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Both young adult literature and novels of migration frequently deal with the construction of identity, from coming-of-age stories to narratives of intercultural exploration and hybridization. Young adult narratives of migration, then, represent a fascinating intersection of two literary traditions for the exploration of questions of identity. However, young adult literature and its varied subgenres are often overlooked among the broader critical scholarship of migration narratives. Indeed, the genre is often critiqued as too simplistic or pedagogical to truly merit consideration among adult readers and academics. Through an in-depth analysis of nine novels, however, I explore questions of identity development in post-colonial former and current French territories, through narratives of refugee journeys, and within the intangible worlds created in fantasy novels. In each case, the young adult novels reach a level of depth and nuance not often associated with the genre. Ultimately, I argue that young adult literature has the capacity to explore the nuanced complexities of identity construction in a modern, postcolonial world.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Today, young adult novels enjoy frequent commercial success, with the most popular series and authors engaging a wide demographic of readers. Yet, for all its popularity, the genre is often overlooked by critical scholarship. Many still view young adult novels as entertainment rather than literature meriting serious consideration. Karen Coats also notes that young adult literature often falls outside of the "literary," being labeled instead as popular or pedagogical (389). This is an unfortunate misconception; in reality, modern young adult novels regularly tackle intricate global and societal issues, while simultaneously exploring the complex inner lives of their adolescent protagonists. This is particularly true of narratives of migration, in which young protagonists often struggle to understand and solidify their own identity within an increasingly fractured geopolitical sphere. The texts in the following chapters demonstrate a level of depth and complexity not often associated with the young adult genre. Ultimately, I argue that young adult novels can fit into the broader critical scholarship of migration narratives, while remaining a distinct literary genre unto themselves. In this project, I explore the intersection of young adult novels and migration narratives, specifically focusing on the development of youth identity.

When analyzing any iteration of young adult literature, a logical starting point is defining the genre itself. Unfortunately, young adult literature is notoriously difficult to categorize, in terms of readership demographics, content, scholarly consensus—and even authorial intent. Author Margo Rabb, writing in the *New York Times,* for example, discusses the publication of her debut novel; she wrote her book for adults, but "had unintentionally slipped across an increasingly porous border," and was published by

Random House Children's Books. In fact, even the term "young adult" is up for debate. Aidan Chambers prefers the term "youth literature," as he finds terms like "teenage" and "adolescent" to be pejorative or clinical, and "young adult" to be too American (though, as an American writer, I have elected to use "young adult" here). He also cites the difficulty of narrowing down each term to a specific range of ages, with "young adults" being anywhere from eighteen to thirty-five years old, youth being in the range of fifteen to twenty-four, while teens and adolescents are even younger (282). In terms of readership, Mavis Reimer and Heather Snell cite the statistic that the largest group of buyers for young adult fiction in the United States are between thirty and forty-four years old, undermining the assumption that young adult literature is consumed primarily by teens (1). Looking to the content of stories to define young adult literature is still divisive; for example, Reimer and Snell quote researcher A. O. Scott who posits that *all* literature in the United States is young adult literature, "in the sense that the nation that produced it was formed "in revolt against the authority of King George III, a corrupt, unreasonable and abusive father figure" (Scott, quoted in Reimer and Snell, 4). Perhaps most succinctly, Caroline Hunt argues in an article entitled "Young Adult Literature Evades Theorists" that young adult literature has a "striking lack" of theoretical criticism due to its modernity and conflation with children's literature — though the field has certainly been growing since her article's 1996 publication (4). However, a definitive critical consensus around young adult literature — or indeed, what a "young adult" is — is yet to be reached.

Outside of scholarly analysis, the debate around young adult literature is no less fierce. As young adult literature is read by broader demographics, or adapted into more

widely-consumed media, the public continues to discuss what *is* and *isn't* young adult literature, and who *should* or *shouldn't* enjoy it. Perhaps unsurprisingly, as young adult literature becomes more popular, its critics become more vociferous. Christopher Beha, writing in *The New Yorker*, bemoans the adults who would read *Harry Potter* over Henry James: "It seems to me not embarrassing or shameful but just self-defeating and a little sad to forego such pleasures in favor of reading a book that might just as easily be read by a child" (Beha). Ruth Graham, writing for *Slate*, is more blunt: "Adults *should* feel embarrassed about reading literature written for children" (Graham). Beha and Graham's criticisms of the genre are essentially the same: that young adult literature is inherently uncritical of the young adult perspective, and that adults should instead read books that highlight "the emotional and moral ambiguity … of the real world" (Graham). As a counterpoint, Laura Miller in *Salon* accuses Graham of simply not knowing how to read into the complexities and nuances of young adult literature, and thus unfairly maligning an entire genre. As these articles suggest, popular and scholarly consensus on the definition and merit of young adult literature are equally murky. The genre is either too simple, or simply misunderstood; meant for adolescents, or to be enjoyed by anyone; childish and superficial, or concealing layers of meaning rivaling the classics.

In the end, there is simply no conclusive definition of young adult literature - it could even be argued that publishing a book as young adult literature is more of a marketing concept than an actual genre, as more and more "young adult" novels become blockbuster movies and television series for all ages. After Rabb's debut novel was published by Random House Children's Books, she "soon learned that I wasn't the only writer who'd written a book with adults in mind only to have an agent or a publisher

decide to market it as Y.A." (Rabb), suggesting that editors and marketing play as much a role as anything else in defining the genre. Even Chambers, one of the most prolific academics in the field, jokes in his search for a definition that, "it still could be argued that everything I've mentioned is simply literature, which happens to pay attention to the lives of adolescents. That there is nothing of such peculiar speciality in any of the books that identifies them as belonging to a distinct form" (280). Yet, clearly Chambers believes the genre does exist, even with its ambiguous parameters. Whether or not young adult literature will ever have a broadly agreed-upon poetics remains to be seen; though as the definitions of "young adult" constantly shift, it seems unlikely that it will be any time soon. The enigma of defining young adult literature certainly adds a challenge to any critical analysis, putting the onus on the scholar to clearly delineate their own parameters.

In the following chapters, I have used the framework laid out by Chambers to select and analyze texts. As both an author and academic himself, Chambers brings a thoughtful authenticity to his analysis that strikes me as both fair and valid. In describing his own young adult novel, he writes: "it wasn't *for*, and wasn't on *behalf* of young readers, the only expression I could find that made any sense was to say it was a novel *of* youth" (268). This distinction eventually influences his poetics of young adult literature, which focuses on the unique experience of youth rather than readership demographics or publisher categorization. For Chambers, "That a literature of youth … must inevitably deal with maturation, de-identification, and with questions of identity and life-purpose, because these are endemic in youthness, indicates that ethical, moral, and spiritual recognitions, and their profound aporias, are unavoidably present, and must be addressed

in a poetics of the form" (281). Indeed, each of the texts I selected for my own analysis approaches themes of maturity and identity as the protagonists go through the inevitable challenges of adolescence and young adulthood. With novels that range from fantasy tales to quiet stories of daily life, with publishers who advertise to young adult and adult readers, and themes as innocent as schoolyard friendships or as dark as trafficking and rape, the common thread through every story is the fact that all the protagonists are youths.

One possible critique of Chambers' poetics is that his definition is too broad. Surely critics like Graham and Beha would add additional qualifiers, such as the simplicity of the ending or the (un)sophisticated emotions. Yet, as the definition of "young adult" continues to fluctuate, and as critics like Scott radically push the boundaries of what constitutes young adult literature, I find Chambers' framework to be appropriately adaptable to a genre that is still relatively new (Chris Crowe points out that for some, "YA books haven't been around long enough to be canonized" 147). Furthermore, my own research into the field has provided me with numerous examples (many included in this analysis) of decidedly "young adult" novels that are nevertheless wonderfully intricate, tackling complex moral, political, and spiritual questions. Of course, not every young adult novel has critical merit. Crowe, mirroring my own thoughts, writes: "It's no surprise that the range of quality is as broad in YA literature as it is in adult literature… Unfortunately, the clunkers are the books that critics of YA literature seem to be most familiar with" (146). Ultimately, Chambers' definition of young adult literature seeks to categorize the genre as a whole (broad though it may be), rather than singling out the best or worst examples.

Chambers' framework is also particularly apt for the second axis of my research: that of migration narratives. Much like with the term "young adult," the terms "migrant" and "migration" merit a brief discussion here. Words like migrant, immigrant, refugee, or expatriate (and others) all have potentially overlapping meanings, and negative or positive connotations. I have chosen to use the words "migrant" or "migration" when referring to this analysis as a whole, as the motivations, methods, and legal statuses of the studied protagonists vary wildly. When possible, more precise vocabulary will be used, depending on the story and character in question. This decision was based on the excellent analysis provided by Chi Luu in "Migrants, Refugees, and Expats: How Humanity Comes in Waves." Luu rightfully points out the ways that the word "migrant" can become pejorative, especially when used in conjunction with other dehumanizing terms. However, she also notes the term's neutrality when used thoughtfully or intentionally. In this analysis, I use the terms "migrant" and "migration" purposefully for their broad definition, encompassing all peoples who move from one place to another, through a vast range of motivations and means.

The thematic intersections of young adult literature and migration narratives are many; questions of identity and feelings of displacement are common motifs in both types of literature, for example. Elia Michelle Lafuente writes that "literature dealing with migrancy emphasizes the migrant's unsettled identity in relationship to both sites" (43). Just as the young adult navigates independence from the family, so too does the migrant navigate distance from his or her home culture. In young adult narratives of migration, this displacement collides and compounds in the adolescent protagonist. Though Chambers was not necessarily considering de-identification in a physical or

cultural sense, there is no denying that the definition applies both to young adults and migrants; the young adult migrant, then, must simultaneously forge a new, dual-cultural identity while developing their identity as an independent adult.

Lafuente summarizes this dual effect in Caribbean-American literature, though I believe it can apply to any national or cultural migration context: "Thus, while the main characters are experiencing the personal journey of maturing from children to adults, they also undergo a literal journey in which they immigrate to the United States, where they develop hybrid identities as bicultural young adults" (34). The complementary literal / physical and metaphoric / emotional journeys of adolescent protagonists often highlight the "ethical, moral, and spiritual" aporias about which Chambers writes. Indeed, one of the hallmarks of maturation is learning to be independent from one's family, and finding one's place in a larger societal totality. Yet, within the migration narrative, leaving one's family often also represents leaving behind a significant portion of one's culture and former identity. The paradoxical desire for independence and connection is typical of young adult novels, as well as in novels of migration; thus, when the two themes overlap, the effect is dramatically magnified.

The element of migration can also add a layer of depth to a genre that is sometimes criticized as too simple. For example, Joanne Brown notes that while young adult literature can be overly formulaic, often featuring a happy ending, stories of migration are more subtle: "the immigrant must overcome a series of challenges… When borders are crossed successfully, the narratives end on a note of cultural victory. However, in return, the immigrant surrenders much of his or her former self: each victory may entail renunciation of and alienation from one's native land, although their

respective pasts will continue to be part of each person's present" (145). The "happy ending" narrative is thus tempered by the profound loss of home culture. This is precisely why Chambers' broad framework is so pertinent in the context of narratives of migration, as he does not limit the poetics of the genre by the tone of a novel's ending.

Finally, young adult literature and narratives of migration intersect in the crucial spaces of real-world understanding and action. Young adult literature can easily serve as a teaching tool for presumably adolescent readers; indeed, many of the novels I selected would give any reader a basic overview of certain geopolitical conflicts and different cultures. One of the great joys of reading is to discover a new way of life or perspective, and young adult literature is no different in this regard, and narratives of migration offer even more opportunities to learn. More broadly, Parsons and Rietschlin highlight the ways young adult narratives of migration can build empathy for adolescent readers through their "windows and mirrors" metaphor: "global literature offers mirrors through which adolescents might empathize with characters because of feelings they share and windows through which they might sympathize in response to that which is unique about the character" (132). In their analysis, the global "window" themes present across young adult narratives of migration were emigration, immigration, trafficking, genocide, xenophobia, and trauma. The universal "mirror" themes were compassion, education, family, and storytelling. These themes, among others, were often present in the francophone texts I analyze here.

Yet, while Parsons and Rietschlin offer an excellent analysis of the capacities of literature to build empathy even through unfamiliar subjects, they do not discuss the logical extension of this newfound awareness: activism. Activism and young adult

literature are often paired together; for example, Alison Roozeboom calls the seminal young adult novel *The Giver* "a dystopian story to didactically target the young adult audience and impart to them the subtextual message to rebel against the corrupt and oppressive aspects of contemporary society" (29-30). Indeed, who could read the *Hunger Games* trilogy without feeling a sense of moral outrage at the injustices of a grossly capitalistic and authoritarian society? Certainly not the Thai students arrested for flashing the *Hunger Games* salute in protests against a military coup in 2014 (Mydans). One need only look at the Harry Potter Alliance[1], a group founded in 2005 to empower activists across the world, to understand the intrinsic connection between some young adult fiction and social justice work.

This call to action perfectly aligns with Chambers' moral and spiritual aporias; as adolescents learn to navigate the world around them, they also must learn how to engage with it critically. Young adult novels — or, as Chambers would say, youthness in general — must seek to understand political institutions and societal norms, and how readers can maintain or break the status quo. In young adult novels of migration, adolescents address these questions on a much larger scale, and often with a sense of urgency. In some cases, for example, the novels describe the journeys of refugees coming from countries currently experiencing conflict or famine. In other examples, issues form an omnipresent, dark background to the story: protagonists face casual racism and discrimination, xenophobia, and inequitable access to opportunities. In either case, the push for political awareness and empathy is there. Postcolonial theorist Edward Said writes: "looked at from the bleak political perspective of modern mass dislocations, individual exiles force

[1] As of June 8, 2021, the Harry Potter Alliance is called Fandom Forward.

us to recognize the tragic fate of homelessness in a necessarily heartless world" (146). This sentiment perfectly mirrors the journey undertaken by readers of young adult novels of migration, where the "individual exile" is the story's protagonist — forcing readers to see hypocrisies and cruelties, and leading to opportunities for activism.

In all the novels I analyze in this thesis, the groundwork is laid for future involvement. There are explicit, instructive examples (like a character starting a political activism group at his school, or another intentionally pursuing journalism to expose immoral laws), implicit suggestions of injustice (dreary living conditions inhabited almost exclusively by immigrants, or impending environmental crises forcing migration, for example), or even author's notes at the end of the novel, connecting the stories to real-world issues and ways to engage. Whether the reader has never left his or her country of birth, or identifies personally as a refugee or immigrant, these stories contain a wealth of inspiration for social justice advocacy and increased empathy.

Given the significant compatibility between young adult literature and narratives of migration, it is unsurprising that I found dozens, if not hundreds, of examples from which to choose. Using Chambers' poetics as a guide, I narrowed down my selection here to nine texts, divided into three chapters. Each chapter is distinct both thematically and geographically. Chapter one will discuss the role of France and its place in the psyche of young adult migrants as they build their own identities. *Un Papillon dans la Cité,* by Gisèle Pineau, follows protagonist Félicie from Guadeloupe to the outskirts of Paris, where she tries to reconnect with her mother while maintaining ties to her grandmother and Guadeloupe. Djiraël, the protagonist of Insa Sané's *Sarcelles-Dakar,* makes the opposite journey: he travels from the Parisian suburbs to his rural hometown in Senegal

for his father's funeral. Here, Djiraël must navigate an uncomfortable reverse culture shock as he revisits the country he left as a child. Finally, *La Proie* features forced migration: Anthéa initially moves from Cameroon to France to live with a wealthy family as a live-in maid. Her situation quickly deteriorates into abuse, and she is unable to leave. Thus, across the three novels, I explore how France — or the myth of France — influences questions of identity and belonging.

Chapter two will look at the stories of refugees as they journey between other countries outside of the French Republic, and how the inherent instability of refugee migration (documented and undocumented) can influence identity development. These stories in particular also encourage youth engagement and activism in the face of a real, pressing global issue. For example, in *Alexis, Fils de Raphaël* by Marie-Célie Agnant, Alexis is a refugee from Haiti, fleeing to Montreal. He and his classmates form a political action group to free Alexis's father from a Haitian prison and to tackle other social ills; activism and enacting social change thus become a core part of his identity in Canada. Mila, the Italian protagonist of Annelise Heurtier's *Refuges*, also finds meaning in activism as she learns more about the refugee crisis in Lampedusa. Her story is artfully interspersed with narratives from refugees on a Lampedusa-bound boat, giving the crisis a sense of intimacy and urgency. *Homme Noir sur Fond Blanc* by Xavier Deutsch also balances multiple narratives: Brahim, a Sudanese refugee, and Gaston, the mayor of a small Belgian town. Here, the activism is on a smaller scale: by welcoming Brahim into his home, Gaston demonstrates the necessity of basic human kindness, even against institutionalized xenophobia and racism. The novels of Chapter two are decidedly more bleak than Chapter one, which is perhaps to be expected. Nevertheless, in the face of

seemingly insurmountable odds, the protagonists of this chapter strive to grow and make their place in the world.

