau qu'elle décrit, comme narratrice ou comme personnage, ou les deux à la fois'[613]. Travel writings became the place where Eberhardt could incarnate herself since she had no other place to do it: 'J'ai renoncé à avoir un coin à *moi*, en ce monde, un *home,* un foyer, la paix, la fortune. J'ai revêtu la livrée, parfois bien lourde, du vagabond et du sans-patrie'[614]. Thus, writing permits Eberhardt to affirm the existence of a male alter ego and, as in her different practices, she alternates between a feminine 'I' and a masculine 'I'. Eberhardt's expression is essentially masculine in *Journaliers*, but when she is sad, alone or when she speaks about love, her 'I' is feminine. For example, when she was in Marseille she wrote: 'Marseille, 23 juin 1901, 9 heures du soir. – Je suis seule à la maison ; il fait sombre et triste ici, et celui qui m'éclaire est loin. Où êtes-vous, chers ?'[615]. We notice, though, that even during moments of sadness, she sometimes alternates with a masculine 'I', undoubtedly to give herself some strength since she seems to associate strength with Mahmoud Saadi more than with Isabelle: 'Et moi, je m'angoisse et je souffre sur un pauvre lit d'hôpital seul et abandonné'[616] The back and forth between the feminine and the masculine in the writing ties in with the idea of alternation between feminine practices and masculine practices experienced during her trip in Algeria. The performative follows the same logic as the narrative. For Jean-Xavier Ridon, 'Eberhardt place au centre même de son écriture la

[611] Paul Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre* (Paris: Éditions Points, 2015), 195.
[612] Ibid.
[613] Marie-Odile Delacour and Jean-René Huleu, *Le Voyage Soufi d'Isabelle Eberhardt* (Paris: Éditions Joëlle Losfeld, 2008), 16.
[614] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Lettres et journaliers* (Paris: Babel, 2003), 101.
[615] Ibid., 84.
[616] Ibid., 86.

problématique de l'identité comme forme de construction'[617].

However, the writing process for Eberhardt was more than the inscription of her identity in a narrative, it was a therapy. It was about lightening the self through writing. In this case, the autobiography becomes a renaissance. She explained her need to forget the past: 'Il y a cependant une chose qui me réjouit : à mesure que je m'éloigne des limbes du passé, mon caractère se forme et s'affirme justement tel que je le souhaitais'[618]. She wrote this sentence shortly after the death of her mother and brother Augustin, to whom she was very close. Despite the pain, it is only after their death that she seemed to place herself at the heart of her writing, as if she could finally live for herself. Therefore, writing was her therapy but before arriving at this conclusion, she also perceived this as suffering, thus joining the Sufi idea which explains the need to know oneself, but which warns of the difficulty of this task. Eberhardt wrote:

> Combien de fois n'ai-je pas senti mon cœur se serrer en songeant à ma vocation d'écrire et de penser, à mon ancien amour de l'étude des livres, à mes curiosités intellectuelles de jadis… (…) 'tu enfanteras dans la douleur', fut-il dit à la première femme, et pareille obligation pesa sans doute sur les destins du premier Prométhée de la pensée, du premier Héraclès de l'art. Une voix secrète a dû lui dire : quand ton esprit ne sera pas à la torture, quand ton cœur ne souffrira pas, quand ta conscience ne te fera pas subir d'interrogatoires sévères, tu ne créeras pas…[619]

In this passage from *Écrits sur le sable*, Eberhardt expresses with poignant intensity the ambivalence of the act of writing. Far from being a simple act of liberation or appeasement, writing is born of an inner torment: it is the fruit of pain, doubt and a conscience in tension. The writer is likened to Prometheus or Heracles, mythical figures of suffering and struggle, as if all true creation required a wrenching away of oneself. The reference to the biblical myth - 'tu enfanteras dans la douleur' - transposes motherhood into the intellectual realm: writing, thinking, creating, means giving birth in pain. This passage therefore highlights a form of writing that is therapeutic, but which does not heal without first rekindling the wounds, a form of writing that heals by exposing and traversing suffering, not by sidestepping it. But despite the suffering she evokes, she also suggests a cathartic effect of writing. Indeed, Eberhardt's trajectory can be seen as illustrating the kind of dynamic described by Albert Memmi and later quoted by Paul Ricoeur in *Temps et récit* (tome 3), who said 'pour m'alléger du poids du

[617] Jean-Xavier Ridon, *Le Voyage en son miroir* (Paris: Kimé, 2002), 23.
[618] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Lettres et journaliers* (Paris: Babel, 2003), 67.
[619] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 100-101.

monde, je le mis sur du papier; je commençai à écrire. Je découvris l'extraordinaire jouissance de maîtriser son existence en la récréant'[620]. Travel writing for Eberhardt was giving birth to another self, for her '[…] les êtres vraiment supérieurs en ce monde tel qu'il est de nos jours, sont ceux qui souffrent du mal sublime de l'enfantement perpétuel d'un *moi* meilleur. Je hais celui qui est satisfait de lui-même et de son sort, de son esprit et de son cœur'[621]. But does this mean that once the therapy is over, the narrative is extinguished to leave room only for the performative? When Eberhardt felt better, she sometimes forgot writing, as she admitted in *Écrits sur le sable*: '[…] et mon cahier de notes est resté si peu chargé, malgré quelques remords, quelques velléités d'écrire… une fois encore la vie bédouine, facile, libre et berceuse, m'a prise pour me griser et m'assoupir. Écrire… pourquoi ?'[622]. What allows us to have an answer is the fact that she defined – on several occasions – writing as not only a therapy but also as her destiny; as seen in *Journaliers*, where she wrote: 'J'écris comme j'aime, parce que telle est ma destinée, probablement'[623]. Thus, we realise that there are two different approaches to self-writing for Eberhardt.

For the researcher Leïla Louise Hadouche Dris, these two approaches can be seen through the difference of narrative in *Journaliers* and in *Écritures intimes. Journaliers*, as we have said, symbolises a therapeutic writing, where we can see an analytical process of the self, which ends with the appeasement of her psychological state of mind: 'Tout – et moi-même – est changé radicalement'[624]. *Écriture intime* seems to be more the reflection of a regeneration which involves the expression of her masculine and feminine identities, where 'le *je* écrit le *il* tout en restant très indépendants l'un de l'autre et où le portait devient autoportrait'[625]. In both cases, the writing of Eberhardt does not correspond to Philippe Lejeune's theory about autobiography. At first, her travel writings seem to correspond to Lejeune's definition because she speaks about her life and experiences using 'I' and there is a shared identity between the author, the narrator and the main character. That being said, the use of a pseudonym complicates the identification of narrator/author. Also, in her autobiographical work, she mixes poetic impression and fiction with the 'truth'. Her writing is probably closer to a diary

[620] Paul Ricoeur, *Temps et récits. Le temps raconté* (Paris: Points, 1991), 121.
[621] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits sur le sable* (Paris: Grasset, 1990), 317.
[622] Ibid., 56.
[623] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Lettres et journaliers* (Paris: Babel, 2003), 51.
[624] Ibid., 259.
[625] Leïla Hadouche, *La Construction de soi dans l'écriture littéraire. Le cas d'Isabelle Eberhardt* (*Bibliothèque Numérique Paris 8*, 2010), 67. https://octaviana.fr/document/156366126#?c=&m=&s=&cv= .

than to a structured and retrospective autobiography as Lejeune understands it. According to Hadouche Dris, 'l'écriture autobiographique d'Eberhardt repose sur un vas-et-vient entre l'écriture de soi mourant et l'écriture de soi naissant'[626] ; therefore, Eberhardt is not afraid to reflect moments of crisis and rupture. She joins Flaubert's idea of the present identity being '[…] le résultat de mes individualités disparues'[627](letter to George Sand, September 1866). Travel writing allows Eberhardt to analyse the self and the creation of a new self, stripped of the past:

> Habitude de solitaire accoutumé à regarder sans cesse en lui-même d'abord, ensuite nécessité de créer un livre pouvant me donner plus tard, une image vraie de mon âme d'aujourd'hui ; seul moyen de juger ma vie présente, de voir, plus tard, si mon individualité est bien réellement en progression ou non[628].

Unlike Alexandra David-Néel and Isabella Bird, travel writing here is not a testimony to the journey itself but rather to the self in the journey.

David-Néel's self-reinvention also mixes the performative and the narrative. That being said, her approach to writing differs from that of Eberhardt since David-Néel used her travel writings as a way to find a coherence of her identity. For this, she presents a self which has a coherent evolution, the only moment of rupture being the departure on a journey. Consequently, her travel writing corresponds to Philippe Lejeune's vision of autobiography: 'Dans la "mise en scène" de l'écriture, le narrateur établit deux types de distance : il se pose soit en face de son passé, soit en face de son écriture'[629]. In other words, writing about the past and giving an impression of natural evolution in the writing. Thus, 'c'est précisément en raison du caractère évasif de la vie réelle que nous avons besoin du secours de la fiction pour organiser cette dernière rétrospectivement dans l'après-coup[630]' ; therefore giving travel writings an organising, but also founding and creative vocation.

To this, we can add the fact that David-Néel also wrote to exist in the public sphere and to prove that she had, indeed, experienced what she experienced, in particular her arrival

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[626] Leïla Hadouche, *La Construction de soi dans l'écriture littéraire. Le cas d'Isabelle Eberhardt* (*Bibliothèque Numérique Paris 8*, 2010), 67. https://octaviana.fr/document/156366126#?c=&m=&s=&cv=
[627] Gustave Flaubert, *Correspondance, t.III* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), 536.
[628] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Lettres et journaliers* (Paris: Babel, 2003), 82.
[629] Philippe Lejeune, *Le Pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Points, 1996), 50.
[630] Paul Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre* (Paris: Éditions Points, 2015), 192.

in Lhasa, since it was forbidden to travel to Tibet. The *pacte de vérité* explained by Lejeune occupies an absolutely essential role for David-Néel since she must be believed, otherwise her book is no longer an autobiography but the story of an impossible journey. It is up to the readers to decide. The author does not hesitate to address them directly: '[…] quelques détails d'ordre géographique, concernant la région supérieure du bassin du Poloungn Tsangpo que nul étranger n'a parcourue avant moi, pourraient offrir un certain intérêt, mais le cadre très restreint du présent livre m'oblige à les omettre'[631]. First of all, she reminds the readers that she is the only one to travel this path, which is a way for her to present herself as an explorer and to underline the exceptional nature of what she did. The fact that she has been the only one to take this path also shows that no one can confirm that her description is true or false. Once again, the *pacte de vérité* established with the readers is crucial. David-Néel also wants to justify the potential lack of details. She anticipates criticism and explains her choices by an educational argument: do not make the book too long and make it accessible as well as interesting. Thereby, *Voyage d'une Parisienne à Lhassa* serves as testimony for herself and for others. Indeed, it is the public testimony of her journey and the intimate testimony of the existence of her reinvented identity. David-Néel tells the story of her life to give a sense of what she experienced.

The performative needs the narrative, since '[…] le processus identitaire lui-même gagne à être analysé comme un système d'action'[632]. Yet, since she desired to exist in the public sphere – which was not necessarily the case for Eberhardt since she did not publish her writings during her lifetime – to what extent is David-Néel's book a theatricalization of the self? It is legitimate to ask the question since we know that David-Néel disguised herself and played a role throughout her journey[633]. For example, she met a traveller before arriving at Kham and wrote: 'Je l'écoutais de loin ainsi que mon déguisement m'y forçait'[634], insisting that this is indeed a role that she had to play. This is reminiscent of the idea of *identité circonstancielle* explained by Kaufmann. That being said, despite a certain theatricalization, David-Néel did not define herself as a European going to Asia, but as a Buddhist. She

[631] Alexandra David-Néel, *Voyage d'une Parisienne à Lhassa* (Paris: Pocket, 2004), 250.
[632] Paul Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre* (Paris: Éditions Points, 2015), 173.
[633] The previous chapters explain in more detail David-Néel's use of disguise. Here, we focus mainly on self-representation through writing.
[634] David-Néel, *Voyage d'une Parisienne à Lhassa*, 137.

integrated the culture of the other. The theatrical aspect of the disguise, which no longer really is one, perfectly symbolises the reinvention of her identity[635]:

> Après un copieux repas composé de *tsampa*, de viande séchée et de thé au beurre, nous revêtîmes nos habits thibétains. Je ne puis guère dire que nous nous déguisions ; Yongden reprit le costume de lama, il l'avait porté depuis sa jeunesse et, quant à moi, je m'étais, pendant des années, habillée à la mode tibétaine. La seule nouveauté, pour nous, consistait dans la pauvreté voulue de nos vêtements actuels[636].

Hence, there is a cohabitation and coherence of her identities (her European identity which she did not deny, and her identity as a *lama/*buddhist), which even seemed to go back to before her trip. The return of the journey also represents this coherence since she built a Tibetan house in Dignes-les-bains (southern France). The identities she assumes (orientalist, poor Tibetan, lama…) appear complementary, whether in their performative staging or in their narrative construction. Moreover, the phrase 'je m'étais, pendant des années, habillée à la mode tibétaine'[637] underlines the fluidity with which she evolves. David-Néel cultivates this idea throughout her writing. Ultimately, what mattered to her was *l'ipséité*. In his book *Soi-même comme un autre*, Paul Ricoeur explained that *l'ipséité* and *l'altérité* are closely attached. According to him, we must understand others to better know who we are. David-Néel seems to have followed this idea perfectly. 'Plus elle étudie, comprend et vit comme les autres, plus sa propre identité se définit et se renforce'[638]. She explained to the readers that, first of all, she lived like Tibetans: 'Nous dormions à la manière des voyageurs thibétains, nos bagages serrés entre nous et disposés de telle façon qu'on ne pouvait rien en enlever'[639] or when she writes 'Yongden et moi, conformément à l'étiquette thibétaine, nous nous précipitâmes vivement sur le bas-côté du chemin pour témoigner notre respect'[640]. All throughout the pages, she appropriates their way of life and their way of speaking : 'L'aube faisait de nous d'honnêtes pèlerins s'étant mis en marche avant que le coq chante comme disent les

[635] The use of the costume was common in Orientalism, as a way of staging oneself, as when Loti, for example, dressed in traditional Chinese clothes to have his photo taken. This is a practice we find in Bird, as we have already said. David-Néel is in a more ambiguous position. Indeed, she took photos in the studio, wearing Tibetan clothes. She also uses costume to access Lhasa, which may suggest a theatrical posture rather than a real practice. And yet, as we explain in more detail in this subsection, the costume also allows her to redefine herself. Like for Eberhardt, the costume gives rise to practices and therefore participates in the performative that constructs identity.

[636] Alexandra David-Néel, *Voyage d'une Parisienne à Lhassa* (Paris: Pocket, 2004), 20.

[637] Ibid.

[638] Fanny Martín Quatremare, 'Identités plurielles au cours des voyages d'Alexandra David-Neel,' *Hybrida,* no. 4 (2022) : 201, https://www.jstor.org/stable/48765794.

[639] David-Néel, *Voyage d'une Parisienne à Lhassa*, 44.

[640] Ibid., 46.

Thibétains[641]. It is not a role anymore; rather it is her way to travel. This evolution is very clear in her book *Voyage d'une Parisienne à Lhassa*. Her moral but also physical reinvention can be symbolized by the makeup that she could not remove. Therefore, it became a part of her, just like the Tibetan role that she had created: 'Je partis enfin, après que Yongden m'eut pathétiquement adjurée d'éviter avec le plus grand soin de me laver la figure, celle-ci étant, à la longue, presque devenue de la couleur orthodoxe d'une face de paysanne thibétaine'[642]. She shared this scene of her arrival in Lhasa with the reader: 'Lorsque je me présentai au bungalow pour y demander l'hospitalité, le premier Européen qui me vit resta muet de stupéfaction en entendant une "Tibétaine" lui adresser la parole en anglais'[643]. She was identified as Tibetan by a European. This is an ultimate reinvention that she had to put down on paper, as a conclusion of her years of travel. For her, writing is to highlight an identity in construction and elaboration. But what about this construction and elaboration when the writing of the self is done mainly according to the readers?

It is legitimate to ask this question after reading Isabella Bird's books. Indeed, 'Bird's travel writing is marked by an awareness of her reception as an author in her home country, and an almost pathological desire to avoid accusations of 'masculine behavior'[644] as explained by Dúnlaith Bird. Although travelling was a way for Isabella Bird to access a certain form of fulfilment and freedom, it is also to exist in the intellectual sphere that she wrote about her peregrinations. Therefore, her writing often seems to be more representative of her Victorian heritage than of her adventurous identity since she tried to present an image of traditional femininity to finally experiment with masculine practices[645]. She would have a more anthropological approach throughout the pages in the book *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan*, but initially she respected the criteria of so-called feminine writing, such as talking mainly about delicate things like this '[…] classic lotus with its great pink or white cups'[646] described as '[…] graceful flowers'[647]. Thus, she lets readers understand that her interests and therefore her personality corresponded to the Victorian era: 'I could not but feel thankful that I had been

[641] Alexandra David-Néel, *Voyage d'une Parisienne à Lhassa* (Paris: Pocket, 2004), 55.
[642] Ibid., 57.
[643] Ibid., 167.
[644] Dúnlaith Bird, *Travelling in Different Skins : Gender identity in European Women's Oriental Travelogues, 1850-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 11.
[645] Practices that we have already mentioned and explained in parts 1 and 2 of this thesis.
[646] Isabella Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (Reno: Pantianos Classics, 2017), 5.
[647] Ibid.

born under British rule, and that I lived in a land where God was worshipped in spirit and in truth'[648]. She aligned herself with Christian values and a sense of British moral superiority, reinforcing the idea of a divine justification for empire, which was a common trope in Victorian thought. She also wrote 'A Japanese bath is simply a square wooden box, sunk in the floor of the room, and entered by sliding panels. I could not reconcile myself to it'[649], expressing discomfort with Japanese bathing customs, reinforcing Victorian ideals of modesty, privacy, and bodily propriety, especially for women.

But if the narrative intends to contradict the performative, the fact that Isabella Bird describes with precision all the masculine practices that she did, clearly shows that the writing also aims to be a witness to her adventures and to bring her journey in the public sphere. For the geographer Nicholas Entrikin, 'narratives do not describe the world directly, but re-scribe and re-tell the world. Narratives are therefore not copies of the world; they construct rather an as-if world'[650]; and for Bird this rewriting of the self allows action in the performative world since it gives her access to the Royal Scottish Geographical Society. Narrative identity- as well as travelling- creates opportunities in a normally masculine world. Hence, the self-narrative is structured around the eventual return from the journey:

> Some letters give a less pleasing picture of the condition of the peasantry than the one popularly presented, and it is possible that some readers may wish that it had been less realistically painted; but as the scenes are strictly representative, and I neither made them nor went in search of them, I offer them in the interests of truth[651].

This quote shows once again the crucial importance of the *pacte de vérité*. Moreover, she justifies herself because she knows she deconstructs the exotic imagination that the British (and Western world in general) have of Asia and Japan. Through this rhetoric, she becomes an '[…] intrepid reporter'[652] and a '[…] androgynous leader'[653]. Indeed, she quantified the difficulty of her journey, establishing her perseverance and toughness: 'Travelled more than

[648] Isabella Bird, *The English Woman in America* (London: Global Grey, 2009), 78.
[649] Isabella Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (Reno: Pantianos Classics, 2017), 42.
[650] Inger Birkeland, *Making Place, Making Self: Travel, Subjectivity and Sexual Difference* (Surrey: Aldershot: Ashgate, chapter 10, 2005), 8.
[651] Isabella Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (Reno: Pantianos Classics, 2017), 9.
[652] Dúnlaith Bird, *Travelling in Different Skins: Gender identity in European Women's Oriental Travelogues, 1850-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 80.
[653] Ibid.

120 miles… over horrible roads'[654]. She also reported vividly and unsentimentally, as a field journalist might, without romanticizing or concealing discomfort: 'Sleeping in wretched huts and eating revolting food'[655]. 'I took the lead through the forest, slashing at the creepers with my umbrella, for there was no path'[656]; Bird often adopted a tone and presence that echo the authority and self-assurance typically associated with male explorers or colonial leaders of the Victorian era.

She played with possibilities and 'deliberately creates several textual gender identities, exploring how to construct the perfect 'woman' on personal and commercial purposes'[657]. This theatricalization of the self makes it possible to produce an identity which fluctuates depending on the audience and which at the same time generates actions. Bird can be understood with the help of Michel de Certeau for whom writing is an '[…] act of self-defence'[658] and can be seen '[…] as a re-appropriation or re-creation of self'[659].

However, the representation of the self is not only carried out through gender but also through the West-East relationship, since Bird asserted her identity also by conveying colonial ideas. In the book *Travelling in Different Skins: Gender identity in Women's Oriental Travelogues,* Dúnlaith Bird is interested in the theories of Edward Said and draws a parallel with a form of theatricality: 'The idea of representation is a theatrical one: the Orient is the stage on which the whole East is confined'[660]. Isabella Bird was aware of this problematic and played on this stage where she positioned herself as both an explorer and a missionary. It was important for her to define herself in this way through writing. She seemed to have a conscious desire to make her mark in Oriental studies. She told her life story to give meaning to what she experienced but, above all, this meaning must exist in the Western world, where she wanted to bring this reinvented identity into existence.

To conclude, for Alexandra David-Néel and Isabelle Eberhardt, the reinvention of the self lies in the balance between the narrative and the performative with a desire to fix

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[654] Isabella Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (Reno: Pantianos Classics, 2017), 56.
[655] Ibid., 98.
[656] Ibid., 43.
[657] Dúnlaith Bird, *Travelling in Different Skins: Gender identity in European Women's Oriental Travelogues, 1850-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 80.
[658] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 29.
[659] Ibid.
[660] Bird, *Travelling in Different Skins*, 80.

memories, to be one's own witness to the evolution of the self while existing in the predominantly male public space of the time. Isabella Bird partially corresponds to this description but she seems to be defined more by the social identity and by the performative (subscribing to the ideas of Kaufmann) and using the narrative identity as a strategy rather than as an element which defines her. But if the self-representation is intended to be possible and complementary to the performative, it is because the travel writing is explicitly autobiographical. So, what about self-representation in fictional texts?

4.b. The representation of the self through fiction in Isabelle Eberhart's short stories

'En fait, il n'y a pas de récit de voyage qui ne soit déjà une fiction'[661]

As we demonstrated previously, autobiography participates in the reinvention of the self, but is it the only literary genre that allows this? Indeed, when we think about autobiography, we expect to be on the side of truth, or at least as close as possible to the identity of the writer, thereby opposing fiction. As Alan Collett explains, autobiography is a '[…] documentary report'[662]. On the other hand, the fictional writing comes from the latin *fictionem*, fictum, supin of *fingere*, which means 'feindre' (to pretend), implying that the story told tells little or nothing about the writer. Of course, the binary opposition fiction versus reality is not as radical and the border between these two concepts is porous and permeable as Robbe-Grillet points out in *Le Miroir qui revient*: 'Le biais de la fiction est, en fin de compte, beaucoup plus personnel que la prétendue sincérité de l'aveu'[663], refusing the idea of the sincerity contract explained by Philippe Lejeune and joining the analyses of Doubrovsky. Thus, we will be interested in the fictional writings of Isabelle Eberhardt[664], since she has written many short stories which, we believe, are a creative approach to reinventing and representing herself. Are there similarities between her travel writings (that aim to have an autobiographical and intimate scope) and her short stories? We will mainly focus on 'Yasmina', 'Légionnaire' and 'Le paradis des eaux' which were published in the press in 1902 and 1903.

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[661] Jean-Xavier Ridon, *Le Voyage en son miroir* (Paris: Kimé, 2002), 40.
[662] He uses this term throughout the article 'Literature, Fiction and Autobiography,' *British Journal of Aesthetic,* n.29 (1989): 341.
[663] Alain Robbe-Grillet, *Le Miroir qui revient* (Paris: Minuit, 1984), 17.
[664] *Le Grand Art* is a novel written in 1901 by Alexandra David-Néel but before her journeys in Asia, so we will not include it in the corpus. We will not speak about Isabella Bird either since she has not written fiction.

We can also use the short story 'Fantasia' as a good example since it was inspired by her first trip to El Oued. There are convergences in the writing processes of this short story and *Journaliers*, especially in the depiction of nature as a medium through which her faith is revealed:

> De tous les souvenirs étranges, de toutes les impressions évocatrices que me laissa mon séjour à El Oued – ville grise aux mille coupoles basses, pays d'aspect archaïque, sans âge – le plus profond, le plus singulier est le spectacle unique qu'il me fut donné de contempler par une claire matinée d'hiver…[665]

The obvious link that we can establish between the fictional writings and the life of Eberhardt allows us to use the idea of autofiction[666]. This neologism is created by Serge Doubrovsky in his book *Fils*[667]. First of all, it is important not to confuse autofiction with the idea of the autobiographical novel, since the latter by its long form and its linear structure does not correspond to the writings of Eberhardt. Thus, for Doubrovsky, autofiction is a freedom of writing, the goal not being to present a destiny worthy of being an example for others. Therefore, autofiction is the fictionalisation of a lived experience, as Vincent Colonna confirmed later. Indeed, in his book *Autofiction et autres mythomanies littéraires*, he defines autofiction as a '[…] mentir-vrai'[668], that is to say '[…] une distorsion au service de la véracité'[669]. Fiction becomes a way of writing the self:

> La notion plastique d'autofiction, dans son acceptation la plus courante et la plus vague, marque peut-être une évolution significative de l'écriture de soi, par laquelle la démarche autobiographique devient désormais une opération à géométrie variable, dont l'exactitude et la précision ne sont plus les vertus théologales[670].

In other words, the creation of characters and the creation of their past as well as the fact of bequeathing them actions and ambitions, is a way for the personal identity of the author to become a narrative identity, more or less consciously. For Paul Ricoeur, personal identity is also created through language and discourses. This contributes to the reinvention of the self and this can be done through – in particular – the creation of fictional stories : 'C'est

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[665] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Au Pays des sables* (Paris: Edition du Centenaire, 2018), 15.
[666] In this thesis we support the theories of Doubrovsky and Colonna. Criticism of the concept of autofiction has been extensive. For instance, Deleuze wrote: 'Il n'y a pas de littérature sans fabulation, mais, comme Bergson a su le voir, la fabulation, la fonction fabulatrice, ne consiste pas à imaginer ni à projeter un moi'(*Critique et clinique* (Paris : Éditions de Minuit, 1999), 20).
[667] Serge Doubrovsky, *Fils* (Paris: Folio, 2001).
[668] Vincent Colonna, *Autofiction et autres mythomanies littéraires* (Auch: Tristram, 2007), 93.
[669] Ibid.
[670] Ibid., 94.

précisément en raison du caractère évasif de la vie réelle que nous avons besoin du secours de la fiction pour organiser cette dernière rétrospectivement dans l'après-coup'[671]. We return to this idea of coherence of the self through writing, but which this time does not go through explicit writing of the self (like travel writing/autobiography) but through the fictional.

Thus, the short stories written by Eberhardt are often love stories which, nevertheless, allowed her to speak about other themes since they all take place in Algeria (or more widely in North Africa). She was keen to accurately portray a cultural context which involves language since, as in her travel writings, she used a lot of words in Arabic to set the scene for her short stories: 'D'autres fois, les nuits de lune surtout, ils s'en allaient sur les coteaux de Châtir, dormir dans les *liazir* et le *klyl* parfumés'[672]. She wanted to highlight Algerian society by drawing inspiration from her own experiences, which allows us to consider her as an orientalist author[673]. However, it is important to clarify that her short stories are not made only of precise descriptions of the environment. Rather, Eberhardt sought to transmit in her writing something of the order of sensation and of the perceptible. It is an atmospheric, sensory style of writing, which emphasises impression over detail. It could be called an impressionist aesthetic, or even a synesthetic aesthetic, because it seems to want to convey not so much what is seen as what is experienced in the flesh, in the soul, in a state of perception mingled with affect. In the short story 'Yasmina', she wrote: 'C'était une de ces heures d'or livide, troublantes, où tout semble transfiguré, où la lumière même a l'air d'une chose tangible'[674] ; light becomes matter; it is not just described, it is experienced. It is not reality that counts, but the way in which it overwhelms the senses.

Moreover, the common structure that we find in her fiction is that of a tragic end for one of the main characters, most often for the female character. Women are very often looking for more independence or freedom, which they often think they can have through a love affair. Yet, Eberhardt seems to offer a circular effect to her short stories since, often, the final situation recalls the initial one. According to Leila Louise Hadouche Dris, this recurring

[671] Paul Ricoeur, *Soi-même comme un autre* (Paris: Éditions Points, 2015), 192.
[672] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Inédits et textes originaux* (Bibliothèque numérique romande, 2021), 339, https://ebooks-bnr.com/eberhardt-isabelle-inedits-et-textes-originaux.
[673] In this case, the term 'orientalist' means that Eberhardt is an expert in oriental civilizations. It must be differentiated from 'orientalist' as understood in postcolonial studies (definition in chapter 2).
[674] Ibid., p. 79.

structure can be explained by the symbolism of two spaces: the tragic space and the space of fulfilment. The tragic space is that of childhood or that of marriage where there is an absence of protection and happiness. Indeed 'Il y a une importance de la symbolique de l'espace dans les nouvelles : l'espace tragique et l'espace de l'épanouissement. L'espace tragique c'est celui de l'enfance qui n'est pas propice à l'épanouissement car il y a une absence de réconfort'[675]. 'L'espace nuptial fonctionne aussi comme un espace tragique, où on y voit une absence de protection'[676]. Although Eberhardt was happy in her marriage, she denounced the system of forced marriages and highlighted the difficulty of living a love story. For her, writing the self was also talking about others. Her writing goes back and forth between personal experiences and the experiences of others.

Although they assume the form of fictional tales and present seemingly invented characters, Isabelle Eberhardt's short stories almost invariably reflect, however obliquely, the imprint of her own lived experience. Beneath the surface of narrative distance lies a palpable proximity between the author's private life and the fictional figures she conjures: wandering youths, solitary mystics, troubled exiles (often male) who embody fragmented, idealised, or sublimated versions of herself. While her writing does not conform to the strict modern definition of autofiction -where the author, narrator, and protagonist share the same name and deliberately blur the line between truth and invention- her texts nonetheless display its essential features**:** a grounding in personal experience**,** a reframing of the self through fiction, and, above all, a deliberate ambiguity surrounding what is real and what is imagined**.** Through narrative distortion and the deployment of the imaginary, Eberhardt pursues an intimate truth, veiled, transfigured, yet unmistakably present. The term *autofiction* is, of course, anachronistic when applied to her work, as it was coined long after her time. Yet invoking it nonetheless allows for a more nuanced understanding of what her writing reveals: a continuous exploration of identity, oscillating between self and other, between ethnographic observation and mystical reverie. Hers is a literature of doubling, of displacement, of fragmented identity, where fiction becomes the medium through which the self is expressed, without lapsing into mere confession. In short, Isabelle Eberhardt's short stories may not

[675] Leïla Hadouche, *La Construction de soi dans l'écriture littéraire. Le cas d'Isabelle Eberhardt (Bibliothèque Numérique Paris 8* [Online], 2010), 333, https://octaviana.fr/document/156366126#?c=&m=&s=&cv=.
[676] Ibid.

belong to the canon of theorised autofiction, but they clearly embody its spirit: a fractured 'I', disguised and projected into other figures, speaking in subtle, indirect ways of its author.