Finally, Chapter three will examine the fantasy genre, as protagonists journey to and from countries that either don't exist or are dystopian versions of their real-life counterparts. This final chapter will explore the same themes from chapters one and two, asking if narratives of migration are inherently different when the destinations are entirely fictional. *La Princetta et le Capitaine* by Anne-Laure Bondoux is a high seas adventure story, spanning the fictional countries of Galnicie, Elgolie, and Azizie, among others. Though the main protagonist, Malva, has a familiar identity arc, I argue that ultimately, the fantasy setting allows Bondoux to deviate from any larger social commentary. In contrast, *Oceania* by Hélène Montardre uses a dystopian, futuristic setting specifically to highlight the dangers of climate change. Flavia, the protagonist, must travel from France to the United States against dangerously elevated sea levels and hostile legislation preventing migration. Here, fantasy is a sharp tool for critiquing modern-day apathy and negligible environmental policies. *Le Dos au Mur* by Christophe Lambert uses fantasy comparably, with a dystopian version of the United States and Mexico as the setting. In this novel, nineteen-year-old Diego competes on a gameshow called *America's Most Hunted* to vie for $100,000 and citizenship to the United States; Lambert clearly critiques American immigration policy throughout the story. Like Malva, both Flavia and Diego become more secure in their own identities as they travel through new places. Ultimately, the fantasy genre does not seem to alter the basic, human elements of identity development; however, a fantastical setting can have the paradoxical effect of either elevating or underplaying real-world critiques and concerns.

The novels explored in each chapter highlight protagonists with a wide range of ages and nationalities. They also experience migration through a variety of lenses: political exile, family reunification, reconnecting with a home culture, seeking better opportunities, or being physically forced. Their authors are equally diverse, hailing from all corners of the globe. Some write primarily for young adult audiences, while others have regularly published adult fiction as well; Agnant and Pineau are frequently lauded as critically acclaimed, while many other authors face relative obscurity. Yet, despite the substantial scope of the novels, there are threads that tie them all together. Chambers' aporias of youth, as well as the challenges of displacement, create a thematic coherence between each story. In a way, the novels echo each other as the adolescent protagonists face the universally recognized passage towards adulthood, alongside the unique challenges of physical migration.

CHAPTER 2: TO AND FROM FRANCE

When writing about narratives of migration in young adult French-language literature, it is unsurprising that France is often the destination or point of departure for protagonists. However, the depiction of France in these novels is not uniform; from one novel to another, the country is almost unrecognizable as it undergoes endless transformations. Depending on the novel or character, France can be a mythological place of hope and freedom, or a prison of intricate barriers and devastating loneliness. It can represent economic prosperity and opportunity, or inescapable poverty. It is tolerant and welcoming, or prejudiced and cruel, or all of these at once. The multifaceted and conflicting nature of France's identity is not new to literature; indeed, post-colonial criticism frequently dissects France's complicated relationship to its former and current citizens and subjects. Frantz Fanon, for example, scathingly observed the mirage of French superiority among his contemporaries: "Le Noir qui connaît la métropole est un demi-dieu... Beaucoup d'Antillais, après un séjour plus ou moins long dans la métropole, reviennent se faire consacrer" (15). More recently, Omar Ba, in *Je suis venu, j'ai vu, je n'y crois plus*, urges young Africans to reconsider the myth of the European El Dorado. Significantly, young adult literature also captures the complexity of the myth of France, often elegantly broaching the same themes driving postcolonial theorists.

In this chapter's novels, some protagonists may initially see France through an idealized or simplified lens; as time goes on, their views become more nuanced. By the end of the novel, protagonists have experienced a variety of conflicts to help them towards becoming fully actualized young adults; they have the capacity to see themselves both as individuals and as part of a larger societal totality. Similarly, as they become more aware of the intricacies of the world around them, protagonists must also

deconstruct and reanalyze any previously held beliefs on France as well as binary ideas about belonging. Simplified ideas about a static, idyllic land of *égalité* and *liberté* give way to a more balanced worldview that encompasses the subtleties and contradictions of modern geopolitical realities, transnational identities, and globally connected diasporas. The young adult novel thereby becomes a site of growth and understanding, on a microcosmic to macrocosmic scale.

I examine three texts in this chapter that reveal a complex portrait of modern France, featuring three distinct protagonists with their own tumultuous relationships to the country. Their paths to and from France are equally diverse: from human trafficking, to family reunification, to naturalization and citizenship. *Un Papillon dans la Cité* (1992) by Gisèle Pineau follows Félicie as she leaves Guadeloupe to join her mother in Paris. Of course, the term immigration does not strictly apply here; Guadeloupe is an overseas territory of France, and Félicie is therefore a French citizen. While the subtleties of visas, immigration, and citizenship are lost on Félicie, she still must face the challenges of moving overseas and leaving behind all she has ever known. Djiraël, a Senegalese immigrant, leaves Paris to return to Dakar for his father's funeral in Insa Sané's *Sarcelles-Dakar* (2009). Having left Senegal at a young age, Djiraël grapples with his return and finding a way to meld his French and Senegalese identities. In the darkest of the three novels, *La Proie* (2019) by Philippe Arnaud, Anthéa leaves Cameroon after being hired as a live-in nanny for a seemingly wealthy French couple, who promise her a better life and opportunities. The situation quickly degrades, and Anthéa must rely on herself to escape her abductors and, ultimately, the country.

France — or the myth of France — is inextricable from the identities of these protagonists. Alongside their families, friends, and education, migration to and from France will play a major role in their coming-of-age stories as they learn to constantly balance the hybridization of multiple cultures and identities. For readers, too, exploring the multifaceted reality of France has the potential to shock or unsettle, and lead to a deeper understanding of a concept of belonging that goes beyond physical presence or nationality. Ultimately, these novels can serve as a broader window to the challenges faced by some immigrants *and* as a mirror to the challenges faced by all adolescents as they grow up.

Félicie, the ten-year-old protagonist of *Un Papillon dans la Cité,* is an interesting point of departure for this discussion. Born in Guadeloupe, she is both French and Caribbean — a citizen and an outsider to mainland France. In the beginning of the novel, Félicie lives in Guadeloupe with her grandmother, Man Ya, in an almost Edenic paradise. Soon, however, she receives a letter from her mother, Aurélie, explaining that Félicie must travel to Paris to live in France with her, her stepfather Papa Jo, and Félicie's stepbrother Michel. Félicie is a bright and optimistic child; she settles into life in the *faubourgs* of Paris, rises to the top of her class, and becomes good friends with a boy in her neighborhood named Mohamed. Although she adjusts relatively well to Paris, she still misses Man Ya and Guadeloupe, and dreams of showing Mohamed her home. She struggles even more when, after winter vacation, Mohamed seems to have drifted away from her, preferring a different group of friends who encourage him to miss class and smoke. However, after Félicie's teacher announces a class trip to Guadeloupe, Félicie is

able to rekindle her friendship with Mohamed. In Guadeloupe, she shows him everything she loves about her home: the sea, the foods, and, above all else, Man Ya.

In the novel's final scene, Félicie and Mohamed return to Paris, where they are greeted by her mother, Papa Jo, and Michel. This ending echoes the novel's first pages - Félicie traveling to Paris. The similar setting makes Félicie's growth all the more apparent: by the end of the novel, she is more mature, confident, and secure in her place, both in her family and the world. In some ways, her story follows the traditional trajectory of coming-of-age stories: leaving the safety and security of home, encountering more of the real world, and beginning to transition from childhood to adolescence and, eventually, adulthood. The circularity of the structure, however, also subverts the linearity of her path and suggests that Félicie's ultimate identity will not be unidimensional.

First of all, in joining her mother in Paris, Félicie is simultaneously leaving home and going home. Aurélie writes to her, saying "Depuis mon départ, j'ai pensé à toi chaque jour… il est temps maintenant de me rejoindre en France où ta famille t'attend" (9). Similarly, Félicie admits, "dans ma tête, j'avais déjà pris au moins mille fois l'avion" (15). This is an expected reunification of daughter to mother, and citizen to motherland. Yet, despite imagining this meeting, all of Félicie's physical ties are firmly rooted in Guadeloupe — its culture, its landscapes, and the maternal familiarity of Man Ya. Thus, rather than navigating a simplistic duality — the safety of home versus the unknown — Félicie exists in a liminal space between the two, belonging to both and neither Man Ya and/nor Aurélie, Guadeloupe and/nor France. Even once she is in Paris, her mother lives on the tenth floor of a towering apartment building, where Félicie has "l'impression d'être

toujours dans l'avion, en suspens entre ciel et terre" (36). Here, Félicie reflects Homi Bhabha's notion of "third space," defined by Arup Ratan Chakraborty as "a place of opportunity for the growth of fresh ideas… it rejects anything fixed, so it opens up newer scope for fresh thoughts allowing us to go beyond the rigidity and limited focus of colonial binary thinking" (149). Chakraborty further elaborates on Bhabha's idea of hybridity: "the idea that no culture is really pure as it is always in contact with the other. According to [Bhabha], Hybridization is an ongoing process; it, therefore, cannot be 'still'" (149). Félicie is literally in motion, imagining herself on an airplane in between two homes; she remains suspended between Guadeloupe and France, connected to both, and rooted in neither.

The push and pull between two people and places is further reflected in the novel's title — *Un Papillon dans la Cite.* The papillon — butterfly — is a classic symbol of growth and rebirth. Here, it can clearly represent Félicie as she learns to flourish in a new city. Guadeloupe is also commonly referred to as l'Ile Papillon — Butterfly Island. Therefore, the butterfly in the city also represents the intrusion or inclusion of Guadeloupe in France. *La Cité* might refer to either Paris, or the gray, drab apartment building literally called La Cité, where Félicie lives. One can easily imagine Félicie as the fragile, brightly colored *papillon* bringing new life into the dreary building — and thereby emphasizing her otherness and struggle to belong. In one scene, she imagines flying away to Guadeloupe, on the wings of a butterfly. Here, the *papillon* in the city is an elaborate dream of escape, and a reversal of Félicie's previous airplane fantasies. Now, physically in Paris, she is pulled subconsciously back to Guadeloupe.

Just as the title is not as simple as it first appears, the novel itself is not purely in French. Frequently, characters use words or phrases in Antillean Creole, which are always translated with footnotes at the bottom of the page. The inclusion of Creole is in line with what J. Michael Dash describes as “a new literary multilingualism that combines French and Creole,” representing “an epistemological break with previous French Caribbean writing” (164). For Dash, the hybridization of language is part of an “earlier vitality” returning to the literature of the region, as well as a symbolic “widespread questioning of the notions of authenticity and "enracinement" (163-164). He further goes on to note that Caribbean writing need not be produced in the Caribbean; the Caribbean diaspora (including Pineau, herself born in Paris to Guadeloupian parents) now produces works across the world. Thus, structurally, the book mimics Félicie herself, as she becomes a global citizen embodying a new type of linguistic and cultural hybridity.

Félicie is not the only example of global citizenry. Her best friend at school and La Cité is a boy named Mohamed Ben Doussan (nicknamed Mo) who moved to France when he was five. In some ways, his family is different: Félicie’s mother has married Papa Jo, has a job, and strives to forget Guadeloupe as she works to fit in with French society. Mo’s mother and aunts, on the other hand, “ne trouvent pas de travail, ni d’mari … alors, elles mangent toute la journée des loukoums et des makroudes avec ma grande-mère en parlant du pays” (59). Yet, much of Mo’s story is familiar, and creates a parallel with Félicie’s. For example, like Félicie, his strongest connection to his home country is through his grandmother, Fathia. On one visit, Fathia bakes loukoums for the children. This sweet cake reminds Félicie of the doukouns Man Ya used to make, and she notes that: “Loukoum et doukoun, ça se joue sur la même musique, ça rime, c’est parent” (56).

Once again, there is a sense that Félicie's story is not strictly unidimensional; instead, it mirrors Mo's. Through "la même musique," we can see the multiplicity of Félicie's identity, as she finds common ground with other immigrants. Here, too, grandmothers — or elders in general — represent a wealth of heritage. Pineau seems to warn, however, that this cultural knowledge is also potentially impermanent. On another visit, as Mo shows off a kouka in their apartment, he says, "regarde celle-ci, avec le cuivre tout grave. C'est seulement ma grand-mère Fathia qui pourra te traduire les inscriptions" (59). Even within one or two generations, then, traditions can begin to fade; it is up to the younger generations to preserve them.

Mo and Félicie's matrilineal connections to their roots are typical of literature from the Caribbean. Kaisa Ilmonen writes about the important role grandmothers play in the Caribbean bildungsroman: "the grandmother characters are constructed via a genealogy of feminist resistance and Caribbean women's cultural tradition…As part of her growth, the daughter or granddaughter must seek out her matrilinear tradition" (69). Once discovered, the daughter or granddaughter can begin to reconnect with the motherland. The motherland here is not a physical space; it is rather "a mutual relationship between a diasporic people that emphasizes continuity, camaraderie and communality. In Caribbean women's writing, the finding of such a matrilinear and folkloric connection to the collective tradition is a particular form of the postcolonial bildung quest" (69). Thus, Félicie and Mo can gain a sense of belonging through their grandmothers, even if they are physically in France. The kouka in Mo's apartment, then, represents the two paths in front of him: to deny and forget his heritage, or to learn to read the inscriptions and stay connected to a diaspora larger than himself.

Mo struggles deeply with these choices, and in a way, is an example of what could happen to Félicie should she forget Man Ya — a key focal point in her identity. Mo has spent more than half of his life in France, and there is a certain detachment from his home country: "Mohamed ne se souvient pas du pays de sa grand-mère. Elle a beau lui dire que c'est aussi son pays a lui … il répond que son pays s'appelle la France" (60). Despite this bravado, Mo also often dreams of his ancestors: "je rêve que je galope dans le désert, sur mon chameau. Je suis le plus rapide des Touaregs. Je vais tellement vite que je les laisse tout derrière moi… A la fin, je suis seul au milieu du désert. Tout seul. Et j'ai perdu ma route. Alors, ma grand-mère Fathia apparaît … au ralenti, elle me montre un point, loin devant…" (61-62). In his dream, his grandmother is once again his connection to his home country and culture; she seems to know and understand that he is still on his journey. It is significant that he is alone in his dream, despite being surrounded by family in real life. Clearly, Mo is unable to either fully reconnect with the larger diaspora of his country or commit fully to 'son pays [qui] s'appelle la France.'

After a while, this disconnect has a profoundly negative impact on his choices, and he begins to find a sense of belonging in a local gang. Félicie is horrified; she chastises him and criticizes the gang: "ils fument, ils volent, ils boivent de la bière et ils se battent" (84). She begs him to leave. Mo is unconvinced; it is clear that he is grasping for selfhood somewhere, and the gang is enticing. He proudly tells Félicie that he is the youngest in the group, clearly feeling that this gang has given him an identity and a purpose, rather than his family. Félicie fears she is losing her best friend, but when there is an upcoming class trip to Guadeloupe, she convinces him to take his studies more

seriously. If his grades and attendance improve, he will be allowed to go; with Félicie's encouragement and help, Mo complies.

For both Félicie and Mo, the trip to Guadeloupe is powerfully restorative, and is an important moment in the story. Notably, Félicie finally gets to have some agency in her own life. At the beginning of the novel, her mother writes to tell her that she must leave. Now, Félicie persuades her mother to let her go to Guadeloupe — it is her own choice. In returning to Guadeloupe on her own terms, it is apparent how much Félicie has grown, and how deeply she is still connected to the country. Mo, too, is able to see another path beyond his gang: "Mo, pour qui les immeubles de la Cité avaient toujours barré la ligne de l'horizon, avait su le nom de sa passion, à l'instant-même où il l'avait vue derrière le hublot du Boeing 747…" (115-116).

Energized, he describes his new dream: "Je pourrai devenir maître-nageur. Je crois qu'il y a des écoles pour ça là-bas. Tu sais, ma grand-mère Fathia m'a toujours raconté que mes ancêtres vivaient dans le désert du Hoggar, que le sable était leur royaume. Les Touaregs, qu'on les appelait. Y'en a encore, vrai. Ils passent leur temps à aller et venir dans le désert. Sans jamais trouver le chemin de la mer" (116). Mo's description recalls the dream he shared with Félicie months earlier. In reaching Guadeloupe and the sea, Mo has traveled where his ancestors could not — while paradoxically reaffirming his connection to his past and a matriarchal lineage through his grandmother. Symbolically, Mo is still forging out alone, but with recognition and guidance from his ancestors and heritage. This would not have been possible without Félicie's intervention, and in a way, she is a part of his matriarchal connections. Ilmenon stresses that literary grandmother characters are "often not so much biological

grandmothers as various "other-mother" characters: foremothers, folkloric warrior mothers, healers, spiritual leaders, anonymous women, slaves, foster mothers, great-aunts and other older female characters" (69). Here, Félicie is not an *older* female character, but plays the same role in his life.