Since we have discussed tragic space, the space of fulfilment is represented by the change of scenery, by the travel (most often a European who arrives in Algeria) as for example in the short story 'Le Major': 'Tout, dans cette Algérie, avait été une révélation pour lui'[677], '[…] toute l'immense tristesse, tout le mystère qui est le charme de ce pays contentaient son besoin de rêve'[678]. The short story 'Légionnaire' is also a very good example of these two spaces. The character Dmitri Orschanoff (he has a Russian name, reminding us of Eberhardt's origins) is an orphan raised by his uncle. He studied in Geneva and is attracted to travel: 'Il erra en Suisse, en Alsace et en Savoie'[679]. This character suffers from an unstable family base and that is why he wants to join the legion in Africa, he wants to '[…] commencer une autre vie'[680]. Dmitri is a sort of fictional male alter ego of Eberhardt. The space of childhood is not conducive to happiness, so her character has to go to Algeria. The legionnaire status that she offers him in the short story is reminiscent of her brother Augustin who was a legionnaire himself. Moreover, she was very angry with him when he left, leaving her behind in Switzerland. We can also see in this an unconscious revenge on the part of Isabelle who, this time, occupies the male role of the legionnaire who leaves, a role that she would have wanted to have and that she finally obtained through fiction. It is a way of rewriting history as it could have been if she was not a woman, but also perhaps a way to revive her brother through writing. Here, Augustin and Isabelle blend into one and the same character.

Then, the space of fulfillment is created for Dmitri: 'Et c'était sa vie, cette contemplation calme, depuis qu'il avait cru comprendre que nous portons notre bonheur en nous-mêmes et que ce que nous cherchons dans le miroir mobile des choses, c'est notre propre image'[681]. The description of the state of mind of Dmitri in Algeria reminds us of Sufist precepts. He manages to know himself through contemplation and through a nomadic life, he manages to dominate himself and to dominate circumstances. He embodies a form of spiritual

[677] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Au Pays des sables* (Paris: Edition du Centenaire, 2018), 110.
[678] Ibid., 121.
[679] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Inédits et textes originaux* (Bibliothèque numérique romande, 2021), 233, https://ebooks-bnr.com/eberhardt-isabelle-inedits-et-textes-originaux.
[680] Ibid., 235.
[681] Ibid.

success. He finds his place thanks to *vagabondage,* which is of course a parallel with Eberhardt herself: 'Il pouvait donc demeurer dans cette Algérie qu'il aimait, l'élire pour patrie adoptive'[682].

In the short story 'Légionnaire', writing the self through fiction seems to take shape through a male character only, but this is not always the case. First, the writing of the self in fictional writings is not always carried by the main character, but by several characters at the same time in the same short story. Second, female characters are also representative of Eberhardt. Indeed, the portrait of male characters is, most of the time, very succinct and vague, while the female characters seem to carry more complexity and depth. It is through the fictional women that Eberhardt created that she shows to the readers her personal psychological journey. In her book *La Construction de soi dans l'écriture littéraire: le cas d'Isabelle Eberhardt,* Hadouche Dris affirms that Eberhardt used her short stories as '[…] espace de thérapie'[683] where she can express her feminine existence and where she could try to resolve the problematic relationship she had with her mother. Eberhardt showed an ambivalence here, since the figure of the mother is at the same time absent but also the one who must be protected. By breaking away from the linearity of the diary or travelogue, the short stories allow Eberhardt to explore the more subconscious layers of her relationship with absence, filiation and the feminine. 'Il y avait en elle une détresse ancienne, comme un vide d'enfance, une faim de tendresse jamais rassasiée. Elle errait à travers la vie, toujours en quête de quelque chose de perdu'[684], this extract presents a heroine- Eberhardt's alter ego- haunted by an orignal absence, an old wound that shapes her life like an emotional wanderer.

For Hadouche Dris, this ambiguous relationship can be explained because the mother represented the obstacle that separated Eberhardt from the love of a father. In this analysis, Hadouche Dris envisages a Freudian perspective from which we more or less move away. We truly think more that the absence of the father transfers into her relationship with her brother Augustin whom she idolises. However, to return to the ambivalent figure of the mother, we

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[682] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Inédits et textes originaux* (Bibliothèque numérique romande, 2021), 238, https://ebooks-bnr.com/eberhardt-isabelle-inedits-et-textes-originaux.

[683] Leïla Hadouche, *La Construction de soi dans l'écriture littéraire. Le cas d'Isabelle Eberhardt (Bibliothèque Numérique Paris 8* [Online], 2010), 339, https://octaviana.fr/document/156366126#?c=&m=&s=&cv=.

[684] Eberhardt, *Inédits et textes originaux*, 189, https://ebooks-bnr.com/eberhardt-isabelle-inedits-et-textes-originaux.

note a difference between *Journaliers* and fictional writings. Indeed, in her travel writing, her mother is presented as a loved one: '[…] la bonté et la douceur de maman'[685]. While she called her 'maman' early on, she changed for 'Maman' with a capital letter – '[…] et maintenant depuis cinq ans, Maman dort'[686] – just after her death, as a mark of respect and love. However, the representation of the maternal archetype in the short stories of Eberhardt gives a very different image of the mother. As we have already said, the childhood space is not synonymous with happiness. We confirm the idea of Hadouche Dris, who thinks that Eberhardt used fiction to talk about her relationship with her mother, as if she did not dare to talk about it in her more autobiographical writings. It could only be revealed through fictional characters. The mother of most of the characters is not mentioned, also because many of the characters are orphans. In the short stories of Eberhardt, the mother '[…] met au monde et disparaît'[687]. We also observe that none of Eberhardt's female characters want to be a mother. They never evoke this desire. Therefore, femininity is no longer defined by motherhood (which is rare at the time). Eberhardt echoed her absent mother and the lack of love thanks to fictional writings but also through her own way of experiencing her femininity, since she has never been a mother herself, and she never speaks of her envy to have children. Self-reinvention and self-representation, as a woman, are made through love stories and creations of male alter egos, and not through a form of motherhood, whether in lived experience or in fiction writing.

The most autobiographical fictional text of Eberhardt is undoubtedly 'Paradis des eaux' (published in 1904 in *la Dépêche Algérienne*) which should be read alongside the short story 'Le vagabond'. In the latter, the main character is a wanderer who hesitates between love (to stay in Algeria with the woman he lives with) and the call of travel. Later, in the short story 'Paradis des eaux', he is found dying in a zouïa in the south. The wanderer has no name, no identity. The impossibility of identification is interesting since Eberhardt herself did not know her origin, her father being absent. Thus, the main character of this short story is alone, only the sound of a drop of water accompanies him in his last breath: 'Le vagabond ne pouvait

[685] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Inédits et textes originaux* (Bibliothèque numérique romande, 2021), 8, https://ebooks-bnr.com/eberhardt-isabelle-inedits-et-textes-originaux.
[686] Ibid., 238.
[687] Leïla Hadouche, *La construction de soi dans l'écriture littéraire. Le cas d'Isabelle Eberhardt (Bibliothèque Numérique Paris 8* [Online], 2010), 76, https://octaviana.fr/document/156366126#?c=&m=&s=&cv=.

parler, et la goutte tombait toujours, inexorable, sonnant sur le cuivre poli'[688]. If vagrancy represented freedom for Eberhardt, here her character shows the limit of having no family or friends: 'Il était seul, seul dans le recoin de la terre marocaine et seul partout où il avait vécu, partout où il irait toujours. Il n'avait pas de patrie, pas de foyer, pas de famille, ni même d'amis'[689]. Therefore, the situation underlines the absence of family of the author herself. More, the negative enumeration 'pas de patrie, pas de foyer, pas de famille', functions as a systematic negation of all places of stability and sociality. The character's identity is thus constructed in a vacuum, through the rejection or absence of what traditionally defines an individual: national belonging, family structure, anchorage in a community. This resonates with Isabelle Eberhardt's own story: born in Switzerland of uncertain origin, brought up outside bourgeois structures, converted to Islam and naturalised French, she has always cultivated an ambivalent relationship with belonging. Far from being a superficial exoticism, Algeria becomes the symbolic theatre of this dissociation: it is both a land of welcome and a theatre of existential idleness. However, the happiness offered by nomadism – the freedom – is not absent from the short story: 'Être seul c'est être libre, et la liberté était le seul bonheur accessible à la nature du vagabond'[690].

Nevertheless, nature, especially water, is also intended to be sensual: 'Une eau fraîche et limpide coulait le long de son corps et il s'abandonnait voluptueusement à la caresse humide'[691]. Hadouche Dris analyses this from a Freudian point of view and as a symbol of the sexual relationship between the two parents, which would prevent Eberhardt from having a relationship with her father. In this thesis, we rather see the sensuality of certain passages of the water's description as the birth of a fantasy which would help the vagabond to accept his mortality: 'Le silence du désert et le glissement de l'eau claire dans les roseaux avaient peu à peu endormi ses pensées. Il se sentait flotter, sans poids, sans âge, dans une sorte de rêve[692]'. The character floats outside of time and space, as if dissolved in a liquid dream. Water is like a fantasy of dissolution, a way of coming to terms with mortality through a slow, gentle and peaceful sensory evanescence. Moreover, the omnipresence of water could be more linked

[688] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Inédits et textes originaux* (Bibliothèque numérique romande, 2021), 400, https://ebooks-bnr.com/eberhardt-isabelle-inedits-et-textes-originaux.
[689] Ibid., 360.
[690] Ibid., 404.
[691] Ibid., 404.
[692] Ibid., 402.

to amniotic fluid. Indeed, the wanderer finds rest in the water, undoubtedly a return to the maternal womb, since nature in this short story gives birth to '[…] trésors de vie et de fécondité'[693]. Water, even if it can be a destructive force, is therefore never an element that frightens the wanderer: '[…] l'eau bienfaisante'[694], '[…] longues herbes aquatiques, molles et enveloppantes comme des chevelures de femmes'[695], '[…] des cascades légères ruisselaient'[696]. Autofiction once again allows to speak about the maternal figure. Indeed, using fiction permits greater freedom through the form of writing itself but also because it is more of the order of the unconscious, as the French writer Laurent Jenny underlines: 'Le sujet de l'autobiographie entend placer sa parole et son histoire sous le contrôle de sa conscience. A l'inverse, l'autofiction serait en somme une autobiographie de l'inconscient' [697]. This short story is all the more disturbing since Eberhardt, like her character, will die a few years later, in the water.

If the women in the short stories are not mothers, they seem at first to flourish through romantic encounters. However, we find a common structure in the different short stories as the love story is always impossible and followed by a breakup, which plunges the woman into passivity like in 'Yasmina': 'Yasmina, passive, s'abandonnait à son sort…'[698], after she learns that Jacques, the man she loves, is leaving Algeria and will not save her from the forced marriage that awaits her. Despite the departure of Jacques, Yasmina will always love him and wait for him. When she sees him few years later, he is married and loves his wife. Yasmina dies of grief, without any resistance or sign of desire to live, she '[…] n'attendait plus que la mort, résignée déjà à son sort'[699]. The psychological state of Yasmina deteriorates over the pages and the writing bears witness to her changes of mood like in *Journaliers*. Eberhardt used female characters to talk about her instability, her mood swings and her depression as well as to denounce the condition of women in Algeria.

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[693] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Inédits et textes originaux* (Bibliothèque numérique romande, 2021), 401, https://ebooks-bnr.com/eberhardt-isabelle-inedits-et-textes-originaux.
[694] Ibid., 400.
[695] Ibid.
[696] Ibid., 401.
[697] Laurent Jenny, 'L'Autofiction,' *Méthodes et problèmes*, L'Université de Genève, (2003): 3.
[698] Eberhardt, *Inédits et textes originaux*, 98, https://ebooks-bnr.com/eberhardt-isabelle-inedits-et-textes-originaux.
[699] Ibid.

But what about the male characters? So far, they represent nomadism, probably because at that time men are the ones who travel (here in the Western Sahara) but also because Eberhardt became a wanderer thanks to her masculine identity. Thus, her male characters are a metaphor for her alter ego Mahmoud Saadi. The male characters are often described as heroic and echo what Eberhardt would have liked to be or was through her masculine identity. The male characters are generally Europeans and have a critical vision of the colonial system, or at least question this system and try to understand Algerian culture like Jacques in 'Yasmina': 'En ville, Jacques s'acharnait à l'étude de l'arabe algérien... Son ardeur faisait sourire ses camarades'[700]. Like Eberhardt, Jacques refuses to use his French supremacy and does not want to be content with using the language of colonists. It is the same in the short story 'Légionnaire' where Dmitri Orschanoff denounces the disrespectful behavior of Europeans in Africa: 'Les Allemands se levèrent et bousculèrent Dmitri (…) pour la première fois peut-être depuis plusieurs années, Dmitri sentit toute la laideur environnante…'[701], he finds peace in the contemplation of the dunes and other Algerian landscapes. Perhaps we can add that this short story (like others) seems to show the impossibility of the union between the West and the East. Indeed, Eberhardt, as we said previously, insisted on this sad West-East duality and showed us that the two worlds intersect without mixing and all the unhappy love stories between European men and Algerian or Moroccan women illustrate this perfectly. We will notice that the woman is always the loser in the love story, the one who suffers the most; a symbol – as we have said – of the harsh condition of women, but also of the Eastern world (represented by the woman) who loses against Western domination. Thus, Dmitri and Tatani, a Bedouin servant, fell in love but her brother promised her to someone else: 'Tatani fut donnée à Ben-Ziane'[702]. Dmitri and Tatani continue to see each other and live their love in secret. Tatani dies, killed by her husband when he discovers it: 'Il y a Ben-Ziane qui a tué sa femme, Tatani Ben Kaddour, de deux coups de fusil'[703].

The use of different characters to express the self can be seen as a process of polyphony. 'La polyphonie trahit donc la représentation que le locuteur se fait du monde ainsi

[700] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Inédits et textes originaux* (Bibliothèque numérique romande, 2021), 84, https://ebooks-bnr.com/eberhardt-isabelle-inedits-et-textes-originaux.
[701] Ibid., 236.
[702] Ibid., 245.
[703] Ibid., 247.

que la vision qu'il a de lui-même, à travers la manipulation qu'il fait de son discours et de celui de l'autre'[704], though a form of polyphony orchestrated by the same person. Isabelle Eberhardt needed different kind of characters to be able to let go her unconscious and to express different forms of the self. Fictional writing as a component of the writing of the self gives additional depth to narrative identity. That being said, travel writings and fictions are not the only form through which Eberhard represents the self. We must also take into account the correspondences (of Eberhardt but also of David-Néel) in order to have a complete representation of the various writings of the self.

4.c. Epistolary writings: polyphony, the voice of the other as a strategy of self-Representation

'La rencontre de l'autre passe par la rencontre de soi, dérive structurelle de la lettre'[705]

The representation of the self through writing takes the form of travel writings and fiction, but another genre can join the large family of autobiographical writings as well: the epistolary genre. Perceived as an intimate genre by the 19th century and therefore more often associated with the feminine, how have Alexandra David-Néel, Isabella Bird and Isabelle Eberhardt appropriated the codes of the epistolary to highlight the reinvention of the self? First of all, we need to understand the hybrid status of the letter, which makes it a complex and fascinating object of study, since it lies between testimony, archive and autobiography.

Before the 17th century, the epistolary genre was associated with debates on ideas, particularly with figures such as Erasmus of Rotterdam. Indeed, Humanism took hold of the letter, and it was therefore reserved for men. The epistolary genre became a rhetorical exercise in the context of confrontation of humanist ideas. But from the 17th century onwards, women also began to appropriate the epistolary genre. Over time, it gradually distanced itself from the traditions of eloquence and classical rhetoric, ultimately coming to be regarded as a fragmented and unstable literary form. Indeed, women were able to flourish through epistolary since it was no longer a major genre. In the 17th century, women were seen as more

[704] Tassadit Acharchour, *La Quête de l'identité dans le récit*, (thèse.fr, 2016), 133.
[705] Anna Jaubert, 'De l'Écriture de soi à la littérarisation, l'enjeu du style,' *L'épistolaire féminin* (2006): 139.

sensitive and less intellectual than men, so these were the characteristics associated with the letter and the epistolary genre. In the book *Modèles de lettres sur différents sujets* published in 1761, Louis Philipon de la Madelaine writes: 'L'art d'écrire des lettres doit être aussi simple que l'art de converser. La lettre doit être l'expression simple et facile du sentiment et de la pensée'[706]. The instructions are clear: the letter must supposedly not be an exercise in literary style. The epistolary genre is seen by the literary world as a feminine genre because it is intimate and not public: 'Pour elles, privées longtemps de la pratique du littéraire et des genres classiques, elles trouvent dans le genre de la lettre un moyen de s'exprimer, de pénétrer dans la *littérature* et de se libérer intellectuellement'[707]. One example is the Mme de Sévigné who, despite her fame, claims never to have wanted to be an author. But what we also see with Mme de Sévigné is that, if the letter is intended to belong to the intimate sphere, it can therefore detach itself from academic codes. However, as the 17th century progressed, the epistolary genre seemed to become more *mondain*. It was a time when literary salons played an important role in sharing ideas and disseminating cultural fashions. Letters were seen as objects of social refinement. The letters written by Madame de La Fayette contributed to the development of social debates, as did the letters from Madame de Maintenon (secret wife of Louis XIV) who wrote about the education of young girls, showing the attention she payed to worldly mores[708].

In the 19th century, the letter was still linked to intimate writing, but this time it was not so much a conversation between two people – the one who wrote the letter and the one who received it – but rather an intimate reflection on oneself. Indeed, it permits the writer to write about the self while at the same time having a memorial function. The letter can be seen as a testimony of the self. For Sainte Beuve, the letter can be seen as an ethnological document[709]. For Lanson, it is a sociological document[710]. Thus, the letter blurs the categories of literary genres. Epistolary genre can also be born out of a desire to pass on the message and thus generate action in others, as exemplified by George Sand, who wrote many letters

[706] Brigitte Diaz, *L'Épistolaire ou la pensée nomade* (Paris : PUF, 2002), 25.
[707] Khouzeimi Sami, *L'Intéraction épistolaire au XVIIIe siècle*, p. 22, https://theses.hal.science/tel-00965108.
[708] Madame de Maintenon, *Comment la sagesse vient aux jeunes filles* (Paris: Bartillat, 1998).
[709] Sainte-Beuve analysed the correspondence of many writers (e.g.Voltaire). This idea of the letter as an ethnological document can be found in several of his books, notably in *Portraits littéraires,* published in 1844.
[710] Gustave Lanson had an influence on the field of 'critique littéraire' during the XX century, particularly through his interest in social influences and social groups, especially in the epistolary genre. E.g.: Gustave Lanson, *Choix de lettres du XVIIIe siècle* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1901).

to various women to share her experience (as a writer but also as a woman). Flaubert in *Dictionnaire des idées reçues* defined this genre in these terms: 'Genre épistolaire : genre de style exclusivement réservé aux femmes'[711]. Even in the 19th century, the letter retained its reputation as a feminine genre. This is also what Brigitte Diaz explained in *L'Épistolaire ou la pensée nomade* published in 2002: 'On verra qu'au XVIIIe, et même encore au XIXe siècle, les femmes qui veulent écrire auront recours bien plus souvent que les hommes à la forme épistolaire : non pas en raison de quelques mystérieux tropisme féminin, mais parce qu'elle reste alors la seule modalité d'expression située aux frontières mouvantes de la littérature qui soit concédée sans réserve aux femmes'[712].

However, if it is intended to be a genre of intimacy, we have seen that women do exist in the public arena thanks to their letters. There is a paradox between the intimate being who writes the letter and the writer who wants to be published and therefore exist publicly. Consequently, another question arises: who are we truly writing to when we write a letter? In one of her letters written in 1774 (19th of september), Mme Roland writes to her friend Sophie: 'Ne te félicite pas de recevoir si souvent de mes nouvelles, ce n'est pas pour toi que j'écris, quoique ce soit à toi que je m'adresse'[713]. Is the receiver just a pretext for writing to oneself? According to Vincent Kaufmann in *L'Équivoque épistolaire*, 'la lettre semble favoriser la communication et la proximité ; en fait, elle disqualifie toute forme de partage et produit une distance grâce à laquelle le texte littéraire peut advenir'[714]. Beneath the guise of intimacy and address, the letter is less a site of genuine exchange than a space of deliberate withdrawal. Behind the illusion of closeness, it establishes a necessary distance from the other, from the world- through which writing transcends mere communication and becomes literature. It is within this interval between voices, this hushed silence of deferred response, that the text emerges: freed from reciprocity, it rises into an autonomous form. In this context, the letter becomes a disguised monologue, a space for the subject to construct itself. This is the case for Isabella Bird, who used her sister primarily as a receptacle for a staged autobiography. Nevertheless, the recipient remains essential, as the letter could not exist without them. Some writers also see the receiver of the letter as a crucial element since they defined themselves for the receiver and by the receiver. In *Dits et écrits*, Michel Foucault defined the letter as an

[711] Gustave Flaubert, *Dictionnaire des idées reçues* (Paris: Le livre de poche, 1997), 55.
[712] Brigitte Diaz, *L'Épistolaire ou la pensée nomade* (Paris: PUF, 2002), 20.
[713] Marie-Jeanne, Roland, *Lettres de Madame Roland, 1788-1793* (London: Forgotten Books, 2018), 224.
[714] Vincent Kaufmann, *L'Équivoque épistolaire* (Paris: Les éditions de minuit, 1990), 45.

'[…]ouverture qu'on donne à l'autre sur soi-même'[715]. Therefore, the other has a role to play in the reinvention of the self, whether this reinvention is done through the journey or its narrative. In fact, what Foucault says about the letter brings us back to the idea of the validation of identity or social recognition, during and after the journey for Bird, David-Néel and Eberhardt. Yet during the journey, this external validation is carried out by locals (Tibetans or Algerians), the letter is different in that it is carried out by relatives or friends in the country of birth of the writers (at least for Bird and David-Néel). While narrative identity tends to remain anchored in the homeland, the self-forged through travel grows from the soil of foreign lands.

Brigitte Diaz joins Foucault in asserting that the correspondent actively participates in the writing of the self by being *le récepteur-réceptacle*. Indeed, 'le regard d'autrui que la lettre sollicite interdit au scripteur de se suturer frileusement dans son propre discours'[716]. The new idea explained by Diaz is that the existence of a correspondent allows the writing not to be closed in on itself and to regulate itself more naturally. Thereby, the practice of letter writing could be considered as *l'événement créativement productif*, in the Bakhtinian sense of the term, since '[…] ce rapport d'une conscience à une autre conscience est caractérisée justement par son altérité'[717]. What roles do Alexandra David-Néel and Isabelle Eberhardt give to their correspondents? Is writing the self through travel writings similar to writing the self through letters? This is what we will try to find out in this subsection, focusing only on David-Néel and Eberhardt since Isabella Bird only wrote letters that we have already analysed. Therefore, we cannot compare her letters with another form of writing since she wrote neither fiction nor a non-epistolary autobiography.

We do not know for certain that Eberhardt wanted to publish her travel writings, but she did tell each of her correspondents: 'Conserve ces quelques lettres où j'ai réussi parfois à mettre un peu de mon âme'[718], reminding us that for her, writing is a form of therapy, a way of getting to know herself and finding a coherence in herself, but also a testimony that can be

[715] Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits*, tome 4 (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), 17.
[716] Brigitte Diaz, *L'Épistolaire ou la pensée nomade* (Paris: PUF, 2002), 148.
[717] Jelena Jovicic, *L'Intime épistolaire (1850-1900) : genre et pratique culturelle* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 15.
[718] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits intimes ; lettres aux trois hommes les plus aimés* (Paris: Éditions Payot et rivage, 2023), 15.

published. The letter also seems to mirror Eberhardt's personality, as it is a fluid, transitional space where thoughts are never fully fixed, much like her identity, which remains in constant motion. Hence, she mainly wrote letters to the three men of her life: her brother Augustin, her best friend Ali and her lover Slimène. Although many of her letters disappeared in the flood – especially those from Ali – we still have access to some of them thanks to Victor Burrucand, a friend of Eberhardt.

What distinguishes Eberhardt's correspondence is the way she momentarily sets aside her male alter ego, allowing the woman she was to emerge more openly, despite notable continuities with the voice found in her travel narratives and fictional writings. In fact, Eberhardt wrote a lot of love letters and showed us a part of herself that corresponded more closely to the criteria of femininity of her time. Although each of them is about love, the three men represented different things for her: her brother represented her past from which she had to break away as well as also being her masculine version; Ali was a symbol for her religious conversion and Slimène represented a form of stability for her. One question remains: is there an underlying hierarchical relationship, given that she is a woman who only writes to men? We will see that this balance of power existed, as we will see a form of passivity on the part of Isabelle Eberhardt, who was desperately waiting for answers from Augustin and Slimène, and then that she always defended her ideas and gave her opinion on various subjects with fervour, using the letter as a reminder of her faith and her principles of life. With her confidant Ali it was different because, even though he knew she was a woman, she sometimes signed her letters in the masculine. What changes here is not so much the attitude and expectations of the one who receives the letter but the stance that the writer agrees to take. The letter allowed Eberhardt to define herself through the eyes of the other and also through the way she saw herself in the relationship she created with the other. We will therefore analyse various letters of Eberhardt and see that, unlike David-Néel, she does not write for her future readers but rather for her correspondents.

The epistolary correspondence with Augustin began when he left for Algeria to join the Legion in 1895. He rarely gave any news and fell into drugs and alcoholism: 'Il faut être sérieux

à présent et cessé absolument, une fois pour toutes, de te bercer de douces illusions'[719]. For her, who was still in Switzerland but dreamt of elsewhere, her brother had the freedom she hoped one day to have, but he was ruining it: 'Reste à présent en Algérie, profite de l'occasion ultime entre toutes, et sauve tout'[720]. In these letters, the main subject is Augustin. The only time Eberhardt speaks about her own feelings is when she is worried about the life of her brother, and the difficulty that she has to live without him. The life of Augustin was so unstable that Eberhardt had to be a pillar of strength: 'Compte sur moi toujours et en tout. Je ne te lâcherai jamais'[721]. This gives the image of a woman who worries like a mother or a wife, offering unfailing support and acts as a psychological stability for her brother, which can be surprising when we know Eberhardt through her travel writings. She writes in another letter: 'Réfléchis et décide-toi à faire comme moi, à changer radicalement ton ancien genre de vie si morbide, tous ces excitants et etc.'[722] ; the situation of her brother provides a contrast with her own life. She does not talk about Islam yet, but she seems to have a sort of inner peace that Augustin does not have. She represented herself as an example for her brother. Thereby, by highlighting her interlocutor and his life, she is also talking about herself, even if she is not yet the main subject of her writing.

Consequently, the beginning of their exchange was mainly about the despair of Augustin, which had repercussions for Isabelle Eberhardt. She gradually wrote less and less to her brother. We can see an interesting new exchange of letters in 1900, in which Eberhardt became much more assertive. At that point, she was not the young girl who lived in Switzerland, she was then living in Algeria and she was Sufi. She now used the letter to assert her new identity: 'Parmi les cavaliers, tu en verrais un, monté sur un fougueux petit alezan doré… Le cavalier, vêtu de gandouras et de burnous blancs, d'un haut turban blanc à voile, portant à son cou le chapelet noir des Kadria, la main droite bandée avec un mouchoir rouge pour mieux tenir les brides, ce sera Mahmoud Saadi, fils adoptif du grand Cheikh blanc, fils de Sidi Brahim'[723]. Thanks to this quotation we can see that the writing of the self even allows the creation of a genealogy and makes the birth of the new identity – her masculine alter ego

[719] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits intimes ; lettres aux trois hommes les plus aimés* (Paris: Éditions Payot et rivage, 2023), 61.
[720] Ibid.
[721] Ibid., 62.
[722] Ibid., 64.
[723] Ibid., 74.

– even more real. Letters are an integral part of the creation of the narrative identity. Thus, the evolution of identity in the letter – from worried woman to Algerian rider – confirms the statements of Brigitte Diaz: 'On mesure aisément combien la relation épistolaire a pu jouer de cette double intimité, sollicitant tout à la fois celle que l'on partage avec l'alter ego auquel on s'adresse, et plus encore celle que l'on entretient avec soi-même grâce à ce détour par l'autre'[724]. The relationship with Augustin evolved as her relationship with herself did.

The affirmation of her Muslim identity is done through the exchange she had with Ali Abdul Wahad, her first Muslim correspondent and heir to one of the greatest aristocratic families in Tunisia. At first, she wrote to him because she had questions about Islam. As often, her faith guided encounters, even epistolary ones. She signed her first letters that she sent to him with the name: 'N. Podolinsky'. Then, quickly after their first exchanges – more specifically in August 1897 – she invited him to Bône. Here is what Ali had to say about this meeting: 'Je ne chercherai pas à d'écrire l'étonnement qui me saisit au débarcadère lorsque, au lieu de serrer la main d'un Mahmoud, je me trouvai en présence d'une jeune fille'[725]. She introduced herself as a man but still did not dress like one. The letter is a space that allowed Eberhardt to explore her masculine identity. Ali has no link with her past or family, it was then possible to present herself under the identity she wanted. Therefore, the letter is a space where she felt safe, enough to create a narrative identity that did not yet correspond to her life, but which was the first step towards what she aspired to become. It also allows a first contact with Ali, who might not have helped her if he had known she was a woman from the start. She begins to construct what she calls *l'identité rêvée* by playing with gender: 'Votre ami Podolinsky'[726], and then in the same letter 'je vous ai même fait un aveu qu'il en coûte généralement à une femme de faire'[727]; and by becoming Muslim '[…] le respect et l'amour que, tous deux, nous portons à l'Islam'[728]. Ali became the correspondent who made all this possible.

The various themes that we can find in her letters to Ali are very similar to those in her travel writings. She talked to him about her torments that finally became the main subject of

[724] Brigitte Diaz, *L'Épistolaire ou la pensée nomade* (Paris: PUF, 2002), 32.
[725] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits intimes ; lettres aux trois hommes les plus aimés* (Paris: Éditions Payot et Rivage, 2023), 75.
[726] Ibid., 76.
[727] Ibid., 77.
[728] Ibid.

her own writing, as in *Journaliers*: 'Toute ma vie n'est que contrastes et oppositions'[729]. Another point in common with her travel writings is writing as therapy. We saw previously that her travel writings or fictional writings inspired by her life helped Eberhardt on her psychological journey. The letters to Ali were also part of this process. She wrote:

> Peut-être avez-vous deviné déjà que, chez moi, l'ambition de me faire un nom et une position par ma plume (chose en laquelle je n'ai guère confiance, d'ailleurs et que je n'espère pas même atteindre), que cette ambition est au second plan. J'écris, parce que j'aime le processus de création littéraire. J'écris, comme j'aime, parce que telle est ma destinée, probablement. Et c'est ma seule vraie consolation. C'est aussi la seule chose, Ali, qui, dans mon très sombre passé, m'ait empêché de sombrer définitivement… Vous voyez avec quelle entière franchise je vous ai parlé, vous disant des choses que je ne dirai certes jamais à personne d'autre[730].

When she writes 'vous disant des choses que je ne dirai certes jamais à personne', she made it clear that what she explained had to remain between her and him, giving Ali a very important role. We rediscover the primary function of the letter, which is a place of confession and intimacy. The fact that the reader can finally have access to this confession gives them the impression of discovering a secret and makes this information even more sacred. However, for Eberhardt, this was not a mastery of literary codes but a sincere confession. Unlike David-Néel, she did not see the letter as a possible strategy for existing in the literary world.