Together, Mo and Félicie represent a new generation — it is up to them to remember and preserve their ancestry while building an identity that is their own, even if their 'own' self has elements of "fragmentation and friction between … different axes of identity" (Ilmonen 72). Indeed, Félicie embodies one of the key French Caribbean literary figures identified by Dash: the storyteller, "who occupies the literary foreground, with his insights into the group unconscious" (164). The storyteller figure suggests a sense of polyphony; Félicie admits to Mo that she keeps a notebook and writes down everything that happens to her. In this way, she records not only her own story, but those of her family and friends as well. Like the inscription on Mo's grandmother's kouka, Félicie is now participating in a history of women preserving a culture and history across borders and generations.

The power of stories and the written word is undeniable in this book: from the Antillean Creole scattered throughout the text, to Félicie's mother writing to Man Ya for the first time in twenty years ("C'est grâce à notre Félicie que j'ai réalisé que la parole vaut mieux que toute forme de silence" [110]), to author Gisèle Pineau's own childhood, spent growing up between Guadeloupe and France. *Un Papillon dans la Cité* depicts the possibility of a cultural hybridity, maintaining an intangible connection to a larger diaspora while building a life in a new country. Ilmonen notes that "in the European version [of the bildungsroman], the protagonist chooses, accepts and discards viewpoints

or values on his way to a harmonious self" (72). In her identity development, Félicie's migration to France represents a literal, physical fragmentation between her roots in Guadeloupe and her mother in Paris. Unlike her European counterparts, Félicie records rather than discards the values and viewpoints of others as she circles between Guadeloupe and France; however, in this way, she does find a harmonious self as a storyteller and future matriarchal figure. Her time in France does not necessarily root her to the country. Rather, it pushes her to better understand her place, belonging to a larger, mobile diaspora and history. Ultimately, Félicie reaches what Mimi Sheller describes as "an achieved indigeneity - a new claim of belonging to a locale, but a belonging grounded in movement, difference and transformation rather than stasis or permanence" (276).

Like *Un Papillon dans la Cité*, Insa Sané's *Sarcelles-Dakar* contains some autobiographical elements. Born in 1974 in Dakar, Sané moved to France when he was only six years old to live in the Sarcelles suburb. Like his protagonist Djiraël, Sané also had to learn to exist between multiple cultures. Though he initially resisted his immersion into France, as an adult, he has a more optimistically nuanced view of his place in the world, explaining: "J'ai longtemps voulu croire que j'étais et resterai exclusivement Sénégalais, mais la vie m'a enseigné que je suis partout chez moi" (Sané, quoted in Idrisse). As he navigates the challenges of adolescence, Djiraël begins to come to the same realization. Like *Un Papillon dans la Cité, Sarcelles-Dakar* is ultimately a hopeful story. Without diminishing the difficulties faced by Djiraël and Félicie, the two stories stress both the need for, and the possibility of, belonging.

In comparison with *Un Papillon dans la Cité,* however, *Sarcelles-Dakar* is geared towards a more mature age group. This is intentional; *Sarcelles-Dakar* is published by Editions Sarbacane in their Exprim' collection. Exprim' was started in 2006 and, according to editor Tibo Bérard, "était assez novatrice et qu'on voulait vraiment casser la limite d'âge et les frontières entre littérature générale et littérature jeunesse. Notre idée est qu'un adulte puisse lire un Exprim' avec autant de plaisir qu'un ado, que ce ne soit pas du tout formaté pour un âge" (Bérard, quoted in Fontana and Schaer). The novels in the collection, then, represent the broader shift in young adult literature's audience. While *Un Papillon dans la Cité,* published in 1992, was intended for a more homogeneously young readership, by 2006 (the same year of *Sarcelle-Dakar*'s publication), young adult literature was beginning to attract a wider demographic. The Exprim' collection is a perfect example of the increasingly blurred lines between childhood and adulthood, or adolescents and young adults.

Sarcelles-Dakar follows the story of Djiraël as he returns to Senegal for the funeral of his father — his first time back since he immigrated to France when he was five years old. He is initially hesitant to go; he would rather stay in Sarcelles to rove Paris with friends, see his "officielle" girlfriend, Alexandra, or to flirt with Farah, a Maghrebi girl in his neighborhood. However, he succumbs to pressure from his family, and travels to Dakar and begins to "me familiariser à nouveau avec le quartier" (68). His goal of refamiliarization is more complicated than he originally assumes. In many ways, Dakar hasn't changed from his last visit. Djiraël, on the other hand, has. He learns that he is now considered a 'francenabé', "un petit Sénégalais de France qui vient ici avec plein de billets" (76). Djiraël is incredibly frustrated; he considers himself to be Senegalese and,

by the French standards he has come to internalize, very poor. His cousins, however, assure him that in Senegal, “on te prend pour un Français” (77).

Eventually, Djiraël and his family travel to the village where his father’s funeral will be held; here, the culture shock is much greater than in Dakar. The funeral rites have many Senegalese traditions that often confuse Djiraël. He is, in fact, quite resistant to many aspects of the funeral and, by extension, mourning his father. He angrily asks the reader, “Je pouvais comprendre ses raisons, mais il m'était impossible de l’excuser … a-t-on le droit de sacrifier sa famille?” (114). One night, his aunt and mother come to see him and explain that he has one last chance to come to terms with his father’s absence and death: “Il te reste une chance d'ôter l’amertume qui encombre ton cœur. Pour ça, il faut que tu te rendes dans la forêt. Tu marcheras jusqu'à ce que tu repères l'endroit idéal pour méditer. Une fois que tu l’auras trouvé, tu t’assiseras seul et tu ne penseras qu'à ton père. Si tu te libères de toi-même, l’Harmattan t’apportera un message” (122). Here, the implication is that Djiraël’s liberation from himself would truly be a liberation from his French identity: he could finally connect more fully with his African roots.

Djiraël doesn’t trust in any of these traditional beliefs, but sets out into the forest nonetheless. Once there, he encounters a mystic old man who tells him a long, fairy tale-esque story of two lovers, Kadiom and Maléguène. Djiraël also shares stories of his own father, a man who Djiraël knew better by his absence than by his presence — “un père fantome” (152). The old man eventually reveals to Djiraël that he carries a message from his father: that his father loved him. Djiraël is finally able to respond that he loved his father, too. With this closure, Djiraël returns to Paris. He feels more whole, and has rediscovered a sense of control over his life. He finds Farah, and despite their cultural

differences, resolves to make a relationship work between them. Like Sané himself, Djiraël begins to accept his roots and his future with a sense of hope.

In some ways, *Sarcelles-Dakar* is a reversal of *Un Papillon dans la Cité.* Rather than trying to adapt to a new country like Félicie, Djiraël is trying to reconnect with his native one. Unlike Félicie, who returns to Guadeloupe after less than a year on a class trip, Djiraël has been gone for over a decade. While Félicie wants to reconnect with her mother, who left her when she was a baby, Djiraël wants to find closure with his father who stayed behind when Djiraël moved away. Where *Un Papillon dans la Cité* was infused with Antillean Creole, *Sarcelles-Dakar* is notable for its distinctly Parisian *argot*.

The novel opens with a single exclamation: “Putain!”, followed by a jargon-filled conversation between Djiraël and his friend Armand. Djiraël’s first person narration is equally unique throughout the novel. For example, he describes getting ready before going out: “Une putain de douche bien chaude! Ça c’est un de mes kiffes. Je peux rester de longs moments sous l’eau pendant que les autres se demandent ce que je peux bien y faire. Sûr qu’ils croient que j’me branle, mais je m’en bats les couilles” (17). Djiraël’s narration anchors the book to the outskirts of Paris, whereas *Un Papillon dans la Cité* remains tied to Guadeloupe and the Caribbean. For Félicie, Creole is a way to stay connected to her home country, but also to express a linguistic hybridity in French Caribbean literature, tying her to a larger tradition of storytellers. Language has a similar function in *Sarcelles-Dakar*. It is, as noted by Elodie Malanda, a way for Sané to:

> s’inscrit dans ce que Bernard Mouralis définit comme 'contre-littérature', c'est-à-dire les écrits qui éclatent les limites de ce qui est considéré comme de la ‘littérature.’ Cette contestation depuis la marge - ici sociale - est soulignée à

> travers l'alternance de chapitres entièrement écrits dans la langue 'des cités' … Sané montre ici que tous les langages sociaux ont leur place dans la littérature. (312)

Djiraël's *argot*, then, like Félicie's Creole, is transformed from a marginalized dialect into a valid, hybridized way of speaking that ties him to a larger Parisian community. However, it is also an (unconscious) marker of Djiraël's distance from his home country.

In fact, Djiraël sees things through a distinctly French lens, despite his personal declaration that "j'suis juste un Sénégalais" (77); as the book goes on, he realizes more and more how much he has changed since he left. For example, he considers himself to be poor. His mother has to work for three months to get a loan from the bank to buy plane tickets to Senegal. Yet, in Senegal, Djiraël's family perceives him as rich. His cousin Djibril is jealous of his Air Max shoes, and his other cousin Bilal explains that in Senegal, "tu cours toujours après l'argent." Bilal further explains that Senegal is difficult: "La vie est dure ici. Y a pas de travail, y a pas d'argent, pas d'avenir" (77). Djiraël tries to protest that in France, it is the same, but his cousin quickly admonishes him: "Je suis pas sûr qu'on puisse comparer. Vous, les francenabés, vous ne pouvez pas vous rendre compte" (76). In some ways, however, life in Senegal *is* the same — just never how Djiraël expects it. When his cousin offers him some pot, Djiraël is surprised, assuming Senegal to be much more conservative. Once again, his cousin corrects him: "Détrompe-toi. En Casamance, il y a plein de champs de yamba. On n'a attendu personne pour en fumer. Toi, tu ne fumes pas?" (70).

Djiraël is still frustrated by his family's characterizations of his wealth and French identity, especially as his cousins mythologize his life in France. He begins to realize that

he is deeply privileged in a way he has never before considered. This is the beginning of many uncomfortable challenges to Djiraël's fragile sense of self, which has been built between two cultures and two parents. It seems that he cannot get a grasp on either place; he simultaneously insists that he is Senegalese — *not* French — while also trying to prove that France is similar enough to Senegal that he understands life in Dakar. The impossibility of coalescing these two ideas is a source of constant tension during his visit.

It is not only Djiraël's family who perceive him as a rich outsider. Later, when he goes shopping, he is quickly surrounded by young children: "une armada d'enfants maigrelets, aux pieds nus, m'a encerclé: - Hé, francenabé! Hé francenabé! Ils me tendaient des pots métalliques. Je ne parlais pas wolof mais je comprenais très bien qu'ils me demandaient de l'argent … putain, ça commençait sérieusement à me faire chier qu'on m'appelle francenabé" (84). Djiraël's emotional response to these confrontations is typically frustration or anger. Though he does not realize it, he is also very defensive; despite his initial hesitation to even go to Senegal, it hurts him to feel like he is an outsider. Later, after a visit to a slum near the Colobane train station. Djiraël remarks, "l'alcool, la drogue, et la violence se mêlaient à cette orgie de désolation… Si l'enfer existait, le bidonville de Colobane devait être son antichambre … j'avais envie de vomir" (86-87). This encounter further proves his cousins' point of view: Djiraël has been sheltered, and doesn't understand the country he left behind. The moment is also striking - Djiraël had idealized Senegal, and confronting an area of extreme poverty makes him physically ill. When Félicie moved to Paris, she saw her mother trying to forget Guadeloupe and become purely French; Félicie had to *actively* build an identity that included both places. Djiraël has the opposite problem: his Senegalese identity has

become inadvertently *passive*. Although he does not see France the same way his cousins in Dakar do, Djiraël is forced to confront all the ways France has influenced his worldview.

He accomplishes this reconciliation through his aforementioned spiritual walk in the woods to meet the Harmattan — winds of Senegal that could carry a message from his father. Again, this both echoes and contrasts *Un Papillon dans la Cite*; both are about absent parents. However, while Félicie's relationship with her mother was damaged, they could work together to repair it and let something new flourish. For Djiraël, the opportunity has passed, and he can only hope to find closure with his father - and by extension, with his relationship to Senegal. This is mirrored in the fable told by the old man in the woods about two lovers who must, for reasons beyond their control, be separated for a long time. It is only when they are reunited that they can finally find peace. Of course, the story evokes Djiraël's own bitter separation from his father and homeland. It is only when Djiraël is able to tell the old man in the woods: "Dites-lui … que je l'aime également et que … je suis fier d'être son fils" (166), that he is able to move forward without resentment. While he is talking about his father, the moment also clearly evokes his evolved attitude towards Senegal. He has long felt Senegalese without fully confronting what that part of his identity meant. It is only in reuniting with his father's ghostly messenger, in his home country, that Djiraël can reconcile his past, present, and future.

Djiraël's encounter with the storyteller is also indicative of what Malanda calls the 'esthétique du merveilleux' (312). Before his message from the Harmattan, Djiraël scoffs at the idea of the supernatural — yet another example of his European rationality.

However, after his meeting in the forest, he recognizes that he has undergone a real, yet unquantifiable, experience, which signals:

> La victoire de la magie sur la logique rationaliste de l'Occident… [il doit] se rendre à l'évidence que le monde surnaturel existe, preuves à l'appui, une fois [qu'il est] de retour dans [son] pays natal. Le cartésianisme acquis en France y est alors présenté comme aliénant et la connexion [qu'il renoue] avec le monde surnaturel marque la fin d'une quête identitaire. (418)

Thus, Djiraël comes to understand another way he has internalized a French identity; by reconnecting with Senegal, he is able to understand another way of looking at the world. His time with the Harmattan reconnects him to a larger Senegalese system of belief and cultural traditions that he had inadvertently lost.

Djiraël's inner journey of self-acceptance and understanding is also represented in the physical world as he loses or gives up some of the material things tying him to his life in Paris. In one scene, for example, as a part of a purification process during his father's funeral rites, he must shave his head. He is horrified: "et merde. J'allais perdre ma belle coupe afro, que j'avais mis deux ans à faire pousser…" (116). Yet it is this newfound baldness that allows him to once again feel the wind on his head — a clear foreshadowing to the coming Harmattan. Furthermore, when he first arrives in Dakar, his cousins are jealous of his Air Max shoes and name brand clothes. Djiraël is proud of them, and happily shows off. At the end of the novel, his cousin begs for his shoes: "Oh cousin, fais un petit geste pour ton frère du tiers monde quoi" (173). Earlier in the story, for similar comments, Djiraël reacted with anger. Now, he can laugh: "et voilà comment mes Air Max toutes neuves sont restées au bled. Après le passage de Djibril, ç'a été le

tour de Papisco et de Seni. Une vraie razzia. Plus de short Lacoste, plus de baskets Jordan et plus de tee-shirt Nike" (172-173). In giving up all of his brand-name possessions and shaving his *belle coupe afro,* Djiraël shows a newfound understanding in the value of immaterial connections.

His external appearance has been transformed into an internal contentment. Yet he has also not entirely embraced the traditional Senegalese views espoused by his mother and aunts; he doesn't quite believe that anything supernatural happened in the forest, for example. Perhaps unconsciously still adhering to Western notions of individualism and faith, he explains,

> Les esprits des morts ne pouvaient pas communiquer avec les vivants. Les contes, c'était pour les enfants, et la foi pour les faibles. En réalité, le vrai problème, avant ma rencontre avec Kadiom, c'est que j'avais perdu la foi. J'avais d'abord arrêté de croire en l'amour de mon père. Ensuite, j'avais cessé de croire en moi. Et puis, j'avais fini par ne plus croire en rien ni en personne. (173)

In a nod to a newfound sense of community, however, Djiraël's new outlook is based on the intangible relationships he has with others — his father, his family, and a larger network of his ancestors. In this way he is able to be, as Sané said, "partout chez lui."

Djiraël's journey is similar to Félicie's; both have aspects of their identities tied up in their relationships with their parents. This is a common theme in young adult literature, where the adolescent's growing independence outside of the family home is a hallmark of coming-of-age stories. Yet Djiraël and Félicie also have the added element of migration, complicating their search for identity. In both cases, they must explore what it means to leave the home. For Djiraël, growing away from his father also pushed him to

grow away from Senegal. For Félicie, reconnecting with her mother put her in the uncomfortable position of losing the stability of her home with Man Ya; without the anchor of Guadeloupe, Félicie was unrooted. In the end, too, both have better understandings of themselves and their identities — which they are only able to achieve through intentionally reconnecting with their home countries.