Ali helped Eberhardt to confirm what she wanted to be. She was '[…] fille du hasard et élevée au milieu de l'incrédulité et du malheur'[731] then 'j'attribue ma venue en pays musulman à la volonté auguste de Dieu qui a, sans doute, voulu me sauver un jour des ténèbres des ignorants'[732]. Ali also became the witness to Eberhardt's knowledge of the Muslim world: '[…] que la paix soit avec vous et que la miséricorde de Dieu vous comble.(…) Année 1897, le 15 mai. Année 1314 de l'hégire'[733]. Mention of both calendars shows mastery of both cultures: Western and Muslim. As a reader, her letters give us a better understanding of her actions. While we may sometimes have doubted the sincerity of her Algerian costume and seen it as a simple disguise, the letter she wrote to Ali in 1897 testifies to her great sincerity: 'Pour en revenir à l'Islam (…) faut-il oui ou non me mettre à jouer le rôle d'un docteur Grenier féminin,

[729] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits intimes ; lettres aux trois hommes les plus aimés* (Paris: Éditions Payot et Rivage, 2023), 88.
[730] Ibid., 89.
[731] Ibid., 94.
[732] Ibid.
[733] Ibid., 57.

qui semble supposer que l'habit fait le moine et que revêtir un burnous ou une ferrachia de femme veut dire être musulman ? Vous-même avez dit qu'il n'y avait pas besoin de se déguiser en Arabe pour être Musulman'[734]. She rejects all forms of theatricality. While she presents Ali with a strong, masculine, and Muslim side of herself, this is not what comes across in the letters she sends to her husband.

In the previous chapters, we argued that Eberhardt revealed a more feminine and traditional personality when talking to Slimène, which their correspondence confirms. This gives rise to a more sensual style of writing: 'Je dois vite, vite me guérir pour partir et aller te rejoindre, toi sans lequel je me sens absolument incapable de vivre'[735] and 'je me suis senti l'envie folle de m'échapper et de courir te rejoindre à Guémar, rien que pour t'embrasser encore'[736]and 'je ne pense qu'à toi, et si la vie ne m'est pas tout à fait impossible, c'est que je sais que tu reviendras bientôt auprès de moi et *Inch'Allah* pour ne plus me quitter'[737]. As she did with her brother Augustin, she was no longer the subject of her writing when she sent letters to her husband. Her whole life could be read through the prism of the love she had for him. However, her belonging to the Arab world was still perceived in their correspondence, since she sometimes wrote to him in Arabic and sometimes in French. The mixture of Arabic and French shows her multicultural nomadism, as we can see in the following letter, where the Arabic signs noted at the bottom mean kisses in Arabic:

[734] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits intimes ; lettres aux trois hommes les plus aimés* (Paris: Éditions Payot et Rivage, 2023), 95.
[735]Ibid., 305.
[736] Ibid.
[737] Ibid., 349.

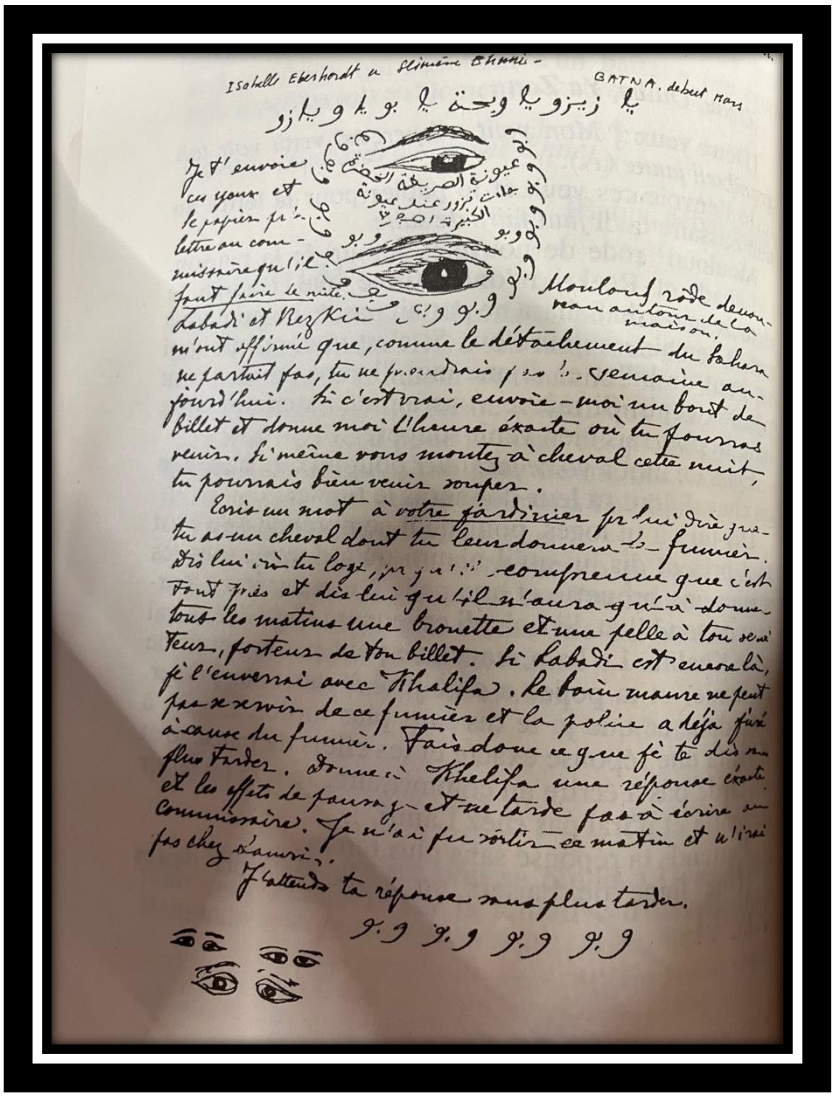

Illustration n°2[738]

Notably, this correspondence reveals more of Isabella than of Mahmoud Saadi, highlighting the notion of *identité plurielle*. In a letter from 1901 she wrote in Marseille 'je suis bien résolue à être désormais pour toi une compagne soumise et sage. Tu verras et tu apprécieras toi-même ce changement dès mon retour'[739], giving readers an image of her different from that of *Journaliers*. We find a common point between the letters she wrote to Slimène and those she wrote to Augustin, notably in the worry and the impatient waiting for news: 'Tu ne m'as rien écrit. Où veux-tu que je prenne du courage pour supporter la misère,

[738] Isabelle, Eberhardt, *Untitled*, *Écrits intimes; lettres aux trois hommes les plus aimés* (Paris: Éditions Payot et rivage, 2023), 12.
[739] Ibid., 334.

la solitude et tous les chagrins que tu sais ?'[740] and 'je ne vis que par et pour toi'[741]. The rare moments when she talks about something else than the love she feels for him, is when she talks about her writings or her translations: 'Je continue mon travail russe; j'aurais sous peu une 100aine de pages'[742]. If these are above all love letters, she, as for Augustin, showed that she could be an example to follow for her husband. Indeed, in July 1901 she received a letter from Slimène in which it was clear he was drunk: 'Ce n'est pas dans l'absinthe que je cherche la consolation (…). C'est dans la réflexion et la foi. Tu devrais suivre mon exemple au lieu de te laisser aller'[743]. Faith helped her find a balance that neither her brother nor her husband seems to have found, probably because they did not respect religious precepts enough, at least that is what she seemed to say: 'Tu te laisses entrainer par l'exemple des incrédules, des pseudo-musulmans'[744]. Despite her saying previously that she would be a submissive wife, she asserted herself more and more by giving her opinion and making numerous accusations to Slimène. In the letters, she speaks of herself in feminine terms, whereas in her travel writings she is mostly defined in masculine terms: 'Pourquoi est-ce que je ne faiblis pas moi ? pourquoi, moi, "faible femme", je tiens bon, je lutte en désespérée'[745], but even in feminine terms she shows a moral strength that stands out from that of her husband. As with Augustin, the contrast between the two lifestyles serves to highlight Eberhardt. Her husband barely responded but eventually joined her in Marseille to marry her. Their correspondence ended like this. The same year she stopped to write to her brother – 'Augustin s'est effacé de ma vie'[746] – and she would also no longer have correspondences with anyone else. The letters show different aspects of the young Swiss woman and are a kind of autobiographical puzzle, reminiscent of *Journaliers* in which Eberhardt was not afraid to sketch out a disjointed identity made up of moments of rupture.

Alexandra David-Néel wanted to exist in the European intellectual sphere. When she wrote – novels, travel writings or letters – she always had in mind that she would be read by a large number of people. Indeed, her writing corresponds to the idea developed by Judith

[740] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Écrits intimes ; lettres aux trois hommes les plus aimés* (Paris: Éditions Payot et Rivage, 2023), 353.
[741] Ibid.
[742] Ibid.
[743] Ibid., 373.
[744] Ibid., 369.
[745] Ibid.
[746] Ibid., 427.

Butler in *Le Récit de soi*: 'Souvenons-nous que l'on rend compte de soi à un autre'[747]. But in the letter, who is the other? She had to take into account her direct correspondent and also her readers. For David-Néel, the letter was an important means of expression that complemented her literary work. Actually, the comfortable virtuality of the correspondent enabled her to look back on her own life, as we shall see from her correspondence with her husband Philippe. They married on 4th of August 1904, and from 1911 to 1941 she travelled abroad, far away from him. Their whole relationship was based on epistolary correspondence. In this case we can think that: 'La valence éthique de la situation ne se restreint donc pas à la question de savoir si oui ou non je rends compte de moi-même de manière adéquate, mais de savoir si, en le faisant, j'établis une relation avec celui à qui je m'adresse'[748]. Indeed, this was particularly evident at the beginning of their epistolary relationship: she frequently spoke of 'us', showed interest in his activities, and attempted to identify shared hobbies. As Anne McCall Saint Saëns explained in *De l'Être en lettres*: 'Une fois encore, l'étiquette épistolaire pousse plus à l'imitation qu'à l'originalité. Les correspondants sont tenus de puiser leurs sujets dans un vivier commun au lieu de les choisir à leur gré, si tant est qu'ils espèrent contenter leurs destinataires'[749]. The life of David-Néel became so different and detached from the one of Philippe that this letter-writing process was hard to maintain. We will also see that she used the letter more as a record of her journey and as a place of memory for her great adventure.

First of all, the letters of David-Néel contain thoughts on marriage. Since their relationship was far from traditional, she was aware of the difficulties that this could engender: '[…] je suis encore moins, peut-être la femme qu'il t'aurait fallu'[750] and she writes about marriage that '[…] ce fut une folie sans doute, mais elle est faite'[751]. By emphasising the negative aspects of the situation, David-Néel showed empathy for her husband who was, at first, averse to her projects. It was also a way of putting herself in the shoes of the readers of the time, for whom this situation was unthinkable. By partially agreeing with them, she shows her pedagogical skills and prepares the ground to develop her point of view. She wanted her marriage with Philippe to develop into '[…] un rapprochement d'esprit'[752] (letter of 15th August

[747] Judith Butler, *Le Récit de soi* (Paris: PUF, 2007), 51.
[748] Ibid.
[749] Anne McCall Saint-Saens, *De l'Être en lettres: l'autobiographie épistolaire de George Sand* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996), 19.
[750] Alexandra David Néel, *Correspondance avec son mari: Édition intégrale 1904-1941* (Paris: Plon, 2016), 38.
[751] Ibid.
[752] Ibid., 55.

1906), which did not seem possible in a more traditional relationship. To support her idea, she talks about her parents: 'Mon ami si tu savais la terreur que j'ai d'une existence comme celle de mes parents : deux statues qui sont restées plus de cinquante ans en face l'une de l'autre aussi étrangères maintenant que le premier jour'[753]. This comparison is doubly interesting, as it provides a critique of traditional marriage that is also found in her feminist texts: 'Quelle énorme quantité de jeunes filles ne grandit pas avec, pour unique rêve, la rencontre du prince charmant ? (…) Ne vaudrait-il pas mieux les élever tout simplement pour être des femmes intelligentes et énergiques, aptes au mariage s'il se rencontre, ne restant pas à jamais désemparées s'il se rompt un jour et sachant s'en passer au besoin'[754]. This letter is also autobiographical, since she refers to her family and shows a picture of the environment in which she grew up.

Through her unusual relationship with Philippe, she continued to express her feminist ideas. For her, marriage should be based on philosophical exchange and freedom. The letter became the space for an intellectual encounter between her and her husband. According to Fanny Martin Quatremare, David-Néel wants '[…] une anarchie des liens du mariage'[755]. But marriage is not the only theme the letters are about. Indeed, through correspondence, David-Néel insisted on the ability of women to do the same as men: 'Où sont les beaux faiseurs de discours sur la fragilité féminine, l'éternelle blessée de ce bon M. Michelet[756]… Quelles anneries !'[757], she wrote this to Philippe after a long and difficult hike in China where the sun burned the skin of her face. Then, she used the same arguments as in her feminist essay, explaining that what prevents women from doing what men do is not their abilities or skills but motherhood. She tried to imagine if she had had a son: '[…] il serait à la guerre, mort peut-être ; et, dans tous les cas je ne déambulerais pas à travers la Chine. Ce serait peut-être lui le voyageur et moi, la bonne vieille maman, je pourrais, au coin de mon feu, lire les récits qu'il m'écrirait, je n'aurais pas de vie propre, je ne serais rien qu'une ombre ayant mis au monde un vivant'[758]and 'le monde n'est pas si beau que l'on puisse désirer créer des êtres pour les y

[753] Alexandra David Néel, *Correspondance avec son mari: Édition intégrale 1904-1941* (Paris: Plon, 2016), 45.
[754] Alexandra David-Néel, *Le Féminisme rationnel* (Paris: Nuits Rouges, 2000), 61.
[755] Fanny Martin Quatremare, 'Les Débuts difficiles d'un mariage épistolaire entre Alexandra et Philippe Néel,' *Çédille, revista de estudios franceses*, 2019, 19.
[756] Alexandra David-Néel alludes to the book *La Femme* by Michelet (Paris: Flammarion, 1993), written in 1830.
[757] David Néel, *Correspondance avec son mari: Édition intégrale 1904-1941*, 513.
[758] Ibid., 514.

placer'[759]. We can see here another interesting parallel with *Le Féminisme rationnel* (1909) which contains a chapter called 'La maternité, voilà l'obstacle': 'La maternité est l'obstacle qui s'est opposé à ce que nous demeurions les libres associées des hommes dans les Sociétés'[760]. Thus, the letters she wrote to Philippe were both the place where their love grew and the place where she could express her ideas. In regard to this, we can add another function to the letters: that of a diary.

David-Néel wanted to control her image and insisted in being an adventurer. The letters served as a record of her extraordinary adventure and her husband became the guardian of it: 'Conserve mes lettres dans lesquelles je te donne des détails sur les pays que je parcours et les gens que j'y vois. (…) ne converse que celles qui pourront me servir d'aide-mémoire pour la confection d'un ouvrage de voyage, les autres où je te raconte que je souffre d'entérocolite ou que je suis sans le sou n'ont qu'un intérêt très momentané, brûle-les'[761] (23th January 1920). She clearly expressed the purpose of her letters: some of her letters were outlets and directly addressed to Philippe, others were notes that would allow her to write a book. Regarding the letters where she showed herself more vulnerable, she told her husband that he should burn them, as if this version of herself had to disappear, as if this aspect of her was not interesting. Unlike Eberhardt, who openly discussed her depression and doubts, David-Néel consciously curated the aspects of herself she chose to reveal. Thus, two visions of writing are presented and used by David-Néel: writing as necessity and therapy (letters that must be burned) and writing as memory. Therefore, she always wrote where she was so that the letters served as a witness to her itinerary, for example in the year 1912: 'Départ en auto à 8h30 pour Chinsurah, une vieille ville, ancienne colonie hollandaise'[762], 'je suis partie le 6 de Karponang pour Changu'[763] and 'j'ai quitté Gongtok, il y a trois jours, pour le nord du Sikkim'[764]. Thereby, unlike Eberhardt, she is from the beginning the subject of her own writing. Philippe becomes a double, a way of stimulating her own writing and self-analysis.