Significantly, both protagonists also live in the Parisian banlieues — transnational spaces that allow them to connect with other immigrants. Living in a multicultural space pushes them to what Bhabha describes as the "gathering of exiles and émigrés and refugees ; gathering on the edge of 'foreign' cultures; gathering at frontiers; gathering in the ghettos or cafes of city centers" (Bhabha, quoted in Chakraborty, 150). Here, at the edge of Paris — at the frontier of the de facto cultural center of France — Djiraël and Félicie live in their own multilingual and multicultural microcosms. Like Félicie's polyphony, Djiraël's journey between Senegal and France shows him the multiplicity of his own identity — he is a 'francenabé.' In *Sarcelles-Dakar* and *Un Papillon dans la Cité*, Djiraël and Félicie must intentionally strive to retain their connections to Senegal and Guadeloupe from abroad. They also move beyond colonial binary thinking; France becomes a physical home for them while they also have an identity in larger diasporas. As Bhabha theorizes, neither protagonist has a 'still' identity; their cultural hybridization is a constant negotiation and renegotiation between a plurality of places, people, and traditions.

Navigating a transnational identity is significantly more difficult in Philippe Arnaud's 2018 novel, *La Proie*, as protagonist Anthéa is desperately, dangerously alone for a large portion of the story. Like *Sarcelles-Dakar, La Proie* is part of the Exprim'

collection published by Sarbacane. However, the content of the story is significantly darker, with a plotline focused on human trafficking; whether or not young adult literature is becoming too dark in general is, and has been, a contentious debate (Williams). Unfortunately, while the plot of *La Proie* is appalling and distressing, it is not necessarily unrealistic. According to France's Ministry of European and Foreign Affairs, 2.5 million people are trafficked every year (2019). Further UN statistics report that from 2016-2018, over 4,000 victims were identified in France alone, with the majority facing some form of sexual exploitation (UNODC, 2020). In *Sarcelles-Dakar* and *Un Papillon dans la Cité,* the protagonists live on the outskirts of Paris among a support network of other immigrants. *La Proie* takes place in the heart of the city, showcasing a deeply horrifying side of the country. For Anthéa, it is not a question of learning to accept or internalize a multicultural identity; her only goal is to escape alive.

The story opens in Cameroon, as ten-year-old Anthéa and her best friend Diane patrol the markets, play at each other's houses, and reluctantly go to school. In addition to Diane, Anthéa is attached to a boy named Samuel. While their relationship is not romantic in these early pages, there is a hint of interest. Much like *Un Papillon dans la Cité*, the early scenes of Cameroon are idyllic. Anthéa's family is poor and without many resources, but Anthéa is unquestionably happy. Her one source of struggle is school, where she does not naturally excel. She is, however, a gifted storyteller. She will often spend her evenings weaving long, complicated tales for neighboring children, participating in what Malanda calls "une poétique de l'oralité," when French novels become "pétris par la littérature africaine francophone… parsemés de proverbes" (308-309).

Anthéa's family's economic situation deteriorates, and she begins to help her mother at the market on Tuesdays. Soon, she starts noticing the same white French woman coming to their stall. The woman is polite, well-spoken, and clearly (in Anthéa's eyes) rich. The woman takes a special interest in Anthéa, and eventually offers to take Anthéa back to France with her. Anthéa's father agrees, explaining:

> Je veux le meilleur pour toi … Je ne suis payé qu'un mois sur deux, désormais - et parfois moins encore… je dois penser à ton avenir. La dame blanche à qui ta mère vend ses fruits… Elle veut t'emmener avec elle en France. Là-bas, ils apprennent mieux, plus vite. Ils sont en avance. Elle nous a promis que tu irais dans une bonne école, la même que ses enfants. C'est une chance pour toi. Et pour nous aussi: un jour, tu nous aideras. (61)

Anthéa's father unironically echoes Fanon here; he hopes that she will return "un[e] demi-dieu," capable of helping her family. Thus, with the promise of educational and economic opportunity, Anthéa must leave her beloved Cameroon for France.

At first, Anthéa's time in France is as advertised. The French family — a mother (Christine), father (Stéphane), and two children around Anthéa's age (François and Élisabeth) — send Anthéa to school regularly. At home, Anthéa helps with small duties around the house and some childcare. Quickly, however, the parents begin to systematically degrade and abuse Anthéa. They hide her passport, stop letting her call home, and increase their demands. Any request from Anthéa, or any outside scrutiny from the school, leads to extreme paranoia and further abuse from the family. Eventually, they take her out of school altogether and lock her in the house when they leave. Despite Anthéa's pleas to go home, the abuse continues and worsens. In the novel's most brutal

and cruel development, Anthéa is locked downstairs at night, where she is repeatedly raped by Stéphane. She almost completely dissociates from herself: “Consciemment ou non, elle est devenue ce qu’ils voulaient: une machine domestique docile, un robot ménager comme celui qui traîne sur le plan de travail de la cuisine … elle oublie des repas, maigrit encore plus” (232). She even stops speaking, signaling a drastic change from her loquacious storytelling in Cameroon: in France, she is silenced.

While living in abject misery, Anthéa begins hallucinating her mother; the hallucination convinces her to attempt an escape. The novel’s final section is chaotic: Anthéa manages to leave the house, but is completely lost in Paris. Fortunately, she is rescued by two homeless men who listen to her story and try to help her. Anthéa feels trapped; she does not have her passport, and fears that the police would not believe her. In a frantic, dangerous last attempt, she sneaks back to the house to retrieve her passport. She encounters Stéphane, but evades him. Leaving the house, she is overwhelmed, and faints. Waking up in a hospital, Anthéa finally speaks to the police, who recognize the signs of human trafficking. In the story’s epilogue, Anthéa is able to return to Cameroon, where “elle est libre, libre, enfin” (293).

Obviously, this plot is significantly bleaker than either *Un Papillon dans la Cité* or *Sarcelles-Dakar*; by the end of the novel, Anthéa’s situation is categorically nightmarish. *Un Papillon dans la Cité*’s most illicit plotline is Mohamed skipping class to commit petty burglary and smoke. In keeping with the more mature audience of the Exprim’ novels, *Sarcelles-Dakar* does feature scenes of extreme poverty in Dakar, and introduces some sexual content, including a girl who must pay for school through prostitution. Yet, neither Djiraël nor Félicie is ever far from the safety of their family.

The misery and crime they see is on the outskirts of their lives; the protagonists themselves are not harmed - and thus the reader is also protected.

Furthermore, while Djiraël and Félicie respect and love Senegal and Guadeloupe they also both come to appreciate the lives they have in France. Though France is not without challenges, they both have friends in their neighborhood, families nearby, and educational opportunities to pursue. Anthéa experiences misery directly and alone, without any familial or societal safety nets; she is in the heart of Paris, with no access to the vibrant transnational spaces described in *Sarcelles-Dakar*. The reader, too, with an increasing sense of foreboding and danger, is pulled unwillingly through the story. *La Proie* forces readers to experience France from a completely different perspective, and deftly shatters any illusion that it represents a guaranteed path to prosperity.

While it is a departure tonally, *La Proie* does have some thematic similarities to *Sarcelles-Dakar* and *Un Papillon dans la Cité*. In the beginning, for example, Anthéa and Félicie — and Cameroon and Guadeloupe — are very similar. Their lives revolve around simple pleasures, like a beignet for Anthéa, or a doukoun for Félicie, as well as neighborhood friends. Cameroon and Guadeloupe are, through the eyes of a child, so idyllic as to border on Edenic. Yet, there are also hints of turmoil. Félicie's mother fled Guadeloupe for better opportunities, and Man Ya's insistence on Félicie's education reveals her own shrewd awareness of the island's potential limitations. Anthéa's parents are struggling economically, and don't have confidence in their children's socioeconomic prospects in Cameroon. In one revealing conversation between Anthéa's father and uncle, the two men debate Cameroon's future. While they disagree on the perpetrator of Cameroon's current misfortunes (one believing it to be the French, while the other feels

Cameroonians themselves bear responsibility), both agree that “Les Chinois, ce sont les pires des colons” (28). Obviously, while they disagree on why, the men both see Cameroon as at the bottom of the global geopolitical ladder.

This perception is echoed more broadly in *Sarcelles-Dakar,* as Djiraël’s cousins criticize the flaws of Senegal, or Africa in general. Despite recognizing the French as past colonizers, African characters in both novels still see France as a land of opportunity - at least in the beginning. Unexpectedly, it is often the French themselves who see France through a more subtle lens. “En France, ce n'était pas simple pour nous. Vos compatriotes pensent toujours que c’est le paradis, la France, je les comprends mais…” (60) Christine wistfully explains — or warns — Anthéa. While Djiraël was an immigrant who wanted to see himself as Senegalese, his depictions of France mirror Christine’s. He, too, felt that life in France was not as simple or as easy as his Dakarian cousins would have believed.

Ultimately, *Sarcelles-Dakar* and *La Proie* play with each characters’ expectations and assumptions of Africa and France. Djiraël’s Senegalese cousins can’t understand the real challenges Djiraël has in Paris, and Djiraël does not fully comprehend his home country. Similarly, although Anthéa romanticizes Cameroon in the beginning, there are clear issues that are obvious to readers: her father works in a corrupt bureaucracy, money is tight, and her friend Diane’s father is abusive, often beating Diane or his wife. Anthéa is not successful in school, and there are no resources to accommodate her learning. Like Man Ya, Anthéa’s parents understand education to be key to a young woman’s access to a better life, and Anthéa is not able to get the education she needs in Cameroon. *La Proie* does not sugarcoat the difficulties faced by Anthéa’s family, or Cameroonian society.

Stéphane and Christine are not the only abusive couple in the book; Diane's family is a testament to the fact that domestic violence can occur anywhere and to anyone.

Of course, Anthéa's experience in France with Christine and Stéphane is criminal and harrowing, and there were many warning signs that those around her missed. Stéphane's mother, Christine's sister, and a friend from school all visit Anthéa at some point, yet none report her increasingly desperate situation to the police. In fact, at one point Stéphane's mother tells Anthéa to watch for signs of Stéphane abusing his children. Anthéa wonders, "et moi? Si c'est a moi qu'il fait du mal? Tu ne peux même pas l'imaginer, ou tu t'en fous?" (216). However, after escaping, she is helped by several people: the homeless men who find her (Alex and Manu), a woman named Annie who sells flowers in the Metro, and, eventually, the police. Thus, even in a book with as negative an experience as Anthéa's, there is some nuance in the portrayal of France and the French. France is, fundamentally, a country with resources — if you know how to navigate the system and the bureaucracy to access them. Like Cameroon, then, France is designed to favor those with privilege. It is worth noting that the people who help Anthéa the most — Manu, Alex, and Annie — all live on the margins of French society. This implies that gaining privilege in France is not necessarily a purely meritocratic pursuit. Stéphane and Christine, debased though they are, still maintain more power in France than Manu and Alex. While Stéphane and Christine are the undisputed villains of the novel, the overall portrayals of France and Cameroon do not depict one or the other as purely good or purely evil.

In this way, *La Proie* echoes the same sentiments of *Un Papillon dans la Cite* and *Sarcelles-Dakar*: France is a place as multifaceted as any other, and identities can

become fragmented to accommodate this multiplicity. Where *La Proie* dramatically differs, however, is in Anthéa's final search for identity. Unlike Djiraël or Félicie, Anthéa does not need to find a way to adapt to both places. Logistically, her entire family is still in Cameroon, and she would have no reason to travel back to France. The circular structure found in *Sarcelles-Dakar* and *Un Papillon dans la Cité* as protagonists journey back and forth between France and their home countries is here altered: Anthéa breaks the cycle of going to the metropole to "revenir se faire consacrer" (Fanon 15). It is hard to imagine her ever *wanting* to return to the site of her abuse and imprisonment. The need to internalize multiple cultures, then, is not urgent or necessary. While Djiraël and Félicie's success is in learning to live between and with a plurality of cultures, Anthéa's victory is in surviving the violent imposition of one.

Indeed, by the end of her abuse, Anthéa is a shell of her former self, and she is losing her grip on reality. When she is alone, she begins to hallucinate her mother, who urges her to be careful and escape. Of course, unlike the *esthétique du merveilleux* in *Sarcelles-Dakar*, there is nothing supernatural at play here; Anthéa is simply unable to consciously process the realities of her situation, and uses this maternal imagery to warn herself. While Anthéa subconsciously retreats into memories of Cameroon and home, actual time and names are slipping away: "[Anthéa] ne sort plus depuis des mois. C'est aux vêtements qu*'ils* portent qu'elle mesure le passage des saisons. Automne, hiver… Plus personne ne parle jamais, à part *lui*… *Il* est *toujours* là" (236, emphasis in original). Stéphane and Christine — her tormentors — have become so threatening and omnipotent that they take over the anonymity of third person pronouns. There is only one *il* and *elle* who matter to Anthéa. Her descent into becoming "une machine domestique docile"

(232) is an apt metaphor for Messay Kebede's description of the colonized subject: "Colonial discourse and rule have so dehumanized and degraded colonized peoples that they have to go through the whole process of relearning to be human" (540). Thus, Stéphane and Christine become the universal *il* and *elle* while Anthéa is closer to a dehumanized 'it.' On a macrocosmic scale, this is symbolic of the relationship of former colonizers towards their subjects, while on the microcosmic scale, it is a brutal indication of Anthéa's isolation and desolation.

It is through this fog of misery that Anthéa finally manages to break free; she seizes an opportunity to push past François (who, despite living in the same house, doesn't fully understand the concept of Anthéa's imprisonment): "elle le pousse, violemment, avec une énergie qu'elle croyait disparue depuis longtemps" (239). This last spark of fight propels her outside, to her eventual freedom and home. Anthéa's search for identity is tied to her search for strength, and she is ultimately victorious. Earlier, her uncle and father discussed the weaknesses of Cameroon, especially in comparison to colonizers like France. In the beginning, this is also true of Anthéa. Even on the first page of the book, the reader learns that Anthéa struggles to stand up for herself against her cousin: "Anthéa ne sait pas lui dire non et Diane le sait" (13). By the end, however, Anthéa has found her own inner strength; she is stronger than her captors. On a macrocosmic scale, *La Proie* disrupts the oversimplified and stereotypical image of France as a more powerful geopolitical force than its former colonial territories.

Her return also echoes the warnings of Ba, who criticizes "la diaspora africaine de renforcer le leitmotiv "émigrer à tout prix" en ne tenant jamais un langage de vérité sur ce qu'elle vit à l'étranger" (Ba, quoted in Lesne 206). Back on Cameroonian soil, Anthéa

"foule la terre rouge, sa terre, qui s'éveille dans la lumière naissante" (293). This awakening echoes a broader goal shared by postcolonial writers from across the francophone world to deconstruct a simplified superior/inferior binary between France and its former colonies. Anthéa's homecoming represents the dismantling of her father's colonial attitudes towards France, as well as her personal maturation towards a valorisation of her own agency and voice.

Conclusion

The final scenes of *La Proie, Un Papillon dans la Cité,* and *Sarcelles-Dakar* are all happy (though, in the case of *La Proie,* the happy ending does not outweigh the overall bleakness of the story). This is perhaps due to the genre, where younger readers expect or prefer to have endings that uplift, empower, and encourage. The sudden change in tone can feel jarring and almost too simple; this is especially true in *La Proie,* though the phenomenon is felt in all three. Indeed, it is a frequent criticism of young adult literature that the endings are precisely too "easy." In a way, this critique is valid for the novels discussed in this chapter. Yet at the same time, the simplicity of these positive endings belies the overall potential of these novels to be the focus of serious critical scholarship alongside more well-known postcolonial critiques and analyses.

One further similarity between all three stories is common to young adult literature: the protagonists' lack of agency. All three characters are sent to and from France at the request or demands of their parents. In each case, the myth of a better life in France originates with the parental figures; it is up to each protagonist, then, to develop their own relationship with the country. This phenomenon is explored explicitly in Ilmonen's discussion of mothers and daughters in female French Caribbean writers,

though the effect is felt in all three novels: “It is particularly common to describe the problematic relationship between mother and daughter as a metaphor for the relationship between the colony and the colonized. The mother may be imbued with white ideals or too deeply wounded by them to teach her daughter any means of resistance” (69). Thus, each protagonist not only works towards developing a sense of independence from the family unit, but also a separation from inherited ideals of colonization. Their coming-of-age is interconnected with their countries’ parallel postcolonial identity development.

These stories demonstrate the power of young adult literature to make complex topics more accessible for readers in general, while retaining shades of nuance and intricacy. This is one of the reasons that young adult literature appeals to a readership well beyond adolescents, as noted by the creators of the Exprim’ collection. Just as adults and adolescents alike can appreciate the journeys undertaken by Félicie, Djiraël, and Anthéa, even readers who aren’t French can recognize and analyze the global power structures and economic disparities inherent between countries. Though this chapter focused on the unique role of France, the stories fit into a larger narrative of growing up in a geopolitically unstable world.

CHAPTER 3: GLOBAL MIGRATION BEYOND FRANCE: THE REFUGEE EXPERIENCE

As noted in the previous chapter, many narratives of migration in francophone young adult literature naturally center around France. This is unsurprising, given France's colonial history; Félicie, Djiraël, and Anthéa were all born in former or current French colonies and territories. Their stories thus have a certain linguistic and historic coherence. Indeed, in almost any young adult novel of migration there will be similar thematic arcs. Young adult protagonists must still grapple with building a sense of self across multiple cultures and a heightened awareness of geopolitical intricacies — particularly in power imbalances between perceived developing and developed countries. Themes of education, familial responsibilities, and gaining independence still remain central. In the previous chapter, I highlighted the importance of France as a destination and an ideal in each story. Yet, this is not always the case — French language novels set completely outside of France are also common. Migration is constantly increasing, including a notable increase in the global refugee population, and there is no shortage of young adult stories reflecting this phenomenon (Dimock).

In this chapter, I explore young adult refugee protagonists moving from and to geopolitical contexts outside of France, and how aspects of adolescent development are fraught in novels of refugee migration. I also examine the *arrested* development of the adolescent refugee characters; this is particularly pertinent in novels where the refugee protagonists die before reaching stability and safety. In these cases, the urgency of action passes to the surviving characters and, by extension, to the reader. Conversely, these novels also feature *accelerated* development, as the refugee characters are performing

activities typically coded as “adult.” In this case, the lack of a family support network is felt acutely, and young adult or underage protagonists are forced to fulfill duties associated with parental care, like finding access to food and shelter. The novels examined in Chapter One serve as powerful tools for building empathy, and this holds true for the texts of chapter two. Yet, this chapter’s stories featuring refugees go a step further, and outline implicit or explicit paths for readers—especially, but not always, young readers—to take that sense of empathy and turn it towards tangible activism and real-world action.

Félicie and Djiraël migrated legally for family reunification and increased economic and educational opportunities. Anthéa, after receiving proper aid following her horrific ordeal, is able to safely return to Cameroon, which she considers to be her home. Each novel in this chapter instead features a protagonist or main character who is a refugee or seeking refugee status, fleeing political instability, violence, and threats. Visits home for class trips and funerals are not possible; in the foreseeable future, none of these characters are able to go back. Their journeys towards a new country may or may not include family members left behind, language barriers, or legal documents. While they may try to reach a specific country, believing it to have better opportunities or liberties, the clear and immediate goal is escaping the home country. The characters’ final destination becomes a secondary concern. This intense focus on escape and safety creates a precarious foundation on which to build identity and belonging; the main characters may still feel connected to their home country culturally, but politically, they must sever ties. While Félicie, for example, existed in a liminal space between France and

Guadeloupe, this chapter's characters are even further marginalized as they exist in the murky and often hostile limbo outside of legal residency.

Despite these extreme circumstances, however, the novels I examine in this chapter also feature characters who are extraordinarily relatable. Alexis, in *Alexis, fils de Raphaël* (2004), faces his time in a refugee camp in the United States and his eventual move to Montreal with humor and optimism. Brahim, the Sudanese protagonist of *Homme Noir sur Fond Blanc* (2019), navigates being an outsider in a small Belgian town with a quiet determination. In *Refuges* (2015), author Annelise Heurtier balances the voice of Mila, an Italian teen on vacation with her family, with brief snapshots of refugees who all end up on the same boat bound for the Italian border. Mila's grief over a recent family tragedy is explored alongside her growing awareness of Italy's tenuous relationship with refugees. As Mila's story weaves together with the stories of those on the boat, the similarities between the characters become increasingly apparent.

The nebulous concept of an identitary binary (us versus them) is highlighted by Michel Agier. In his definition of 'nous,' he stresses: "Le « nous » que j'utilise dans cette réflexion est relationnel, il n'est pas ethnique, racial ou national. Autrement dit, ce peut être n'importe qui du point de vue de l'identité, mais c'est celui ou celle qui est établi quelque part et regarde celles et ceux qui arrivent comme des étrangers (au sens du mot anglais outsiders)" (12). For readers — especially adolescent readers — the simple dichotomy of "us" versus "them" is irrevocably blurred as Alexis, Brahim, and Mila all traverse typical adolescent challenges alongside their migrations; by the end of the story, none of them feel like outsiders.

The difficulties faced by characters in all three novels are thus familiar to young adult literature *and* to novels of exile and immigration more broadly. Once again, young adult literature does not diminish the nuance of the genre; the geopolitical and personal challenges portrayed are multifaceted and complex. In *Reflections on Exile*, for example, Said describes the debilitating solitude of exile:

> There is the sheer fact of isolation and displacement, which produces the kind of narcissistic masochism that resists all efforts at amelioration, acculturation, and community. At this extreme the exile can make a fetish of exile, a practice that distances him or her from all connections and commitments. To live as if everything around you were temporary and perhaps trivial is to fall prey to petulant cynicism as well as to querulous lovelessness. (146)

The characters examined in this chapter struggle against this "petulant cynicism" and "narcissistic masochism," and do not always succeed in rising above it. Thus, just as the previous chapter's novels do not diminish the complexity of postcolonial France, this chapter features novels that explore the intersections of adolescent development, the perils of exile, and the institutions that force refugees into "the perilous territory of not-belonging" (140).

An excellent example of the versatility and intricacy of young adult literature and its authors is Marie-Célie Agnant. Born in Haiti in 1953, Agnant migrated to Montreal in 1970, fleeing the Duvalier regime. Of her childhood, Agnant remarked, "Quand on passe toute son enfance sous le règne de Duvalier, il est difficile de pouvoir se souvenir d'autre chose que de la terreur et de la peur. Sauf si on vient d'une famille de Duvaliéristes. Moi, je me souviens du bruit horrible des sirènes, du silence imposé, et de ce désir de partir à

cause de cette peur qu'on ne pouvait pas nommer" (Agnant in *Île en île*). In Quebec, Agnant has published award-winning poetry, short stories, and novels for both adults and adolescents. Part of her goal as an author is to bear witness; this becomes particularly relevant when writing for adolescents. She writes,

> L'écriture, de manière générale, et plus particulièrement certains de mes textes destinés aux jeunes sont des passerelles qui permettent d'aborder des sujets occultés, oubliés, enterrés, comme le Chili, Haïti, la répression, la dictature ... Les jeunes que je côtoie dans les écoles et qui ont lu mon roman *Alexis d'Haïti* (un texte sur l'exil et la répression) me posent ces questions ; pourquoi, demandent-ils parfois, personne ne nous parle de ces évènements ? Je sais combien il a été important pour moi que mes enfants comprennent très tôt comment et pourquoi le monde est divisé tel qu'il est. (Agnant in *Île en île*)

It is notable that she equates young adult literature with 'l'écriture, de manière générale' here; Agnant suggests that all literature can have a similar function — to inform. She is aware of the particular readership attracted to her young adult novels, but does not use this as an excuse to diminish their overall message.

Agnant's work frequently centers on the complex themes of colonialism, the Haitian diaspora, racism, and social justice; by her own admission, many of her pieces contain autobiographical elements (Boucher). This is certainly the case with her 1999 and 2000 young adult novels *Alexis d'Haiti* and *Alexis, fils de Raphaël*. Following Alexis and his mother as they flee from Haiti to their eventual resettlement in Montreal, the novels are a testament both to Agnant's strength as an author and of the potential of young adult literature to deftly navigate actual modern problematics. *Alexis d'Haiti* focuses primarily

on Alexis's escape; from a precarious and dangerous situation in Haiti, to a terrifying ordeal fleeing to Miami, the novel is a fast-paced and gripping account of human courage.

Alexis, fils de Raphaël, which is my focus here, chronicles the ongoing challenges of resettlement. While Alexis has fled Haiti, his safety in the United States is still tenuous. Facing insurmountable bureaucratic hurdles in America, Alexis and his mother are eventually sponsored by an uncle in Montreal, where they move to start a new life. Once there, Alexis must integrate into a new school system, and grapple with his father's ongoing imprisonment in Haiti. Eventually, Alexis partners with a group of friends at school to campaign for his father's release. When Raphaël does eventually succeed in obtaining diplomatic passage to Canada, it is not a simple reunification. Alexis barely recognizes the man who gets off the plane: "Alexis regarde attentivement les mains de son père, son visage, à la recherche d'un indice qui lui permette de savoir ce qu'ils ont bien pu lui faire en prison pour qu'il ait changé à ce point" (202). Raphaël suffers from intense trauma, to the point where he must be hospitalized indefinitely; at the novel's conclusion, he is still in treatment.

Raphaël is an interesting counterpoint to Alexis. His condition is one of suffering, which Agier identifies as a key assumption in many "sociétés d'accueil et parmi celles et ceux qui se nomment les 'aidants'" (14). He continues: "La compassion suppose que l'autre sur lequel on s'attriste soit souffrant, c'est-à-dire diminué. Voire mourant, voire mort. Donc il n'est plus là. On peut développer cette analyse et dire que ce sentiment suppose l'absence et le silence de l'autre" (15). Yet Alexis, in his politically active friend group, is the opposite of absence and silence: indeed, he intentionally and loudly takes up

space in Montreal. Even within the same novel, then, Agnant portrays a multiplicity of immigrant identities, contributing to what Monique Lebrun classifies as a trend of "l'accession du personnage 'étranger' à un statut sémiotiquement plein" (95). Raphaël, alongside other family members and Alexis's diverse friend group, is part of a rich tapestry of immigrant stories. Raphaël's hospitalization also contradicts the assumption of a happy ending; arriving in Canada is not the end of the story. In fact, after Raphaël's arrival one of Alexis's friends is racially profiled and arrested in the Metro. The struggle for acceptance continues, then, even after characters have "made it."

In many ways, then, the challenges Alexis faces in *Alexis, fils de Raphaël* are more quietly insidious than those of its prequel. For example, at the novel's beginning, nine months have passed since Alexis and his mother Janine's escape from Haiti. They are trapped in a bureaucratic limbo in Miami, waiting for a residence permit. Their lives have become stagnant - Alexis is not enrolled in the public school system: "Depuis neuf mois, ils attendent, c'est trop long. Si on compte le temps passé derrière les barbelés dans le camp, il y aura bientôt deux années qu'il n'a pas été à l'école" (31-32). From a developmental standpoint, this interruption is devastating, as Alexis misses the socialization and educational opportunities afforded to others his age. For example, despite being enrolled in English classes, Alexis rarely attends. This is not a stereotypical adolescent avoiding school; on the contrary, Alexis is very bright, enjoys writing poetry, and overall misses his school friends from Haiti. Yet, he cannot bring himself to make new connections in Miami, either socially or linguistically. Alexis doesn't feel he needs new friends, explaining instead that "tous mes amis sont restés là-bas" (82). In his self-imposed isolation, Alexis recalls the advice of his Haitian friend Jérémie: "Les gens

changent lorsqu'ils vivent trop longtemps loin de chez eux … Ils deviennent bizarres, ils se comportent de façon étrange" (81). This is eerily reminiscent of Said: Alexis is indeed sinking into "the kind of narcissistic masochism that resists all efforts at amelioration, acculturation, and community" (Said, 146).

To make matters worse, the situation is seemingly endless as the United States government constantly prolongs their wait. In one scene, Alexis and Janine return, for the tenth time, to 64 Biscayne Road to check on the status of their residence application. The journey is long via public transport, and the immigration office and officers are cold. When they are once again turned away, Janine cries, "Nous avons attendu deux heures, ils se sont débarrassés de nous en dix minutes. Dix minutes pour nous faire dire d'aller refaire tous les examens médicaux… pourquoi, mon Dieu, pourquoi?" (43). Thus, Janine and Alexis are caught in an interminable and dehumanizing existence, with normal markers of adolescent development noticeably absent.

In Miami, Alexis has no school-aged friends, no legal permanent residence, and no concrete plans. Janine remarks that he seems like "un oiseau aux ailes brisées … auquel on aurait tordu le cou" (7). This bleak description mirrors the unknown fate of Raphaël, Alexis's father, who is trapped in a Haitian prison; Alexis and Janine don't even know if he is alive or dead. Just as Alexis languishes in Miami, so too does his father in Haiti. The parallel is as noticeable as it is uncomfortable—obviously, Alexis would rather be in his current situation than in prison. Janine even chastises him for not appreciating how fortunate they are: "tu ne peux même pas comprendre que dans notre malheur, nous avons encore de la chance" (38). Yet, Raphaël and Alexis are both undeniably

experiencing the same arrested development; this comparison thus serves as a subtle critique of the often precarious American immigration system.

Just as Raphaël is one of many prisoners in Haiti, Alexis is surrounded by other refugees in Miami: “Cette misère humaine qui déversait par brassées des réfugiés sur les plages les plus inhospitalières était universelle… [Janine] avait croisé au Havre des femmes venues de tous les coins du globe, de pays, de contrées dont elle n’avait jamais entendu parler auparavant” (58-59). While the protagonist of the story is Alexis, Agnant reinforces just how common his situation is. Even for readers who are unfamiliar with global refugees, *Alexis, fils de Raphaël* neatly dispels the illusion that Alexis’s story is an outlier—or that America is a simple paradise for any who enter. For readers who are also familiar with *Alexis d’Haiti*, Alexis’s time in Miami fosters a sense of indignation; after all that he and Janine have survived, the bureaucratic immigration nightmare seems particularly cruel. It also gives more nuance to the ending of *Alexis d’Haiti*: just because they successfully left Haiti, does not mean that life is automatically better or easier. When this trauma is multiplied by all of the refugees and immigrants in Miami, the injustice becomes overwhelming.

Furthermore, Agnant does not gloss over this period — it is actually enhanced by the structure of the book. Typically, young adult literature follows a steady, consistent pacing, with characters progressing through regular and relatable life stages and changes. Recall, for example, Félicie: her main storyline — traveling to Paris — is established and executed within the first pages. Chambers, too, in trying to land on a concrete poetics of the form, notices this trend: “The [young adult] narratives are straightforwardly told. They are, to use Shklovsky's word, chronologically "stepped," without intrusive

metafictional or alienating devices. It is as if twentieth-century modernism had never happened" (280). Though he does not conclude that steady pacing is a necessary feature in the poetics of youth literature, he does remark it as a pattern. Yet, in *Alexis, fils de Raphaël*, the narrative arc is disrupted. Chapters one through eight (of eighteen total) focus on Alexis's stagnation in Miami. Alexis doesn't even land in Montreal until page 114 of 221. The book is then almost split in two; in Montreal, Alexis attends school, makes friends, and gets involved in a youth activism project. This second half of the novel is so familiar to young adult readers, that the first half becomes even more jarringly divergent — much like the interrupted lives of the refugees Agnant is describing.

Alexis and his mother are eventually able to move on from the United States thanks to Uncle Etienne, who sponsors their visas in Canada, and serves as a sort of cultural translator when the two arrive. In the plane to Montreal, Alexis vacillates between anxiety and hope: "Mais en vérité, intérieurement, il est tendu comme un arc et fait de grands efforts pour ne pas se laisser envahir par la nervosité de sa mère. Lui, c'est l'accueil, la-bas, au Canada, qui le rend nerveux… et si, une fois de plus, on devait les enfermer dans un autre camp de réfugiés?" (107). As the plane ride continues, "Alexis, tout heureux, se laisse porter par une douce rêverie en contemplant les gros ballots que font les nuages. 'Le ciel et les nuages, c'est l'infinie liberté,' pense-t-il… il laisse vagabonder son esprit, content de cette beauté que rien ne semble pouvoir lui ravir" (111). This inability to settle on a single emotion plagues Alexis in Montreal, as well. With his past, Alexis never quite settles into feeling completely safe. For example, "... le doute l'assaille chaque fois qu'il rentre de l'école. Il ne sait jamais s'il retrouvera Janine" (159). This continued trauma is typical of adolescent refugees. Dr. Gunisha Kaur,

medical director of the Weill Cornell Center for Human Rights, notes that "humans experience a crippling response when faced with persistent uncertainty" (Kaur). With refugee and asylum seekers, she finds "significant trauma from instability" that has the capacity to ripple out through multiple generations and entire communities that experience the trauma vicariously. Once again, Agnant challenges the idea of a simple, happy ending in Montreal, though he begins to succeed in other areas — notably, academically and socially.

In school, Alexis's teachers praise his work ethic and laud his progress. Once again, this is a stark contrast with Alexis in Miami, where uncertainty and fear paralyzed him. Another key difference is that in Montreal, the school has resources available. Two classmates, Emmanuel Ratelle and Sara Blanchot, are assigned to tutor Alexis to make sure he keeps up with his assignments and learning. These students, particularly Sara ("la meneuse du groupe" 160), end up bringing Alexis into their larger friend group, providing the social interaction with friends his own age that he so desperately lacked in Miami. Surrounded by this support, Alexis is able to more easily adapt to adolescent life in Montreal.