[759] Alexandra David-Néel, *Correspondance avec son mari: Édition intégrale 1904-1941* (Paris: Plon, 2016), 586
[760] Alexandra David-Néel, *Le Féminisme rationnel* (Paris: Nuits Rouges, 2000), 26.
[761] David Néel, *Correspondance avec son mari: Édition intégrale 1904-1941*, 586.
[762] Ibid., 128.
[763] Ibid., 159.
[764] Ibid., 161.

For David-Néel, epistolary correspondence also offered the possibility of retracing her life and analysing her past with the aim of explaining her current identity. The events of her childhood were read through the prism of the present to justify the fact that she was so independent and adventurous. She wrote to her husband about her own mother: 'Tout en moi lui déplaît, comme tout lui déplaisant en mon père. Je lui ressemble tant !'[765] and 'toi tu as eu une vie d'enfant, tu as joué, tu as été heureux (…). Moi, je n'ai rien eu, rien qu'un orgueil qui était mon refuge' [766]. She sought a coherence of the self through the writing of the past. However, she also liked to show that she had managed to completely detach herself from her environment, to justify her reinvention. In Eberhardt's case, the imagined identity was one entirely severed from the past. She wrote while in Lachen, in the Kingdom of Sikkim: 'Je me rends bien compte, qu'il est plus que singulier que, née Parisienne, élevée dans une grande ville par des parents qui étaient tout autre chose que des chemineaux ou des poètes, je sois douée de cette mentalité si étrangère à mon milieu'[767].

Thus, this new identity must be shaped through different practices – which we have seen during this thesis – but it also exists in the writing to be shown to readers. The letter became a play for Alexandra David-Néel to perform. Philippe was turned into a spectator. If her first self-portraits were negative, like this one in a letter in 1904: 'Je ne suis pas jolie, je ne suis pas gaie, je ne suis pas une femme, l'on ne saurait s'amuser auprès de moi'[768] ; she liked to describe herself as an adventurer – '[…] j'ai la peau de la figure toute brûlée'[769] – or as a Buddhist since she explained in a letter of 1914 that she was wearing '[…] la robe consacrée'[770] during a ritual, which shows that the Buddhists accepted her into their community[771]. Her letters are a strategy of validation by the community of her readers. When arriving in Pakyong in 1912, she wrote: 'Ce matin j'ai prêché dans un monastère, comme je te l'avais annoncé ! oh ! certes il y en a qui sont beaucoup plus érudits que moi en religion asiatiques, mais il n'y en a pas beaucoup qui aient pénétré si près de leur intimité'[772]. It is yet another way for her to insist on her spiritual sincerity but also on the exceptionality of her journey, like when she

[765] Alexandra David-Néel, *Correspondance avec son mari: Édition intégrale 1904-1941* (Paris: Plon, 2016), 152.
[766] Ibid.
[767] Ibid., 365.
[768] Ibid., 37.
[769] Ibid., 367.
[770] Ibid.
[771] Even if there is a form of theatricalization in her writing, the wearing of the Buddhist robe is not a role that she plays, it is a sincere act as explained in the subsection about David-Néel and Buddhism.
[772] Ibid., 193.

said that 'le fait de rester en relation avec un Dalaï Lama est une aubaine que nombre d'orientalistes m'envieront'[773]. The use of the future 'm'envieront', shows that she travelled and wrote while thinking about her return to France and the status she wanted to have in the European intellectual sphere. That being said, it is because she wrote for her husband and for her French readers that she sometimes made references to life in France. For example, in this letter from 14th July 1918, when she visited Kum-Bum '14 juillet. Fête nationale, j'y pense en écrivant la date. Triste fête chez nous ! l'ennemi dévastant notre pays !'[774].

For Alexandra David-Néel, the letter was a working laboratory which allowed self-analysis, affirmation of her identity, affirmation of her feminist ideas and which permitted to complete her literary and orientalist work. In addition to participating in narrative identity, the letter has a memorial function. Moreover, we can speak of a phenomenological exploration of the self through the letter since the way David-Néel and Eberhardt used it was close to the function of a diary, describing all types of lived situations. Although David-Néel and Eberhardt had several uses for the letter, as we have seen, it is interesting to see that for David-Néel it was mainly used as a self-portrait, whereas Eberhardt used it more as a form of therapy. For Isabella Bird, who based all her literary work on the epistolary genre, the letter was a way of constructing a public image thanks to a genre that is intended to be intimate. In all three cases, 'la communication épistolaire a ceci d'idéal qu'on s'y adresse à un autre imaginaire, non pas tel qu'en lui-même, mais tel qu'on le rêve'[775], which allows great freedom in writing. Also, whether letters, fictions or travel writings, Isabella Bird, Alexandra David-Néel and partially Isabelle Eberhardt, decided to publish their writings. Thus, the desire for publication and the reception of their texts by their readers must be considered during this analysis of self-representation. This is what we will try to understand in the next subsection.

[773] Alexandra David-Néel, *Correspondance avec son mari: Édition intégrale 1904-1941* (Paris: Plon, 2016), 191.
[774] Ibid.
[775] Brigitte Diaz, *L'Épistolaire ou la pensée nomade* (Paris: PUF, 2002), 59.

4.d. Pseudonym and publication strategies: existing in the public sphere

'Devant le papier, l'artiste *se fait*' [776]

Whether it is autobiography, travel writings or autofiction, a book also exists because it finds its place in the public sphere. Therefore, the representation of the self is also made for and by the readers. Indeed, we have already mentioned the idea of a *pacte de verité* which exists between writers and their readers as shown by this quote from the theorist Philippe Lejeune in *Le Pacte autobiographique*: 'Ce qui définit l'autobiographie pour celui qui la lit, c'est avant tout un contrat d'identité qui est scellé par le nom propre'[777]. He questions the idea of veracity of the autobiographic text and more specifically the veracity of the name. Thus, this statement will allow us to broach the question of pseudonym, especially important for Isabelle Eberhardt. Does giving the self to read to others mean removing the social mask, including that of false names? Of course, as we have already mentioned, what seems real (name or story) is in reality also partly fiction and vice versa. What is interesting to understand in this subchapter is rather the conscious choices of publication strategies decided by Isabella Bird, Alexandra David-Néel and, to a certain extent, Isabelle Eberhardt. Hence, the representation of the self in the public sphere goes through the name used as author, the title of the book, the paratexts, the use of different media (books but also newspapers and conferences) … and so forth. All these strategies around publication and self-representation are even more important when it comes to women wishing to exist in an environment – especially in the 19th and 20th centuries – which is exclusively masculine. This is what Eberhardt confirmed about the world of journalism: 'En France il faut être française pour vivre du journalisme et avoir, comme on me l'a dit et ce que je n'ai pas voulu, un amant dans les journaux'[778], 'malgré tout ,les français sont très pot-au-feu, et ils aiment la femme cuisinière. La femme de lettres est pour eux un phénomène inutile'[779]. In addition to being women, the nationality of Eberhardt, David-Néel and Bird (Swiss, French and British) meant that their readers and publishers undoubtedly expected a form of orientalism and exoticism from them, in order to correspond

[776] Mallarmé, to Eugène de Lefébure, 18 février 1865 in Stéphane, Mallarmé, *Correspondance complète, 1862-1871. Lettres sur la poésie, 1872-1898* (Paris : Folio Classique,1995), 227.
[777] Philippe Lejeune, *Le Pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Points, 1996), 33.
[778] Isabelle Eberhardt, *Lettres et journaliers* (Paris: Babel, 2003), 121.
[779] Ibid, 122.

to the expectations of the time. This was especially the case of Bird, as we have already mentioned in chapter 2. In the following, we will analyse her different publication strategies more closely.

Like David-Néel who had chosen *Voyage d'une Parisienne à Lhassa* as a title of her book, Bird wanted to be identifiable as European even before the reader starts reading her book *The English woman in America* published in 1856. What about her best-known book *Unbeaten tracks in Japan*[780]*?* 'For women traveller, experience is staged three times: in the actual journey, the rewriting of this journey as travelogue, and the reader's consumption and interpretation of this account'[781]; therefore, we can assume that Bird had given meticulous thought to all the details of her books, particularly the drawings and engravings that accompany them. Indeed, in the first edition of 1880, we can find this drawing of Bird wearing Japanese clothes, more precisely a *mino* (蓑) or a traditional Japanese raincoat made out of rice straw. It was made to cover the entire body for workers in the rice fields and for travellers.

[780] This book was published in two volumes in 1880 by John Murray.
[781] Dúnlaith Bird, *Travelling in Different Skins: Gender identity in European Women's Oriental Travelogues, 1850-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 84.

Illustration n°3[782]

Through this drawing, she decided to use the process of theatricalization of the self and to correspond to the orientalism desired by her public. With her thin and small body, she really looks like a Japanese and she is not perceived as a European anymore. Hence, behind orientalism perhaps this is the symbol of Bird wanting to hide behind a costume, to wear a mask in order to have access to a freedom impossible to access in Victorian society. This idea can be confirmed by the size of the hat which hides her face, as if she wanted to disappear. For Dúnlaith Bird, this drawing allows Isabella Bird to conceal '[…] the mark of her femininity'[783] and at the same time is a way of invoking '[…] the power of unchanging British femininity'[784]. By wearing Japanese clothes while affirming a British identity in the book, she represents a cross-cultural motion. This strategy also shows us that women writers want to

[782] Isabella, Bird, *Self-portrait in Japanese straw raincoast. Unbeaten Tracks in Japan*, 1880, *Travelling in Different Skins : Gender identity in Women's Oriental Travelogues, 1850-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 110.
[783] Ibid., 111.
[784] Ibid.

assume control of their own economic production. Indeed, by representing herself wearing Japanese clothes, she insists on the author-narrator relationship to make a *pacte de verité* with the readers. Maybe this can also advance the theory that Bird played with readers by presenting her texts and paratexts as feminine but hybrid at the same time. This way of deliberately playing with the genre and the expectations of her audience is the best way to exist in the literary market.

Another example of this process can be found with her book *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains* published in October 1879 by Johan Murray where the title itself is very gender-oriented. The cover of the book is full of flowers to insist on gender expectations while she is representing herself not as feminine in the practices she experienced (riding a horse alone, fishing and so on). The use of her femininity is also found in the dedication she made in *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains*: 'To my sister, to whom these letters were originally written, they are now affectionately dedicated'[785]. Pretending that the publication of her letters was an accident was a perfect way of creating an intimate moment with readers who will supposedly have access to something secret. Moreover, she underlined her non-ambition to be famous since the desire to exist in the public sphere must be only masculine and is very badly perceived when it comes from women. But in the second part of her career, Bird wanted to attract another audience: geographers, explorers and colonial government officers. For this reason, when she started to write her book about Japan, she based her marketing on the lure of the unknown: '[…] in the absence of all other sources'[786]. She establishes herself as an authority figure. This is for this very same reason that she included parallels between Great Britain and the countries she visited, to always speak about home in order to ensure her identity as a traveller (the opposite of the approach undertaken by Eberhardt). She found her legitimacy as a writer through the affirmation of her strangeness.

Bénédicte Monicat, professor of French and Women's Studies, said about women travellers: 'Elles pénètrent dans un ailleurs textuel qui les révèle autres et les fait s'écarter de l'écriture et des propos féminins de convention'[787]. Indeed, Bird played with cultural definitions of femininity. For example, in 1878, a journalist writing in *The Times* noted that Bird was dressed in masculine attire. After that, Bird and her publisher John Murray decided

[785] Isabella Bird, *A Lady's life in the Rocky Mountains* (Berkeley: Mint Editions, 2021), 67.
[786] Isabella Bird, *Unbeaten Tracks in Japan* (Reno: Pantianos Classics, 2017), 8.
[787] Bénédicte Monicat, *Itinéraires de l'écriture au féminin* (Paris: Rodopi, 2004), 3.

'to publish a sketch of herself in the offending riding habit as the frontispiece to every subsequent edition'[788]. She used publication strategies to underline the question: what does it mean to be identifiable as a woman? This somewhat provocative reaction shows that Bird had reached a point in her career where she had a certain power in the public sphere, which was not the case when she published *The English Woman in America* and *A Lady's Life in the Rocky Mountains*. That being said, even in the second phase of her career, she did not question the West-East relationship as we have previously demonstrated. These publication strategies and choices confirm that the reinvention of the self goes hand in hand with the representation of the self, both passing through the affirmation of a Western identity.

For Isabelle Eberhardt, it was the opposite process, since it was the creation of her Arab identity which allowed her the reinvention of the self. Moreover, it seems difficult to talk about publication strategies since – apart from some short stories – it is not known if she intended to publish her writings[789]. Thus, we will mainly talk about her use of the pseudonym as a representation of the self, combining the analyses of gender studies and therapeutic writing explained previously in this thesis.

According to Genette in his book *Seuils*, using a pseudonym is like a '[…] drogue, qui appelle vite la multiplication, l'abus, voir l'overdose'[790]. Indeed, Eberhardt used different names: the first one was Nicolas Podolinsky (when she was living in Switzerland), the second one was Meriem bent Abdellah (when she was in Bône) and then Mahmoud Saadi, that she created while she entered the Sufi religious brotherhood, a similar process as nuns when they take holy orders. For Hadouche Driss, this choice for the pseudonym is the result of three factors inherent to the psychological life of Eberhardt:

> D'abord, la diariste qu'elle était, exprimait un deuil, pour ne pas dire deux deuils impossibles (l'absence du père et le décès de la mère). Ensuite, ses nombreuses notes journalières font état d'une dépression longue et profonde. Enfin l'invention réussie de Mahmoud Saadi précédée de l'usage d'autres pseudonymes, indiquait une personnalité à l'identité multiple[791].

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[788] Dúnlaith Bird, *Travelling in Different Skins: Gender identity in European Women's Oriental Travelogues, 1850-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 184.

[789] She published only few novels. From to 4th to 18th of June 1901, she published some articles in *La Dépêche Algérienne* about her attempted murder. She also published few articles when she was war reporter in 1903, in *l'Akhabar*.

[790] Gérard Genette, *Seuils* (Paris: Seuil poche, 2002), 55.

[791] Leïla Hadouche Dris, *La Construction de soi dans l'écriture littéraire. Le cas d'Isabelle Eberhardt* (Bibliothèque Numérique Paris 8, 2010), 11, https://octaviana.fr/document/156366126#?c=&m=&s=&cv=.

Thus, as mentioned in the previous subsection, writing can be a way to no longer define the self by the past and pseudonymisation is part of this dynamic. This can be analysed as a defense system. As Roland Barthes states, 'le pseudonyme est un nom propre, le nom propre est lui aussi un signe, et non bien entendu un simple indice qui désignerait, sans signifier (…) Comme un signe, le nom propre s'offre à une exploration, à un déchiffrement'[792]. For Eberhardt, the double that she created served to escape, to conceal herself but also participated in a process of therapeutic writing. Moreover, the pseudonym of Eberhardt also makes the link between the narrative and the performative since she used this name in writing but also called herself Mahmoud Saadi in her everyday life. The use of pseudonyms allowed her to make a new part of herself visible and therefore to reinvent herself while choosing how others should represent her. Accordingly, Eberhardt once again moves away from the theory of Philippe Lejeune since he declares that 'un pseudonyme est simplement une différenciation, un dédoublement du nom, qui ne change rien à l'identité '[793]; but we have seen that the creation of the pseudonym permits to achieve a form of fulfilment since it is not only a narrative identity, but the name creates actions. It is precisely through the creation of Mahmoud Saadi that she heals. Thus, the young woman is more in line with the idea of Jean Starobinski, for whom the choice of pseudonym is an *acte finalisé* towards a refusal. Authors can break with their social and familial origins. Then, Eberhardt could hope to access a more or less dreamt existence thanks to the name and project herself towards a new status which seems ideal due to the fact that it was not predestined by birth. Therefore, we can affirm that pseudonymity is more the result of a multiple identity rather than a publication strategy. That being said, maybe we can speak about strategy when it comes from journalism. Indeed, Eberhardt, as we know, was a journalist and had the desire to exist in the press world. First, she published some short stories, inspired by the principle of *roman feuilleton* which appeared in the 19th century. Indeed, the writings of Eberhardt are not divided into episodes like the novels in the *roman feuilleton*, but they reflect the growing relationship between the press and literature. She used the medium of the newspaper to exist in the literary sphere. Nevertheless, Eberhardt was also a journalist who used the newspaper also to express her political ideas. After her marriage in October 1901, she joins the newspaper L'*Akhabar*,

[792] Roland Barthes, *Le Degré zéro de l'écriture* (Paris: Seuil, 1972), 66.
[793] Philippe Lejeune, *Le Pacte autobiographique* (Paris: Points, 1996), 27.

formerly conservative but radical republican since Victor Baruccand took the lead. L'*Akhabar* fought for the rights of Muslims to the point of wanting equality between them and the colonists. Eberhardt wrote many articles along these lines and even became a war reporter. She was sent to the Moroccan border to write about the difficulty of the situation. More than a desire to exist in the public sphere, journalism became a continuation of her literary work which also dealt with the horror of colonialism.