Interestingly, this group also helps him stay connected to Haiti — Sara is the daughter of Haitian immigrants, and is fascinated with Alexis's story and history. She constantly asks him questions about what life in Haiti was like. She and her family thus represent the Haitian diaspora, and the myriad of ways to stay connected — or disconnected — from one's roots. Indeed, Sara's parents, and by extension, Sara, often view Haiti negatively, and Alexis feels he must defend the island. Haiti, he insists, "n'est pas maudite, elle est malheureuse, mal aimée, c'est tout" (166). Here, Alexis's optimism

is on full display. Despite his past experiences, he has hope for the future of his country. His defense is also deeply personal; for Alexis, his identity is still strongly rooted in being Haitian. Possibly, his hope for Haiti is tied to a need for hope for himself — if Haiti can overcome its challenges, then so can he.

As a migrant, Alexis's identity is both internal and external — while he may identify as Haitian, there is no doubt that others *also* view him this way. Sara's mother, for example, "n'avait en tête qu'une idée: que Sara épouse quelqu'un qui n'ait surtout rien à voir avec Haïti" (168). Between Alexis and Sara, both are fascinated at their similarities and differences: "Sara … n'arrivait pas à comprendre comment Alexis pourrait tant lui ressembler et parler un langage qui lui était si étranger. Alexis ... était stupéfait de l'ignorance dont faisait preuve sa nouvelle amie en tout ce qui concernait Haïti" (163). This highlights an additional challenge for the adolescent migrant's quest for identity: external perceptions. Sara was born in Canada, but she and Alexis still find a kinship in their shared ancestry. Even though Alexis has left Haiti, Sara's mother still judges him as having ties that are too close. Thus, these external perceptions are both an advantage and a possible hindrance. In either case, it is an additional challenge for Alexis to navigate.

Typically, adolescents seek independence and individuality from their parents, eventually finding their unique place in the family structure and larger community; it is a distinct need for both individuality and belonging (Szwedo et al. 949). Alexis must seek this independence while grappling with his and his mother's intense fear of separation *and* while bearing the burden of societal assumptions about his identity. Said writes that "Exiles look at non-exiles with resentment. *They* belong in their surroundings, you feel,

whereas an exile is always out of place" (143), adding a potential extra layer of complication to the young adult search for belonging. In *Alexis, fils de Raphaël,* Agnant adds nuance: is Alexis still out of place within the diaspora, next to families like Sara's? Sara and Alexis clearly bond over their ties to Haiti, yet they are also well aware of their mismatched understanding of the country. Sara's mother, who ironically looks down on other Haitians, underlines that even within the Haitian community, Alexis can struggle to belong. This is a struggle that is not easily overcome. Djiraël in *Sarcelles-Dakar* represents, perhaps, a version of Alexis in the future; Djiraël felt Senegalese, but upon returning to the country, discovered that his family saw him as French. In the same way, Sara sees herself as connected to Haiti, while Alexis is shocked by her ignorance. There are not easy answers to the dilemma of belonging, and the novel does not seek to provide any. Rather, Alexis is as a testament to this challenge, providing a lens through which readers can better empathize and understand, and perhaps fulfilling Agnant's need to explain why the world is "divisé tel qu'il est."

Alexis, however, is not simply a character to pity, or to teach readers empathy. Instead, he is a strong role model figure, whose experiences and actions give him a unique agency and voice, despite his young age and circumstances. In "To Be or Not to Be an Adult, That is the Question," Heather Snell comments on the ability of so-called children to enact change. After questioning the idea that childhood and adulthood must necessarily exist as a binary along a linear path, Snell discusses how in current society, access to adulthood is synonymous with access to agency and privilege. Dismissing children as ignorant or innocent is often a discursive strategy by adults to diminish their political agency. Yet, "children" can and do exert political agency; Snell cites the

survivors of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School (Parkland, Florida) shooting as an example, who utilized their childhood as agency to more effectively call out inefficient lawmakers: "[The survivors] explicitly rejected the notion that children are innocent and ignorant. In reclaiming childhood as a space of experience and wisdom, they were able to remain in their allotted place as children — those who are supposed to be protected by adults - while also placing the burden of change squarely on the adults who had failed to protect them" (10). This relationship is metaphorically mirrored in the country of Haiti itself. Sara tells Alexis that she hates Haiti "qui t'a trop fait souffrir" (164). Alexis responds "ce n'est pas le pays… c'est le gouvernement… Moi, j'adore Haiti" (164-165). Here, Haiti is reduced to a childlike status of non-agency, suffering at the hands of the parent-figure government.

Alexis and his friends also exemplify the child-adult tension as they engage in a campaign of political activism to raise awareness about Alexis's father, ultimately resulting in Raphaël's diplomatic release from prison. Here, Agnant plays with the adult-child binary; Alexis desperately misses his father, and longs for that paternal authority in his life. Yet, it is Alexis who coordinates the efforts to bring Raphaël to Canada — the adolescent saving the adult. Furthermore, when Raphaël arrives, he is very unwell after years of abuse in prison. As Snell notes, those who are ill are often not seen as Raphaël "adult" in modern society. Thus, even though he is reunited with his father, Alexis is still effectively living without a traditional father figure. Like the Parkland shooting victims, Alexis must navigate a political labyrinth of adults and governments that, rather than protecting children, has instead created countless refugees and innocent victims.

Agnant also does not restrict her criticisms to the Haitian government: near the end of the novel, one of Alexis's friends, Malik, is arrested and beaten for refusing to show his student ID card on the metro. The incident is not isolated — many of Alexis's friends share similar stories of racial profiling and abuse. The students vow to use their newfound political activist group to protest Malik's treatment. Alexis and his friends clearly fall into the disadvantaged groups noted by Snell — they are adolescents, many are immigrants, and many are people of color. Yet, in disrupting the child-adult binary, Alexis takes on the political agency of an adult, and the novel implies that he will continue fighting injustices in the future. His character can help readers understand the refugee experience, while simultaneously demonstrating an empowering blueprint for political activism and social justice for all adolescents.

Alexis, fils de Raphaël takes a frank look at the challenges facing refugees, especially children. Alexis faces — and overcomes — numerous setbacks and obstacles, with the implication that there are more to come. Yet readers, by the end of the novel, are also confident that Alexis can overcome anything in his future. The story is honest *and* hopeful; this reflects Agnant's own successful migration and career in Canada. It also introduces readers to injustices that exist in the world, and gives them the tools and motivation to make a difference. Alexis's story is one of empowerment and success against almost insurmountable odds.

Of course, the harsh reality is that many refugees do not have happy endings, as demonstrated in Annelise Heurtier's 2015 novel, *Refuges*. The novel is split into two overlapping narratives. The main story follows Mila, an Italian girl on vacation on the island of Lampedusa with her family, after the death of her younger brother. She spends

her days trying to avoid her parents and their vacation home; the echoes of her brother haunt her family, and she feels suffocated by the memories. Of the house, she writes "Tout semblait vouloir lui rappeler que les années passées – dans lesquelles elle se réfugiait souvent en pensée, à l'époque tout allait tellement mieux – ne pourraient plus être rattrapées" (4). On one of her forays into the island, she meets Paola, and the two quickly form a friendship. It is through Paola that Mila begins to learn about the global refugee crisis, and the dark history of Lampedusa — a popular destination for fleeing refugees from several African countries. Mila's character trajectory, then, moves from personal tragedy to larger, global awareness.

Lampedusa — a simple place of healing for her family during a time of mourning — is transformed into a more complicated site of refuge and danger for refugees. This transformation goes beyond just the book itself; in an author's note, Heurtier explains, "les arrivées de clandestins à Lampedusa étaient déjà bien plus fréquentes que ce que je décris dans ce roman… dans un contexte économique difficile, l'opinion publique italienne était déjà tiraillée entre humanité et exaspération face aux dépenses engendrées par l'accueil des migrants" (164). Thus, Mila's story happens on a more macrocosmic level as well: from the intimate, fictional narrative of one family, to the broader, real-life implications of the Lampedusa humanitarian crisis.

In the penultimate chapter, Mila meets Ugo, an Italian boy whose father has been arrested under the controversial Bossi-Fini law[2], which penalizes the sailors who aid

[2] Note that the Bossi-Fini law was passed in 2002: "la loi Bossi-Fini opère un durcissement des conditions d'accueil des migrants en Italie. Entre autres mesures, elle conduit à la mise en place de poursuites judiciaires pour toute personne, notamment les pêcheurs, qui, recueillant un migrant, se retrouve de fait complice d'immigration illégale" (Heurtier 158).

migrants. Learning about this law represents a sort of climax in Mila's personal development:

> Elle était stupéfaite. Elle avait l'impression que tout un pan du monde se révélait brusquement à elle, avec des réalités dont elle n'avait jamais entendu parler, peut-être parce qu'elle avait choisi de les ignorer, peut-être parce qu'elle ne pouvait pas les percevoir, trop recroquevillée sur elle-même, occupée à regretter son passé ou à imaginer sa vie sans la naissance de Manuele. Comment avait-elle pu passer à côté de ça, elle qui croyait avoir si bien redécouvert Lampedusa? (155)

Once again, Mila's story moves from personal fiction, to real-world tragedy. Two days later, Mila hears about a migrant boat that shipwrecked off the coast, but she is no longer surprised. Instead, she sees the world with more realistic nuance: "Elle avait l'impression d'être une Mila différente. Grandie. Personne n'allait ressusciter ces frères, ces sœurs, ces enfants, ces parents qui mouraient en fuyant leur pays. Personne ne ferait revivre Manuele. On ne ramenait pas ce qui était perdu. Désormais, elle avait envie de penser à l'avenir" (162). Mila thus undergoes a complete transformation: from clinging to the past to looking forward, and from feeling powerless to recognizing her ability to enact change. She is able to make the connection between losing her brother, and the thousands of migrants losing their families to a perilous journey overseas. Mila developing a strong sense of empathy for others is the pinnacle of her growth over the course of the novel, suggesting that empathetic global citizenry is a necessary and desirable step in adolescent development.

Mila's story — told through numbered chapters — is also interspersed with a series of italicized first-person narratives from seven Eritrean migrants who all end up on

the same boat bound for Lampedusa. It is this boat that Mila sees in the story's epilogue. While the novels analyzed in chapter one could be critiqued for overly optimistic endings, *Refuges* ends on a subtler, ambiguous note: only three of the seven refugees survive the voyage (four, if you count an unborn baby whose mother is among the survivors). The novel ingeniously blends real-life events (Heurtier's author's note reveals that the book is partially inspired by an actual 2013 shipwreck off the coast of Lampedusa), with humanizing, fictional characters. While Mila is able to undergo the more typical adolescent maturation, the migrants' transformations and potential are abruptly cut short — by their deaths at the end of the book, or earlier by the circumstances of their home countries. Yet, conversely, their stories are also more personal and intimate, through their first-person narration, in comparison to the third-person narration of Mila's chapters.

While each migrant only has a chapter or two at most, their voices are distinct and memorable. Through this narrative technique, Heurtier thoughtfully makes each refugee character as complex as Mila, while also adding intricacy to the novel overall. Sara Day notes that much young adult literature follows a familiar first-person narration, sometimes leading to criticisms of overly simplistic writing. However, novels "employing multi-voiced narration allow for the most explicit exploration of mutual influence and control, both within and through the various narrative strands," with each voice being given equal power and influence (67). In novels like *Refuges*, this is particularly important "because each consciousness is its own subject rather than another's object, *each consciousness possesses equal authority*, regardless of the larger system of power established by the text in which that consciousness operates" (68,

emphasis mine). Heurtier is able, then, to suggest an inherent humanistic equality between all narrators or focalizers in the story, despite their societal inequalities.

Furthermore, though they are leading very different lives from Mila, the refugees don't necessarily feel like "the other." Saafiya, for example, dreams of becoming an English professor — a relatively common life goal. At nineteen years old, she speaks four languages already, and is an excellent student. However, she soon recognizes the futility of pursuing this career: "J'avais compris que je ne serais jamais libre de choisir mon métier, puisque c'est le gouvernement qui allait en décider" (Location 441). Eventually, she resigns herself to following the rules of her government while secretly harboring plans to leave: "Mais dans le secret de mon âme, je ne vivrais plus désormais que pour préparer ma fuite" (Location 509). Saafiya's potential is limited only by the constraints of her home country, and the injustice of her story stands out. It is also, in some ways, reminiscent of Mila's story — both women recognize the need to seize control of their own futures, and make plans to do so. Of course, Saafiya's plans involve a much more dangerous journey, and this parallel intentionally demonstrates how circumstances of birth - rather than personal merit — can determine future success.

Saafiya is resilient up until the end of the novel; however, her bravery is not complacent. Rather, it is fueled by an intense anger, one that is shared by all of the refugees on the boat. Saafiya speaks of her "rage et insoumission" that continue to burn (33). She is joined by Awat, recognizable for the "espèce de rage qui brillait dans ses yeux" (54) and Amanuel, "la colère qui palpite au fond des yeux" (136). Awat feels a kinship with Meron because the two have "la même rage au fond des boyaux" (156). Meron's emotions vacillate: "De l'amertume, de la colère ou de la tristesse, je ne sais pas

quel sentiment j'éprouve le plus souvent" (72). These refugees are not simplistic, plucky, stereotypical young adult heroes. They are complex, imperfect, and cognizant of their own suffering and misfortune. This has a basis in psychological research: Martti Tuomisto and Jane Roche's first-of-its-kind literature review on anger-responses of forced migration conclude that "experiences involving persecution, nationwide trauma, and multiple losses may lead to complex anger responses, further compounded by hostile post-migration environments" (8). The refusal to water down the refugees' rage forces readers to confront the refugee crisis more directly; had *Refuges* only focused on Mila, the blunt force of the refugees' fury would have been tempered. Instead, their anger and frustration are a constant narrative nudge to the reader: the refugee crisis is unacceptable and inhumane.

Yet, the novel is not without a final promise. Bleak anger is juxtaposed with hope in the last refugee story, narrated by Saafiya's unborn infant. He or she listens intently to his mother's heartbeat: "Heureusement, il y a la musique de son cœur. Boum-boum. Boum-boum. Je ne sais pas encore où je vais naître, mais je forme le vœu que ce soit dans un endroit où l'on laissera nos cœurs battre d'amour et d'espoir" (162). This last wish is expressed on the last page — leaving it up to the reader to write the next chapter. It can ultimately be seen as an appeal for the reader to cultivate the same empathy as Mila, and to fight for a more just future.

Like *Alexis, fils de Raphaël, Refuges* can be seen as a call to youth agency and activism beyond the pages of the novel. In fact, Heurtier herself set out to tell the story of Eritrean refugees, to bring more attention to their plight: "En 2013, lors de la première

grande médiatisation[3] d'un naufrage de migrants en Méditerranée, j'ai été frappée par le traitement très impersonnel réalisé par la majorité des supports journalistiques… Et j'ai eu honte de ne pas savoir, de ne même pas être capable de positionner l'Érythrée sur une carte. Alors je me suis dit que j'allais parler d'eux, en particulier" (Entretien avec Heurtier). She goes on to discuss Mila's own growing awareness of the refugee crisis, and how this realization is an integral part of growing up: "Peu à peu, Mila s'ouvre à la fois sur sa propre histoire et sur ce qui l'entoure, quitte à faire voler en éclats ses certitudes, sa manière d'envisager le monde. Mais grandir, c'est un peu cela, aussi, non ? Et il n'y a pas d'âge pour cela" (Entretien avec Heurtier). Thus, part of adolescent identity development is not only internal, but external as well. In this case, global citizenry should involve the easing of injustices against others, the formation of empathy, and the empowerment to better the world. Mila's worldview is irrevocably changed by learning about the refugee crisis in Lampedusa, as all of her preconceived notions are challenged and reconfigured. She recognizes that she must play her part as a global citizen, helping to form the world in which she wants to live. While this sounds difficult, Heurtier provides paths forward within the text.

While Alexis chooses to enact change through a political activist group at his school, as he is already well aware of the challenges of his country and its refugees, Mila must first start with her own education. Through Paola and Paola's friends, Mila takes the time to thoughtfully learn about the refugee crisis in Italy and beyond — much like Heurtier herself did months of research before beginning to write. At the end of the

[3] Lampedusa has been the subject of much mediatization. For example, see *Mur Méditeranée* by Louise-Philippe Dalembert or *Songe à Lampedusa* by Josue Guebo. Furthermore, In Limine provides an excellent discussion of the spectacularization of disembarkations compared to the relative silence on post-arrival daily realities in "The Theatre of Lampedusa."

novel, when Mila recognizes her own *potential* to act, she simultaneously feels the obligation to do so: “Elle ne savait pas ce que le futur lui réservait, ce qu’elle ferait exactement en faveur de ces migrants entrés en collision avec son monde. Une chose était sûre : en gardant les yeux ouverts, en affrontant les difficultés, tout devenait possible” (162). Thus, education and action are inextricably linked in the text, and the novel itself becomes a form of education for the reader, once again blurring the lines between fiction and reality.