Thus, while Eberhardt and Bird both employed publication strategies, David-Néel was undoubtedly the one who most meticulously crafted the image of herself she wished to project in the public sphere. In fact, if she defined herself as a Buddhist (this is even how she introduced herself in front of the Dalai Lama), the title of her best-known book, *Voyage d'une Parisienne à Lhassa*, emphasises her 'Westernness'. Indeed, during her trip she thought of her return and of the reception of her works. As we have already mentioned during this thesis, she insisted on the fact that she was a great adventurer, that she was not afraid to take less-travelled paths or very difficult road, then using the masculine codes of explorer, like when she crosses the Himalayas: 'J'ai souffert de l'altitude, la tête me tournait, mon souffle était court.Les montagnes autour de moi semblaient me narguer, comme si elles voulaient m'aspirer dans leur froideur impitoyable. Chaque pas devenait un combat contre l'épuisement et le froid'[794]. It is likely due to her desire to exist in the public sphere and to control the image of herself she wished to project that David-Néel tended to minimize Yongden's importance. According to Dúnlaith Bird, David-Néel feared that in the eyes of her readers '[…] her male counterpart will eclipse her authority as leader by vertue of his gender'[795]. This fear was reinforced by the fact that she had to play a passive role as an old Tibetan mother while Yongden interacted more with the people they met. However, she loved her adopted son and did not devalue him, but she shows that she was the mastermind behind their trip: 'Je calculais mentalement le temps nécessaire pour se rendre au village'[796] while 'Yongden répondait gauchement'[797] to a man who questioned him and suspected them to try to reach Lhasa.

[794] Alexandra David-Néel*, Au Cœur des Himalayas* (Paris: Payot, 2016), 43.

[795] Dúnlaith Bird, *Travelling in Different Skins: Gender identity in European Women's Oriental Travelogues, 1850-1950* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 189.

[796] Alexandra David-Néel, *Voyage d'une Parisienne à Lhassa* (Paris: Pocket, 2004), 56.

[797] Ibid.

There, she writes '[…] je dis à Yongden de me suivre'[798] and '[…] retournons sur nos pas, dis-je à Yongden. Nous traverserons le col de Temo'[799](Himalayas, in the Ladakh region, India) in order to show readers that she was the one to make the important decisions. In addition, she used the pronoun 'nous' for common events, while she seemed to use 'je' for exceptional events, such as their arrival in Lhasa: 'Je dominais de haut la Sér Pang, la cohue multicolore des Thibétains en habit de fête et, par de-là, Lhassa étendue dans la plaine. (…) Spectacle inoubliable qui, à lui seul, m'eût payé des fatigues que j'avais endurées pour le contempler'[800]. This form of superiority that she wanted to establish is also seen in her photographs.

Illustration 4[801]

[798] Alexandra David-Néel, *Voyage d'une Parisienne à Lhassa* (Paris: Pocket, 2004), 56.

[799] Ibid., 136.

[800] Ibid., 166.

[801] Alexandra, David-Néel, *Untitled*, 1912, Maison Alexandra David-Néel, Digne-les-bains.

Indeed, in photo number 4, found in the museum Alexandra David-Néel in Dignes-les-Bains, David-Néel can be seen posing on a yak to make sure to be taller than the Tibetan woman[802]. This photographic composition gives a feeling of power, emanated by David-Néel. As in many of her photographs, she has her hands on her knees and looks far ahead, recalling the colonial posture. The ambiguity of her relationship with colonisation is also present in the photographs and David-Néel seemed to make sure to correspond more or less to the expectations of Westerners. But, if she seemed to highlight her 'Westernness', let us not forget that she, nevertheless, defined herself as Buddhist and that the representation of herself also involved asserting her status as a lama.

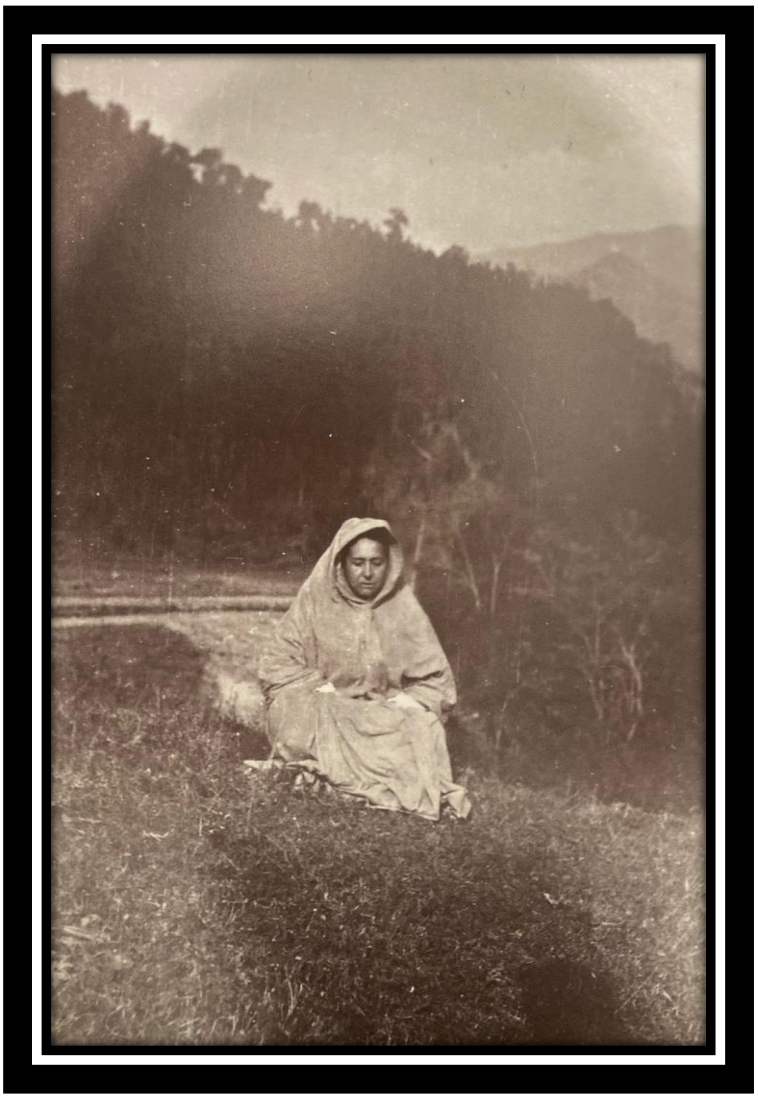

Illustration 5[803]

[802] She was a maid who accompanied Sidkéong Tulku (son of the Maharadjah of Sikkim) when he went on an excursion (in the Upper Sikkim) with David-Néel in 1912.
[803] Alexandra, David-Néel, *Untitled*, 1914, Maison Alexandra David-Néel, Digne-les-bains.

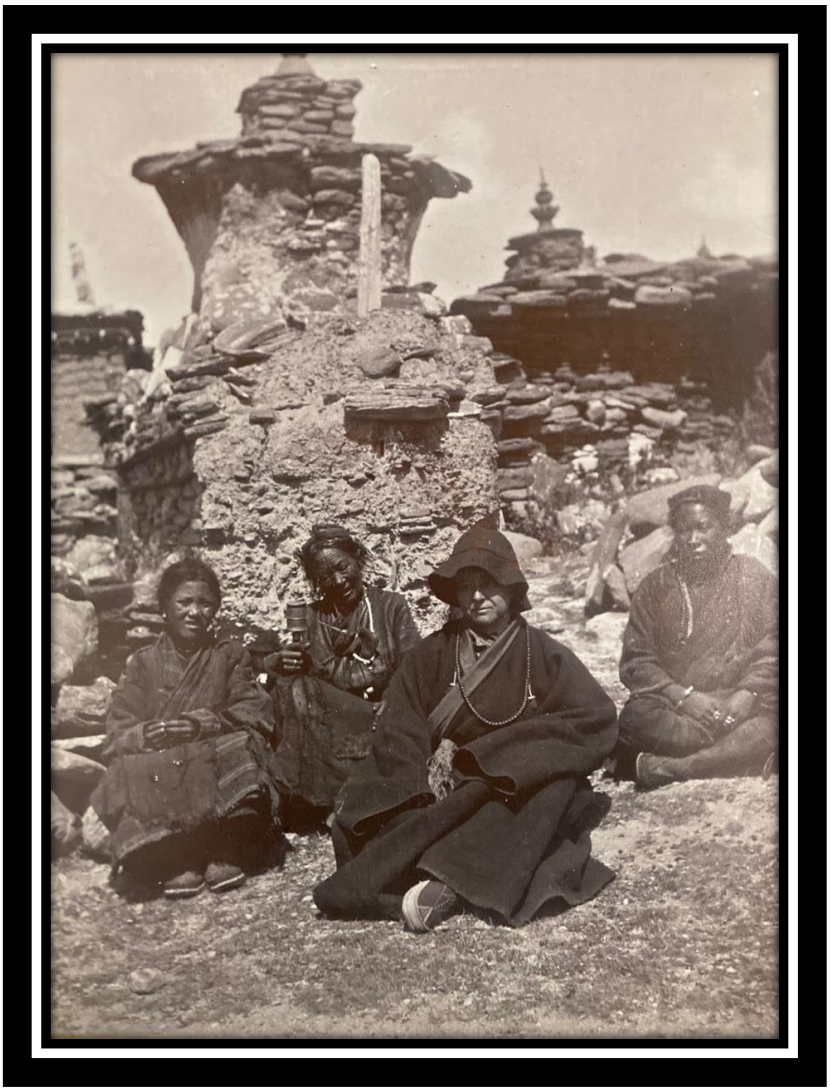

Illustration 6[804]

Undeniably, Buddhism allowed her spiritual and philosophical evolution but it also permitted legitimacy to exist in the public sphere. Thereby, 'cette nouvelle identité se voit illustrée par l'obtention d'un prénom lamaïste tibétain signifiant "Lampe de sagesse" [805] et le titre officiel de lamani octroyé par le Gomchen de Lachen. À partir de ce moment, elle peut prêcher et porter l'habit religieux hindouiste, ce qui à nouveau lui ouvrira de nombreuses portes'[806]. Hence, she staged her religious evolution for her audience. In photo number 5, she is alone, eyes downcast (or even closed), meditating. She used photography to illustrate a religious practice. This photo highlights a process under construction for which she was at that

[804] Alexandra, David-Néel, *Dans un couvent de la secte des Gningmas avec des sœurs converses,* Maison Alexandra David-Néel, Digne-les-bains.
[805] The religious name of Yishé Tön-me (*lampe de sagesse*).
[806] Fanny Martín Quatremare, 'Identités plurielles au cours des voyages d'Alexandra David-Neel,' *Hybrida*, no. 4 (2022) : 205, https://www.jstor.org/stable/48765794.

time practising. The fact that she is pictured alone and in this position can also underline a form of wisdom and inner calm. Be that as it may, how authentic could this in the end seem, since she chose to have her photo taken when meditation is an intimate and solitary practice? As Roland Barthes said: 'Dès que je me sens regardé par l'objectif, tout change : je me constitue en train de poser, je me fabrique instantanément un autre corps, je me métamorphose à l'avance en image'[807]. A photograph is a form of self-narration, sometimes going as far as theatricalisation.

In photo number 6, which was taken in a convent when she stayed with the Gningmas sect, we find David-Néel in a meditation position, sitting with her legs crossed. This time, she is surrounded by the sisters of the convent. Her integration into a religious group reinforces the idea that she is one of them. The organisation of this photo was deliberately designed by David-Néel who put herself physically forward in relation to the other protagonists. We also note that the other members of the sect look at the camera while David-Néel looks at the horizon, as in photo number 4, once again recalling a form of power and conquest (here religious conquest). She is of course not a missionary, it is not a religious conquest from the traditional point of view of colonialism, but more of a personal conquest which is to feel legitimate in her adopted religion and therefore to be legitimate as an expert of Buddhism in the Western world. She wanted to be sure that her personal practices were interpreted the way she wanted by her audience. She wanted to have a total control of her image, she explained it in a letter to her husband in 1925: 'Je dois soigner la façade de ma vie de façon à continuer à attirer l'attention et à retenir l'intérêt'[808].

For this, she used different media. Of course, she used travel writings to promote her identity as an adventurer, but as we have seen she also wanted to define herself as a popularizer of knowledge about the Orient. Among other books, she wrote *Le Népal*, *l'Inde d'hier et d'aujourd'hui* and even a Tibetan grammar book for foreigners who want to learn the language (she received a grant from the French ministry for this). But David-Néel also wanted to exist in the intellectual sphere. To be validated by experts, she translated books in Sanskrit to French, like *Astavakra Gïta*, and she was very an active member of La Société théosophique. In consequence, on her return from Lhasa, she went all over Europe to give conferences on

[807] Roland Barthes, *La Chambre claire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), 25.
[808] Alexandra David Néel, *Correspondance avec son mari: Édition intégrale 1904-1941* (Paris: Plon, 2016), 121.

Buddhism: 'C'est donc la parole vivante qui porte le message' [809]. Thanks to this, her recognition became European and even global in scale thanks to the translation of *Voyage d'une Parisienne à Lhassa* in English in 1927, in German in 1928, in Spanish in 1929 and in Danish and in Italian in 1945. Alexandra David-Néel 'a su mieux que beaucoup de ses contemporains ou contemporaines célèbres, exploiter aux mieux les possibilités offertes par les médias, par tous les médias'[810]. Still today, her travel writings and all her work are very popular. Hélène Duccini explains this in part with the arrival of the hippie movement in the 60s. indeed, thanks to that, Buddhism takes a more public place in the West, people travel to India to make initiatory journeys and '[…] des lamas viennent en suite en France et fixent leur communauté dans des monastères ouverts aux retraitants, qui s'initient aux pratiquent du yoga et de la méditation'[811]. She also remains a reference in orientalist studies, even if '[…] les mérites de l'orientaliste s'effacent devant la témérité de la voyageuse'[812].

To conclude, the representation of the self goes through narrative identity, which is constructed through travel writings, fiction or letters. Narrative identity anchors the performative identity in time and in public space. To ensure that this reinvented identity is correctly interpreted by their audiences, and that they can endure over time, David-Néel, Bird and sometimes Eberhardt, attached great importance to publication strategies. It is above all by playing with codes of masculinity and femininity that they offered themselves a place in the intellectual world, a place they still occupy today.

[809] Hélène Duccini, 'La Gloire médiatique d'Alexandra David-Néel,' *Le Temps des médias*, no. 8 (2007): 135, https://shs.cairn.info/revue-le-temps-des-medias-2007-1-page-130?lang=fr.
[810] Ibid., 140.
[811] Ibid., 139.
[812] Ibid., 138.

CONCLUSION

‘Pour les femmes, le simple fait d’errer sans but dans les rues est déjà un acte de transgression’[813]

This thesis has attempted to show how, for Isabella Bird, Alexandra David-Néel and Isabelle Eberhardt, travelling is a way of reinventing themselves by questioning social norms. To understand this process, we decided to consider the notion of identity from a performative prism (what they do, their actions) as well as from a narrative one (what they write about themselves). By combining the theories of Kaufmann (a more sociological approach to identity) and Ricoeur (narrative identity) with those of gender and postcolonial studies, we have tried to explain that identity is a concept in constant movement and that it is multifaceted. It seemed important – in our society where identity is unfortunately often used by extreme right-wing parties advocating for national identity – to show that reinventing oneself can be achieved by superimposing different cultures.

Thus, Bird, David-Néel and Eberhardt, thanks to their commonalities and differences, are perfect examples to treat this subject on the invention of the self in female travel writings. They decided to escape a destiny predetermined by their culture by choosing to travel. The first part of this thesis explained how they questioned the self by adopting a nomad way of life. As we have seen, they adopted an intellectual and linguistic nomadism in order to construct a new mode of being within geographical space. Certainly, a space is never neutral, and we saw how they had to utilise strategies to evolve in places where tensions linked to gender and/or colonisation issues existed. By being nomads, Bird, David-Néel and Eberhardt also defined themselves by the way they lived in spaces and not just by their heritage, as explained by Deleuze. Hence, from the first chapter of this study we saw the extent to which the performative had an impact on the questioning of identity and its possible reinvention, as the starting point is a physical displacement. This new relationship with spaces and places also impacts narrative identity. The narrative is a way of having power over two spaces: the real one, which is described as the three writers want it to be and where they can occupy the role that they want, and the space of the book itself, since they control the speed and angle of

[813] Lucie Azema, *Les Femmes aussi sont du voyage* (Paris: Flammarion, 2021), 159.

view of the narrative. In doing so, they also occupy intellectual space, since travel writings at the time were written mainly by men. Indeed, travelling and writing about it enabled Bird, David-Néel and Eberhardt to demonstrate the instability of gender norms, and thereby, to reinvent themselves.

The second part of the thesis therefore focused mainly on the construction and reinvention of the self through the performative and firstly, based on Kaufmann's theory of identity, looks at questioning of the binary oppositions. With the help of Judith Butler and Simone de Beauvoir, we started by analysing gender identities. As we saw previously in this thesis, Bird, David-Néel and Eberhard played with gender by occupying male spaces and by taking part in activities that were considered masculine at the time. It is important to remember that they never denied their feminine identities, but rather wanted to free themselves from certain gender codes to redefine a femininity that allows greater freedom. This echoes current issues, as gender oppositions (male and female) are called into question with notions such as gender fluidity (which Eberhardt represented very well) and non-binary identities, or quite simply with the idea that masculine and feminine can have multiple definitions and that gender can be perceived as a circular and non-linear reading system.

Another important aspect that also echoes current issues is that of post-colonial studies, which question the West-East relationship. The areas explored by the three authors (Algeria, India, Tibet and Japan) all have a colonial past that makes them contact zones – as Mary Louis Pratt understands it – where different cultures interact with an asymmetrical relation of power. As women, Bird, David-Néel and Eberhardt had a different role than travelling men. But how far did they manage to break away from their colonial heritage? A legitimate question to ask and, as we have shown in this thesis, its aim was not to portray the authors in a positive light and as anti-colonial at all costs, but rather to show the ambiguity of their position and how they reinvented themselves in such a context. Bird, despite her positive views of the Ainu, continued to convey a colonial message, while David-Néel's position was more ambiguous. She played with this system on which she sometimes depended, while at the same time detaching herself from it. Eberhardt's position was meanwhile much more clear-cut and anti-colonial. These three different perspectives helped us to see that it was difficult to detach themselves from the analytical system of their culture of origin, despite the desire to reinvent themselves thanks to a new culture. It also shows that if they did not have

privileges because of their gender, they had them thanks to their nationality of origin and they were keen to keep them.

This ambiguity in their way of approaching the new culture they adopted, to a greater or lesser extent, can also be seen in their relationship with religion. Indeed, religiosity and more broadly spirituality both play a very important role in their own reinvention, and this constitutes an important and original approach to identity. As we have seen, Bird never converted to a new religion and never stopped to believe in the superiority of Christianity. She used her Christian heritage to travel in a missionary role. This sets her apart from the two others who see religion as a possible reinvention. For David-Néel, Buddhism grants a reinvention of the intimate self but also of the public one. Even if at times she seemed to judge some religious practices due to her Western gaze that she did not always manage to avoid, she reinvented herself thanks to new religious practices permitted by the journey. Her practices go hand in hand with her narrative identity, since presenting herself as a Buddhist in her book contributed to her reinvention. David-Néel was perceived as a main figure of Buddhism by Westerners but also in India and Tibet, which is obviously very rare for a European. For her, the narrative identity is legitimised because it is accompanied by action (such as going to Lhasa and going on a spiritual retreat in a cave). In addition, religion gives a sense of belonging to a group. This is also the case for Eberhardt, who is perceived by Muslims she meets as one of them. Belonging to a group helped her to find a balance, as her multifaceted identity appeared to find harmony and coherence thanks to Islam. Religion allowed her to live her masculine and Arab identity while her feminine side helped her depression through adherence to Sufism. Despite the fact that her faith sometimes guided her journey, this was not a pilgrimage but rather what we might call a spiritual wandering. This idea can be found in *La Conférence des oiseaux* by Farid al-Din Attar, a Sufi poet who used the metaphor of birds to symbolize the spiritual wandering that leads to God. In this book, a group of birds wander in search of their king, which symbolises the quest of the Sufi pilgrim who, just like Eberhardt, lets wandering give meaning to their journey.

The last part of the thesis was less focused on the performative and rather analysed in greater depth the idea of narrative identity as one that enables the coherence of lived experience, but also of writing as a testimony to action. The representation of the self, for Bird, David-Néel and Eberhardt was done through different types of writing.

Firstly, we analysed the representation of the self in travel writings, which is the primary source for this thesis. Bird described herself as an authority figure, since she travelled in places not yet explored by a lot of people. She became a figure of reference in Great Britain. Writing about her travels allowed her to have this place in the public sphere. In her travel writings, David-Néel insisted on the exceptional nature of her journey, and we saw that she wanted to find a coherence in her identity, to show that everything in her life seemed to lead her to these adventures. This idea allowed her to create a connivence with readers. Consequently, we are entitled to wonder whether the literary construction of the self is not thought out with the sole aim of existing in the public sphere. If this is, indeed, something important for Bird and David-Néel, it is still not their only goal. Since travel writing is autobiographical, it helped them in organising their thoughts and memories. It helped them to construct their identity for more intimate purposes and not just for their readers. It is very clear for Eberhardt, though, since she never said she wanted to be published. As we explained, writing is more like a therapeutic exercise for her. Also, travel writing is a continuity of her actions, since both the performative and the narrative have enabled the existence of her alter ego.

Secondly, we examined the representation of the self in fiction, with the aim of understanding how travel- and the act of writing it- enables the reinvention of the self. So, we focused mainly on Eberhardt and her short stories. All her characters are representative of a part of herself, and the author played with this to offer a sort of polyphony, orchestrated to express the complexity of her identity. But to really understand Eberhardt's self-writing, we also had to look at her correspondence. Clearly, the letter was a hybrid space for her, where having a specific correspondent had a significant impact on the way she represented herself. By writing mainly to men (her friend Ali, her brother Augustin and her husband), she puts aside her male alter ego Mahmoud Saadi to let the womanly side express herself. However, as her correspondence continued, she gradually let go of that part of herself to fully embrace her *identité rêvée* (as seen, for instance, when she stopped writing to her brother or when she affirmed her Muslim faith in her letters to Ali). For her part, David-Néel saw the letter as a place where her marriage to Philippe could live on, but also as a precious record of her journey. As we have seen, she was very precise in her dates and places (she also took the time to write down the date and where she was) so that the letters completed her travel writings. That being said, the letter was also a place where she talked about her childhood, and where she

did not hesitate to de-romanticise her life in comparison to her travel writings. Moreover, having her husband as a correspondent allowed her a more intimate way of writing, all while she kept in mind that her letters may well be published. In this way, studying travel writings as well as letters and fictions has enabled us to understand the narrative identities of Bird, David-Néel and Eberhardt as a whole.

As this self-representation was public, since they decided to be published, we finally turned our attention to the publication strategies used by these three writers. The reinvention of the self was done for a personal purpose: the need and the urge to travel in order to redefine themselves with the help of different cultures (as we saw at the beginning of this thesis), but this identity is also confirmed by the fact that they made it to exist in the public sphere. In order to gain public recognition and navigate the masculine publishing environment, Bird and David-Néel, and to a certain extent, Eberhardt, employed specific publication strategies. Bird enjoyed blurring genre codes while asserting her British identity. David-Néel perfectly mastered all media and had control over her public image, while Eberhardt used a pseudonym to be more easily published, but also and always with a concern for gender fluidity and therefore to bring Mahmoud Saadi to life. For all three, this new self appeared to be a condition for happiness, as they experienced travel as a detachment from social mechanisms of identification- such as family, home, social role, and profession. This nomadic ideal represented not only a form of liberation but also an opening onto the infinity of the world.

The extraordinary personalities and adventures of these three women have had an influence and impact on the women travelers who have followed them. Indeed, by showing that women were able to be independent and to construct oneself through peregrination, Bird, David-Néel, and Eberhardt have served as a role model for many people. Bird's membership of the Royal Geographical Society, a position she gained through her contributions to geographical knowledge (notably through the study of the Ainu people), served not only as personal recognition but also as a mentor and a good example for other women who aspired to explore, but were limited by societal expectations. Bird represented the possibility of a world where women's achievements could be celebrated and recognised in spheres previously dominated by men. Even if Bird was committed to Christianity, never expressed feminist ideals, and she eventually married, she has nonetheless contributed to

advances in feminist thinking through her actions and what she embodied: adventurous spirit, successful travel writer, independent, and disruptive with her rejection of gender norms. Fanny Jane Butler (1850-1889) is part of a line of women whose lives have undeniably been shaped by Bird's pioneering spirit. Indeed, Fanny Jane Butler was a medical missionary from England who travelled to India, where female doctors were needed since the purdah women who lived there were not comfortable receiving care from male doctors. She met Bird who was visiting Kashmir, and Bird gave Butler the money to build the medical facilities. After that, Fanny Jane Butler went on to found the John Bishop Memorial Hospital in Kashmir, which was built in memory of Bird's late husband: 'Forty years ago it was an unbeaten track which women travellers trod when they journeyed in the East, and Mrs. Bishop (nee Isabella Bird) was one of the bravest of these pioneers. The result of this visit was an offer to build a John Bishop Memorial Hospital'[814]. Bird also had an impact on the life of Fanny Bullock Workman (1859-1925)[815] which is often seen as a direct successor to Bird. Workman is a famous American alpinist, explorer, geographer and cartographer who set several women's altitude records. Like Bird, she was not afraid to venture into hostile natural environments. Thanks to her trips (Asia, Europe, North Africa) she became the second woman to speak at the Royal Geographical Society, after Bird. It is also interesting to see that Bird's exploits still fascinate people today, as a manga about her trip to Japan - *Isabella Bird, femme exploratrice* - was created in 2013 by Taiga Sassa and edited by Ki-oon.

For her part, David-Néel was and remains an emblematic figure of the female traveller, as well as a feminist role model, by her independence, but also by her questioning of traditional marriage and motherhood[816]. In *Une Histoire des grandes exploratrices*, Caroline Riegel dedicated an entire chapter to David-Néel and her influence : 'Que retenir aujourd'hui d'Alexandra ? La volonté farouche d'être libre, de conquérir sa renommée. Celle de ne se plier à aucun système, à aucune superstition, à aucun ordre infondé. Celle encore de s'affranchir du regard ou des critiques d'autrui pour être, sans faux complexes, sans fausse modestie'[817].

[814] E.M Tonge, *Fanny Jane Butler, Pioneer Medical Missionary* (London: Church of England, Zenana Missionary Society, 1939), 43.
[815] She wrote many books about her travels such as: Fanny Bulloch Workman, William Hunter Workman, *Algerian Memories: A Bicycle Tour over the Altas to the Sahara* (London: T. Fischer Unwin, 1895).
[816] On a broader level, the link between travel and feminism is not automatic for all women travellers. That said, travel is still always a lever for emancipation, even for those who do not identify as feminists.
[817] Caroline Riegel, *Une Histoire des grandes exploratrices* (Paris: Glénat, 2023), 142.

By describing her like this, Riegel makes it clear that David-Néel actively participates -through what she said, what she did and what she represented- in the development of feminist ideas. We should add that David-Néel not only has inspired many women[818] to start travelling, but some have even decided to follow in her footsteps by going to Tibet (following the same itinerary) like Laure Dominique Agniel, french journalist, who wrote *Voyage au Tibet, sur les pas d'Alexandra David-Néel,* which shows David-Néel's ongoing impact in women travellers. In 2016, a comic book - *Une Vie avec Alexandra David-Néel* by Fred Campoy and Mathieu Blanchot- retracing her extraordinary life, has brought her story to an even wider audience, as well as a movie about her journeys called *Alexandra David-Néel- J'irai au pays des neiges* by Joel Farges.

Isabelle Eberhardt is also one of the inspirational women who still serve as a role model. Indeed, her anti-conformist spirit was celebrated by feminists and travellers, particularly in the 70s and the 80s. Timberlake Wertenbaker, is an American-British playwriter and a screenplay writer who wrote a play called *New Anatomies* in 1981 where she transformed the life of Eberhardt into a story celebrating the transgression of gender norms. Then, the Algerian writer Malika Mokeddem in her novel *Le Siècle des sauterelles*, describes the story of a man and his daughter trying to rebuild their lives after the mother of the family was killed by bandits while they were away. The daughter, Yasmine, finds in Eberhardt a source of courage and freedom that will help her to live. She said she wants to travel in the desert like '[…] son modèle, la *roumia* Isabelle'[819]. Eberhardt not only inspires fictional works, a Franco-Australian film has been made about her life in 1992 by Ian Pringle called *Isabelle Eberhardt* with Mathilda May in the title role. In addition, an exhibition- *Isabelle Eberhardt, de l'une à l'autre* - curated by Karelle Ménine in 2019 at Maison Tavel, Geneva, highlights Eberhardt's impact on the way female explorers are perceived. Karelle Ménine has helped to raise awareness of Eberhard's work and her legacy. Philosophical essays have also been based on the life of Eberhardt, such as *Comment supporter sa liberté* by Chantal Thomas where she described Eberhardt as a '[…] intrépide voyageuse'[820] with a '[…] résolution héroique'[821] and

[818] Many women have dared to set off on their travels, whether thanks to direct or indirect inspiration from David-Néel, Eberhardt and/or Bird, such as Odette du Puigaudeau, Ella maillart, Marion Sénones, and Sarah Marquis.
[819] Malika Mokeddem*, Le Siècle des sauterelles* (Paris: Poche, 1996), 279.
[820] Chantal Thomas, *Comment supporter sa liberté* (Paris: Rivages, 2000), 120.
[821] Ibid, 121.

who '[…] ne reculera devant aucun obstacle pour aller plus loin vers le désert'[822] in the chapter devoted to her. In this book, Chantal Thomas praised the spirit of independence and the importance of seizing one's freedom, especially as a woman, something that Eberhardt represents perfectly.

Bird, David-Néel and Eberhardt, through the autonomy and the freedom they embodied at a time when women were a symbol of mobility, were and still are role models, not only for female travellers but also for women in general, since their actions and personal lives helped to question gender norms and encouraged women to '[…] proposer une autre réalité face à celle dépeinte par un masculin autoproclamé comme *neutre*'[823].

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[822] Chantal Thomas, *Comment supporter sa liberté* (Paris: Rivages, 2000), 121.
[823] Lucie Azema, *Les Femmes aussi sont du voyage* (Paris: Flammarion, 2021), 11.

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