While Mila has not yet formed her own political action group (though upon her return from vacation, it is likely that she would!), Paola is further along in her activism journey. She explains to Mila the urgency of action: “Ce qui ne veut pas dire qu’il faille se résigner, ou faire comme si ça n’existait pas. On fait ce qu’on peut faire, avec nos moyens. Tous les quatre, on est très engagés dans une association qui vise à faire abroger cette loi. Et Ugo s’est inscrit en fac d’histoire politique. Il dit qu’il veut être journaliste” (157). Here, Paola is distinctly aware of her youth, both as a source of hindrance (her “avec nos moyens” comment implies that her means are currently more limited) and as a rich source of potential. As Snell discusses, Paola is “explicitly reject[ing] the notion that children are innocent and ignorant” (10). Yet, rather than “placing the burden of change squarely on the adults,” Paola’s friends are making plans for their own empowerment — especially Ugo, in his career trajectory as a journalist.

It is notable that both *Alexis, fils de Raphaël* and *Refuges* feature youth activist groups, and that both groups have explicit plans to continue fighting social injustices beyond the ends of the novels. Alexis and Mila each grow during their stories; they end the novels as more mature, thoughtful characters who are better prepared to face the

world in front of them. Yet, this character arc is juxtaposed with the political activist work that remains incomplete. Indeed, both Alexis and Paola's groups are working through intricate social issues that do not have neat solutions - once again defying the stereotype that young adult literature has "happy" and easy endings, or that it merely presents a simplified worldview. Even the narrative structure of *Refuges* emphasizes the complexity of modern existence by not focusing solely on the internal development of a single protagonist. *Refuges* refuses this egocentric construction in favor of an interconnected tapestry of stories. While Mila is the main character of this novel, she is only one part of a larger, global network; her story's brief convergence with those of the refugees allows her to glimpse this truth and finally move more purposefully towards adulthood.

While Mila's path crosses only momentarily with the Eritrean refugees, Xavier Deutsch in *Homme noir sur fond blanc* imagines a more prolonged interaction. Published in 2019, the book follows the story of Brahim, a young Sudanese refugee, as he attempts to cross Europe. Through harrowing conditions and several perilous encounters with police, he finds himself on the outskirts of the small Belgian town of Saint-Franc. Before heading into town, Brahim, desperately cold and hungry, spends a few nights in the home of an eccentric recluse, Emile, who has recently died of natural causes in bed. Brahim is respectful, and disturbs the house as little as possible before moving on. Soon, he meets Gaston Goffart, the local mayor. Gaston, knowing the risks of harboring an undocumented person, immediately feels compelled to help Brahim anyway, and invites him to his home. Gaston takes on a paternal role for Brahim, and the two begin to forge a cautious, yet trusting, bond. Unfortunately, not everyone in Saint-Franc shares Gaston's

attitude — Brahim's presence is frequently met with suspicion or outright dislike and anger. Eventually, Brahim is reported to the national police in connection with the death of Emile. After many negative encounters with the Belgian police, Brahim attempts to flee, but he is shot in the process. The novel ends with a brief note on the aftermath of Brahim's death: there are no resignations or consequences among Belgium's top political positions. Saint-Franc's school, however, has been renamed "Ecole Brahim Abdelgadir."

This ending is possibly the bleakest yet — with Brahim's death, there are no broader structural changes or consequences. The same systems that led to his death are still flourishing in Belgium and Europe. In this sense, the book is a fiery condemnation of the European refugee response, and an earnest supplication for change. The title, *Homme noir sur fond blanc*, can reference a criminal lineup. While the most obvious "homme noir" would be Brahim himself — starkly out of place and criminalized in Saint-Franc - another interpretation is possible. For instance, the "homme noir" could simply be a silhouette as Deutsch puts all of Europe on trial. As each person comes face-to-face with the refugee crisis, how will he or she be judged? In the book's "Remerciements," Deutsch is blunt: "Il grandirait quelque chose de ténébreux dans le royaume d'Europe, à quoi certains ne se résignent pas. A vous qui rendez ce temps plus digne, plus solidaire, plus juste, plus chaud …aux innombrables, aux justes, aux allumeurs; à tous ceux qui résistent; à vous merci" (217). The "quelque chose de ténébreux" growing in Europe is those who would deny humanity to refugees; it is these people who are the criminals in the 'homme noir sur fond blanc' lineup.

This motif of judgment begins even before the story, as the novel is prefaced by two quotations: one from Jesus ("Et le Roi leur répondra: en vérité, je vous le dis, chaque

fois que vous l'avez fait à l'un de ces petits qui sont mes frères, c'est à moi que vous l'avez fait" (Deutsch, 5)) and the beginning of a Georges Brassens song, *Chansons pour l'Auvergnat*. The full Brassens song is about the eternal paradise awaiting l'Auvergnat, who was the only one to give hospitality and kindness to the singer. Here, there is no call to political or legal judgment. Instead, the novel suggests that those who would turn their backs on refugees will face a moral judgment that carries weight beyond legal systems. By using two distinctly Western and Judeo-Christian references, the implication is clearly meant for Europeans to think twice about the impact of their actions. Of course, Deutsch does not mean to put morality on a simplified binary; every person, regardless of religion or culture, has a choice to make.

For example, at one point before meeting Gaston, Brahim is in police custody. The Belgian police leave cash on the interrogation room table with him — most likely to entice him to steal. Brahim thinks of the Quran, quietly reciting a passage against stealing. However, the verse isn't necessary: "Brahim est honnête avant d'être pieux. Il ne s'empare pas de ce qui ne lui appartient pas…" (48). Thus, Brahim's religion is secondary to his own moral compass. His choice is immediately juxtaposed with the Belgian police, who seize Brahim's jacket and its contents — including his cell phone — and feign misunderstanding when he asks for it back. Eventually, the police leave him on the side of the road in a dark forest, as it lightly snows. Surely, these officers were not a part of Deutsch's remerciements "aux policiers honnêtes" (217).

This brief encounter is merely one of many for Brahim, much like how in the beginning of *Homme noir sur fond blanc*, Brahim's story is one of many. The novel chaotically jumps from story to story, of countless migrants preparing to reach Europe.

Eventually, Brahim's journey emerges as the main storyline, but not before readers are introduced to Ousmane in Libya, an unnamed migrant held for ransom in Italy, or Abraham, a deaf boy trying to reach England, among others. Again, the multiplicity of stories contributes to Day's analysis of polyphonic narration in young adult literature. In *Refuges*, Mila never met the refugees, so their voices remained separate in the novel. In *Homme noir sur fond blanc*, however, Brahim and the other refugees interact with different people and institutions across Europe. This polyphony, then, is useful "as an interrogation of cultural hegemony [that] extends beyond questions of race and class to include concerns about gender and age, as well as the hierarchical social and institutional systems at play in many adolescents' lives" (68). Day goes on to note that adolescents, in navigating "the overarching institutional power structures of school, church, and home life … generally occupy the lowest level of the hierarchy" (69). In novels of migration, particularly with refugees, adolescents are also occupying the lowest level of a legal hierarchy; their identity development must navigate not only the typical adolescent institutional power structures, but also state apparatuses. Deutsch does not dispute the institutional power imbalance between the adolescent refugees and the citizens of Saint-Franc. However, there is an added moral dimension to power structures here that Day overlooks. Indeed, at several moments, the adult characters of the novel come across as racist, cruel, or ignorant. As Deutsch has established from the beginning an explicit call to morality, it is notable that the adolescent refugees often have a *moral* position of power over the adults, forcing them to question their previously held beliefs or choices.

Like *Refuges*, the polyphony of voices here also suggests that Brahim's story is by no means unique — nor is Gaston's. Abraham reaches England through the help of a kind

truck driver. Brahim at one point avoids detection by police when he enters a sports bar, and men subtly move to block him from the view of a passing cruiser. Less fortunate are the four Sudanese "qu'un gouvernement européen rapatrie vers l'enfer" (27). While Brahim eventually does reach Gaston in the fictional town of Saint-Franc, the implication is that the other migrants could just as easily reach the reader. Readers are then clearly called to action in real life; it is up to them to decide if they will play the role of Gaston or a more sinister character (or, a passive character who does nothing).

In a similarity to *Alexis, fils de Raphaël*, the beginning of *Homme noir sur fond blanc* has the same sense of altered time. In the chaos of the beginning of the story, new sections of text begin only with place names ("Asmara, capitale de l'Erythrée" (8), "Province de Kordofan, Soudan" (9), "Sahara oriental, non loin de la frontière libyo-soudanaise" (10), etc). Once Brahim reaches Gaston and Saint-Franc, however, time is measured more and more chronologically as his location stabilizes ("C'est un samedi de février" (130), "Il est alors 13h17" (155), "Jeudi 21 février, à 10h18 du matin" (207), etc.). When Alexis was stuck in the migrant camp, time essentially stood still as he was unable to attend school or settle into any sort of healthy routine. Similarly, time has no meaning in the melee of *Homme noir sur fond blanc*'s opening pages. The refugees' endless search for safety and security take precedence over normal timekeeping — and by extension, development. Brahim's physical journey through Sudan, Libya, the Alps, and eventually Belgium, is far more important than temporal markers.

This is further mirrored by Brahim's development as a character. After an emotional departure from Sudan, Brahim's story is told primarily through the lens of physical safety and wellbeing. His arm is hurt, and it frequently causes him pain. He is

wary of police, and concerned about finding food, water, and safe lodging. In terms of character growth or emotional development, there is very little in this period. Brahim does make some connections with other migrants along the way, but there is no sense of prolonged friendship, trust, or obligation between them. This is not due to any mistrust or antisocial behavior on Brahim's part — in general, Brahim is almost too trusting and open at several moments early in the story. The transitory nature of Brahim's connections as he travels is primarily circumstantial, rather than inherent to his personality. It is only when he reaches Saint-Franc that time in the story starts to pass more linearly, and Brahim is able to move beyond purely survival mode.

Most adolescents, as they reach adulthood and venture into wider society, yearn for acceptance, especially from their peers, who begin to replace parents as main sources of validation. Szwedo et al. note that a "weakening of parental support occurs in the context of teens' strivings to achieve independence from parents as they begin to turn increasingly to peers for support during mid- to late adolescence" (950). In either case, Szwedo et al. indicate that seeking support from developmentally appropriate external sources is key to developing functional independence later in life. Cut off from family geographically and digitally after the police steal his cell phone, Brahim has no connection to family or peers. He has little opportunity to explore a bi-cultural identity; even his connection to Sudan is tenuous as he recognizes that he cannot return. Furthermore, in Belgium as an undocumented refugee, he faces rejection on a devastating scale: from legal barriers to xenophobia. Thus, it is not only geographical and chronological stability that finally allows Brahim to begin to move forward — it is also Gaston's careful friendship and paternal support that provide him the necessary security

to grow. It is a slow process; Brahim's first night, he wakes up in a panic to check that Gaston hasn't locked him in his room. Later, however, Gaston lends Brahim a phone to call his mother. This moment of reconnection helps ground Brahim in this aspect of his identity: that of the first-born son, fulfilling his duty to search for opportunities to provide for his family.

By the end of the novel, Brahim trusts Gaston enough to ask him to also lodge two of his friends, Gaouar and Safouan, who are stranded at a Belgian train station. Following the developmental model established by Szwedo et al., Brahim's ability to call on Gaston for help is a positive step in his identity development and potential. Later that week, as the three boys sit around Gaston's table playing cards, "Brahim rit" (207). That simple phrase is a paragraph by itself, marking its significance as one of the few moments in the book with Brahim's laughter. Playing a card game across multiple languages and cultures, we begin to see a path for Brahim to embrace his roots and grow into a new life. It is a scene of stunning normalcy in a story where, four pages previously, Gaston received an anonymous letter that read "pas de singes à Saint-Franc" (203). Gaston, now acting in more of a parental role towards Brahim, destroys the letter. He is careful to shield Brahim from any external rejection, instead allowing Brahim the chance to flourish in the safety of his home.

While Brahim doesn't see the letter, its contents would probably not surprise him; at that point in the story, he had been the victim of racism too many times. In the beginning, however, his impression of Europe is practically mythic - a land of justice and easy economic opportunities. In fact, when he discovers the body of Emile, he is vaguely surprised: "Brahim n'est pas sot: il sait que chacun périt. Mais il n'avait jamais songé

qu'un Européen put, comme chaque autre homme, périr. C'est une pensée agréable. Pas que Brahim éprouvait le plus petit ressentiment à l'endroit de cet homme. Mais il se représente que l'Européen est mortel" (67). This small scene reveals much about Brahim's initial mindset: he believed Europe to be practically untouched by death or hardship. Yet, finding Emile's body, along with ongoing encounters with the police, cause Brahim to reconsider his initial stereotypes. Eventually, he is able to completely adjust his worldview: "ils avaient fui le Soudan parce qu'au Soudan régnait la violence, qu'il n'y avait pas de loi, et qu'ils pensaient trouver en Europe la protection de la police et de la loi. Ils se trompaient, tous! Les policiers européens se comportent comme les policiers du Soudan, et plus cruellement parfois" (96). Like Alexis in Miami, Brahim must reconsider the truth behind reputations, and learn to make his way in a place that is not as perfect or as easy as he assumed.

Both Brahim and Alexis adjust relatively easily to new information. Their resilience allows them a certain level of adaptability to Miami, Montreal, and Saint-Franc. Mila, too, is able to learn horrific things about Italian law, and pivot her future plans to fight injustice. By far, then, it is Gaston who has the most trouble processing new ideas. Throughout the novel, he is frequently indignant: "Gaston blémit. Brahim aurait été arrêté? Les policiers lui auraient ôté ses chaussures et son attele? C'est impossible. Pas en Europe. Pas en Belgique" (154). Gaston's Belgium is the country that had "ouvert ses portes. Elle a donné refuge à Victor Hugo, Baudelaire et Karl Marx qui fuyaient les persécutions" (162). It takes him a long time to come to terms with conflicting stories. He recalls reading about a similar instance of police brutality in Belgium, against an Ethiopian refugee. Up until Brahim's arrival, Gaston had never truly thought about it, but

Brahim's experiences force him to reconsider: "Il commence à voir clair. Il commence à percer le brouillard de l'entendement. Parce que les policiers belges, ayant arrêté un garçon qui demandait asile et protection, l'ont rendu au trottoir sans son attelle et sans ses chaussures… Combien d'autres garçons, dans ce pays, ont-ils eu à subir de telles brutalités?" (163-164). Gaston is by no means a cruel person; indeed, he is one of the most generous and caring characters of the novel. Yet he lived most of his life in complete ignorance of global issues, preferring the quiet comfort of Saint-Franc — believing that those problems could not touch him in Belgium. It is noticeably harder for him to accept the truth, and more difficult still for him to recognize his own complicity in it.

Much like *Refuges* and *Alexis, fils de Raphaël*, then, *Homme noir sur fond blanc* also suggests that adults have created a world that is morally untenable, with little interest in fixing it. Gaston's kindness towards Brahim is laudable, but it does not move towards systemic change. When he first starts helping Brahim, Gaston is almost giddy. He questions if he is falling into a second adolescence, but rejects this idea: "L'adolescence consisterait-elle à sauver des vies humaines? Jamais, pas du tout. Elle consiste à ne pas se rendre compte; à penser que le monde peut changer comme ça, d'un coup de volant… il se dit qu'il doit arrêter. Son adolescence est restée loin derrière lui. C'est un autre temps. Un adulte travaille avec le réel, pas avec les rêves" (108-109). Gaston's resignation to "le réel," the novel suggests, is part of the problem — as is his binary thinking around concepts of adulthood. Snell pushes back against defining adulthood at all: "How does one measure one's level of adultness? Is adultness defined by biology, words, age, or maturity level? Or is it defined by traditional markers of adulthood?" (3). Gaston is

clearly on the cusp of making the same realization; after all, the 'adults' in Belgium working with 'the real' have not been able to enact much change. Brahim's death and the subsequent continuation of the same elected officials and policies proves that perhaps a more "adolescent" attitude is needed to break down years of stagnation.

Through Gaston and Brahim, *Homme noir sur fond blanc* showcases this tenuous relationship between adolescence and adulthood. While adults clearly have more power – – politically and economically, especially — adolescents have the overall moral superiority in the story. What Gaston may brush off as youthful idealism is clearly more of a mindset that is needed in Saint-Franc and beyond. For instance, while the adults argue about Gaston's electability if he continues to house Brahim, Benjamin, a local teen, has no such qualms. He naturally sees Brahim as a person, rather than as a statistic or threat. As Benjamin listens to Sudanese music with Brahim in Gaston's kitchen, the two young men laughing and sharing their cultures, Gaston observes: "quand on voit une colonne de migrants qui tente de franchir un col des Alpes… ce sont des ombres, presque des fantômes, des silhouettes qui n'ont pas d'âge ni de nom. Mais que l'un d'entre eux, un seul, franchisse votre porte… et se mette à rire en écoutant Mohamed al Wardi à la table de votre cuisine… alors il redevient ce qu'il n'aurait jamais dû cesser d'être: un humain" (189). In the kitchen, Benjamin has already grasped this truth more quickly than all of the adults in the novel. Snell posits that human life is not linear:

> The advantage of thinking about human life as being circular, with a series of stages from adolescence to adulthood and back again, is that it rejects the idea that humans march in a straight line from birth through childhood to adulthood… The linear journey from childhood to adulthood is too easily recruited to colonialist

> thinking, perpetuating the long-standing association between the "primitive" and the childlike. (3)

In Gaston's kitchen, there are two scenes with Brahim laughing: with Benjamin, and later, playing cards with Gaston and his friends. In these parallel moments, it is Gaston who actually re-learns an ethical and interpersonal fluidity that comes naturally to Benjamin and Brahim. In this instance, Gaston's development is in line with Snell's circular concept of life stages.

Thus, the power balance between adults and adolescents is more nebulous than it may seem on the surface. In *Alexis, fils de Raphaël*, Alexis's uncle Étienne serves as a sort of cultural translator for Alexis as he adjusts to Montreal. Étienne, a Haitian immigrant himself, already understands what Alexis is going through, and is able to give him the guidance necessary to stabilize him in Quebec. With Gaston and Brahim, the relationship becomes much more muddled; "discourses that rely on condescending differentiations between child and adult" are absent (Snell, 4). While Gaston provides Brahim the same structure and support as Étienne gives Alexis, he also learns to see Belgium through Brahim's eyes. Both are able to learn from the other; Gaston gives Brahim paternal support while Brahim reinvigorates Gaston's life with renewed purpose and truth. Ultimately, one could argue that the coming of age story in this novel is just as much *Gaston's* as Brahim's. Gaston is, after all, the one whose worldview is more thoroughly shaken; he must grapple with renewed questions of identity and morality, and about what it means to be Belgian. Brahim, in contrast, is a relatively steady figure, calmly explaining to Gaston the abuses from Belgian police - in a way, explaining to

Gaston how the world really works. This inversion of the "adolescent" identity in the young adult novel is innovative, and once again defies the stereotypes of the genre.

In the end, however, whether or not Gaston plays the role of the young adult is less important than his place in the binary between welcome and rejection. He represents the best that humanity has to offer: he is willing to learn, to be humble, to act, and to welcome. Others in the story, such as the anonymous writer of the racist note, offer only cruelty, ignorance, and hatred. *Homme noir sur fond blanc*, like *Refuges*, depicts a world with many such cruelties. At the end of *Refuges*, however, there is distinct hope: the unborn baby, and Mila's newfound determination. *Homme noir sur fond blanc* offers a more ambiguous epilogue; there has been no large-scale revolution or change. At the same time, it seems like in one small town, the scales have tipped towards justice. In one discussion, Gaston's assistant warns him that if people knew he was harboring migrants, he would never be re-elected. "Crois-tu vraiment qu'à Saint-Franc les gens soient si mauvais?" Gaston wonders sadly (176). Her prediction turns out to be wrong: Gaston is re-elected by "une écrasante majorité" in the epilogue (215). While the novel does not explicitly showcase youth activism, it does still indicate a desperate need for something to change, and there is an implication that youth must play a role. Like *Alexis, fils de Raphaël* and *Refuges*, *Homme noir sur fond blanc* leaves the reader with a morsel of possibility, and the motivation to push for a kinder, more just future.

Conclusion

In the previous chapter, themes related to France's colonial history evoke specific challenges in constructing identity. However, those protagonists also operate with a stronger safety net, whether proximity to parents or legal residency. Even Anthéa, whose

situation was the most precarious due to her captivity, had a home to return to in Cameroon. There was the assumption and expectation that the French state, once it knew of her trafficking, would take care of her in the meantime. Her repatriation to Cameroon is even a desired outcome, rather than the "enfer" awaiting some of the repatriated refugees mentioned in *Homme noir sur fond blanc*. Alexis and Brahim have no expectations of the American, Canadian, or Belgian governments, nor are they able to return to their home countries safely. Though the *Refuges* refugees' narratives end before they are on Italian soil, Mila's observations in Lampedusa suggest that any arriving refugees will not have a warm welcome in Italy, either.

Through his close ties with his family — both his mother and uncle — Alexis is able to experience the most stability of all the protagonists in this chapter, and subsequently he develops the most as a character throughout his novel. This is an important nuance - in most young adult novels, the protagonist must learn to seek independence from their family. In stories of migration, the family is a crucial repository of security and memory. Without the safety nets of family, education, and governmental stability, adolescent development is far more precarious. Of course, many refugees live in extremely dangerous or precarious circumstances. This is most dramatically demonstrated through the multiple tragic deaths at the end of *Refuges* and *Homme noir sur fond blanc*, but even Alexis struggles when he doesn't have access to typical educational opportunities or legal residence and its benefits.

The global refugee crisis, including a look at the immense suffering it causes, is an example of a *window* that these novels provide (assuming that the reader does not personally identify as a refugee; in this case, these novels might more easily provide a

sense of validation for one's own experiences and identity). An adolescence brutally disrupted by violence and chaos, dangerous travels that span thousands of miles, and an abrupt break in education are all potentially unfamiliar to the average reader, but these harrowing experiences can also help build empathy between the reader and the protagonist. There are some themes and motifs of each novel that function as both familiar and destabilizing forces. Citizens of, for example, Belgium, may find both a window and a mirror in *Homme noir sur fond blanc*. While they may recognize the archetypical Belgian town, they may *not* recognize it through Brahim's eyes. The same may be said of an Italian or Canadian citizen. There are also, of course, universal themes. Some mirrors include recognizing the potential for injustice in one's own country's policies, or the general human desire to find safety and belonging, especially as an adolescent. In other words, readers can relate to characters' need for security, while being shocked about the conditions they must traverse to find it.

Ultimately, this unique combination of windows and mirrors in these novels provides the impetus for demanding social change through youth activism. This call to action creates an intangible link between these novels and real life, showcasing the power of literature to drive social movements. Furthermore, by highlighting youth as agents of change, these young adult novels shake up traditional age-based social hierarchies. In giving protagonists the agency to act beyond their own individual interests, the novels create a conduit to the reader, metaphorically passing along the torch of responsibility to the real world. Rather than young adult literature forcing adult-created morals onto adolescents, then, these novels prove that it is precisely an adult-created morality that

needs youth input. These novels are not prescriptive; they are instead an invitation for young adults to use the tools at their disposal to reshape the world for the better.

CHAPTER 4: YOUNG ADULT FANTASY NARRATIVES

In previous chapters, analysis of young adult identity was closely tied to real world contexts, from French geopolitical power to refugee narratives. Each protagonist, though fictional, traveled between real countries. The stories were often inspired by the authors' personal experiences, or by current events. Even *La Proie,* where Anthéa spends most of her time locked away, is inextricable from 21st century France and Cameroon — Anthéa's father, for example, discusses former French colonizers in comparison with modern-day Chinese intervention in Africa. In this way, each novel feels directly tied to a real place and time as protagonists navigate the challenges of transcultural identities. Today, there are countless young adult novels that explore the intertwined themes of migration and identity against the backdrop of the real world.

Neither narratives of migration nor young adult literature, however, *needs* to be set in a real time or place. Young adult literature in particular is well-known for its fantasy subgenre — *Harry Potter, The Hunger Games, The Giver,* and *The Book Thief* (to name a few globally popular examples) all take place in either a completely fantastical setting, or with strong fantasy elements. Indeed, many scholars have studied the pervasive trend of young adult fantasy and dystopian fiction, which is a prolific subgenre. David Cappella notes that no study of young adult literature is complete without considering fantasy; furthermore, he notes that its popularity is only growing as more female readers are attracted to the growing subgenre, especially through works that feature female heroines (5).

Novels of migration, too, can have fantasy elements (a particularly delightful example would be *Le Roi Absent* by Moetai Brotherson, a novel spanning multiple

continents and decades as the protagonist attempts to find the truth of his own history). Furthermore, many novels within the fantasy / science fiction genre have strong underlying themes of migration. *Dune* by Frank Herbert and *The Dispossessed* by Ursula Le Guin, for example, are more easily classified as science fiction novels — yet both have plots that revolve around the protagonist's migration or exile to another planet, and the resulting culture shock and difficulties adapting. Indeed, Donald Palumbo actually examines aspects of *Dune* through the lens of exile, noting the ways in which science fiction can bend the concept to include exile "from one's own time" as different characters are reborn after death "into a world radically different from the one [they] had known" (441). This creative rendering of exile nonetheless carries thematic similarities to real-world exile as described by Said and others, highlighting the ability of fantasy narratives to transform familiar concepts into the fantastic.

Yet, despite the fact that novels of migration and young adult novels frequently delve into the fantasy genre, there is very little research that examines the three together. Furthermore, while scholarly articles and analysis abound for novels about young adult immigration, the research remains centered on connecting realistic protagonists with real-world situations and implications. A lack of research, however, does not translate to a lack of content — there are actually innumerable young adult fantasy[4] novels of migration. In this chapter, I will examine three: Anne-Laure Bondoux's *La Princetta et le Capitaine,* Hélène Montardre's *Oceania,* and Christophe Lambert's[5] *Le Dos au Mur*. Each novel has varying levels of fantasy, though none are set in our modern reality: *La*

[4] Note that I use the term "fantasy" here as a convenient umbrella term referring to novels that are set in an alternate timeline or world other than our own. For the purposes of this analysis, "fantasy" encompasses science fiction and dystopian fiction as well.
[5] Not the actor!

Princetta et le Capitaine is high fantasy, featuring a completely fictional world; *Oceania* is set in a futuristic version of France and the United States after decades of climate change have wreaked havoc on the planet; *Le Dos au Mur* is set in an alternate modern version of Mexico and the United States where Mexican immigrants compete in a horrific game show to earn American citizenship.

Though these novels are within the fantasy genre, there are undeniable similarities with the previous chapters' texts. The protagonists still face family conflict, first loves, and other important developmental milestones — their journeys have a profoundly familiar tone. Indeed, each protagonist in this chapter is, on one level, deeply relatable. The novels' settings, however, are strange and unfamiliar, and this necessitates a more nuanced interpretation of each hero or heroine. For example, when Alexis moves from Miami to Montreal, a French reader may see the depictions as a window into actual American and Canadian refugee policies and the traumas of displacement. On the other hand, when Malva, the heroine of *La Princetta et le Capitaine,* moves from Galnicie to Elgolie, it is harder to draw a direct parallel with a real-life equivalent. Previously, I analyzed the influence of real places and events on young adult identity; here, I will explore how identity is transformed within the fantasy genre, and the implications of a young adult migration novel set in a fantasy geography.

La Princetta et le Capitaine by Anne-Laure Bondoux follows the story of fifteen-year-old Malva, a princess of Galnicie. Upon learning that her father plans to marry her to an unknown suitor, she enlists the help of her maid, Filomène, and her tutor, the Archonte, to orchestrate her escape. Unbeknownst to her, the Archonte has secretly planned to have her murdered so that he can take control of the kingdom himself. Malva

and Filomene evade murder, but begin a long and dangerous journey towards the unknown, with the Archonte an omnipresent threat as he pursues Malva to carry out his revenge. Eventually, Malva decides that she will search for Elgolie, a mythical paradise that she is certain actually exists. Back in Galnicie, Orfeus, a young sailor, sets out to find Malva and bring her home. Their stories collide in the Orniant empire, where Orfeus rescues her from a malevolent chieftain. Together, they decide to continue to sail for Elgolie, a seemingly chimeric pursuit that takes them literally beyond the edges of the known world.

Up until this point, the book's locations are vaguely familiar; the helpful map included in the opening pages reveal a geography resembling the European and Asian continents. Galnicie resembles southern Europe, particularly Spain or Greece, while countries such as Orniant, Guirkistan, and the Grande Steppe Azizienne are clearly meant to evoke the Middle East and Asia. East from Europe across the ocean there is even the Terres d'Aremique, an obvious play on l'Amérique. Once Orfeus and Malva go beyond the "limites du Monde Connu" (demarcated by a thick line across the southern latitude on the map), however, the world becomes a chaotic and surreal place. This fantasy land is ruled over by a mythical figure known as Catabée, who puts Malva, Orfeus, and their crew through a series of personalized trials before allowing them passage through. Those who fail the trials perish, and several crew members lose their lives during the dangerous tasks. Each trial is personalized to a specific crew member; Malva, for example, does find Elgolie. However, at this point in the story, she has realized that Elgolie always represented an escape, rather than real life. She passes her trial by giving up her dream of Elgolie, returning to her ship, and setting sail for home — Galnicie.

Once home, the remaining crew realize that through some fantastical temporal machination, ten years have passed in Galnicie during their three months at sea. The kingdom is ravaged, and only Malva's father remains in the castle. He is now a weakened old man; Malva is finally able to forgive him for trying to arrange her marriage, and he is able to finally understand his daughter. As Malva commits to rebuilding Galnicie, she has one last challenge: the Archonte has caught up to her. In a final duel, the Archonte kills Orfeus before being stabbed by Malva. In her grief, Malva continues to rule Galnicie. She also begins to write a book about her adventures; the first pages are the same as the opening of *La Princetta et le Capitaine*. This circularity is reminiscent of *Un Papillon dans la Cité*, with Félicie vowing to become an author at the novel's conclusion.

At almost 600 pages, *La Princetta et le Capitaine* is so jam-packed with adventure and intrigue that it is almost possible to miss the profound changes that Malva undergoes as she learns to understand and trust herself during her journey across the world. In the beginning, Malva's personal identity is intertwined with her role as princess. For her father, Malva's royal status overshadows her actual personality or capabilities. When she attends a meeting of ministers, he humiliates her by reading excerpts from her private journal, and chastising her for her *plaisanteries*: "il est temps de cesser ces enfantillages. Vous êtes la seule héritière du trône de Galnicie. D'ici peu, vous serez sa représentante officielle. Le pays n'a pas besoin de ces sornettes" (11). Soon after, Malva learns of her betrothal. While her father certainly underestimates her and cruelly humiliates her, it is also clear that she is not ready for leadership (though she is not ready for marriage, either).

In the beginning, Malva is impulsive, reckless, and arrogant, while simultaneously completely reliant on others. Indeed, her reliance on others is what allows the Archonte to so easily manipulate and deceive her as he plans her murder. Christine Détrez remarks on Malva's passivity in her own life: "Elle ne fait que suivre les événements, ballotée par les flots et les décisions. Même son désir d'indépendance est décrit comme le résultat d'une manipulation par son précepteur félon, afin qu'elle s'élève contre son père. Malva se trouve ainsi littéralement dépossédée de son désir même de liberté, puisqu'elle n'a finalement fait que servir la vengeance de l'Archonte" (10). The Archonte's control of Malva's life does not seem to imbue Malva with a sense of empathy, either. Once Malva and her maid, Filomene, escape the kingdom, Malva continues to treat Filomene like her servant, rather than equal. Her perpetuation of their princess-subject relationship (contrary to her declarations that Filomene is like a sister) shows a marked lack of awareness. Just as the Archonte used Malva to achieve his own ends, so does Malva continue to use Filomene to achieve her own goals.

Throughout the next parts of her adventure, Malva continues to rely on the competence of others rather than herself. In the kingdom of Ouzmir, the Khansha of the Baïghour people, it is Filomene who learns the local language and customs of their hosts. Malva, on the other hand, still sees herself through the lens of Galnicie; she tries to teach the Baïghour women about her own country, and smiles when the women are shocked at her description: "pour elles, les Galniciens devaient sembler de vrais barbares" (131). She seems to find joy in distancing herself from Galnicie, and proving how different and superior she is to her former home. When Baïghour is raided, Filomene has learned to ride on horseback and can fight alongside Ouzmir; Malva has no such skills, so she flees,

is kidnapped, and sold to the emperor of Cispazie. Here, she once again relies on Lei, another prisoner from Balmun who speaks multiple languages. It is Lei who has the intercultural skills to speak with Malva and the other slaves, as well as a knowledge of medicine to help Malva heal from an injury. When Malva is almost killed in Cispazie, she is *again* rescued at the last minute by Orfeus and his crew, whereupon she demands that the entire crew must do as she says: "Je refuse de retourner en Galnicie… Je sais que le Coronador vous a confié cette mission, mais j'ai d'autres projets" (276). Orfeus is shocked by her selfish attitude, and admonishes her: "Le peuple galnicien attend votre retour… nous avons vécu des mois de deuil et la terreur, jusqu'au jour où nous avons appris que vous étiez vivante… des hommes sont morts pour vous, Princetta! Ils ont cru en leur mission, comment osez-vous?" (277). Malva is unmoved, and haughtily responds "Vous ne pouvez pas comprendre" (277). She does not thank her rescuers, nor does she acknowledge her own shortcomings or take into consideration the plans and aspirations of the others. This egotism is nothing new; even when Malva realized Filomene had fallen in love with Ouzmir, she assumed Filomene would still follow Malva's orders: "Malva hocha la tête, devinant combien cela serait difficile pour Filomène, le moment venu, de quitter son beau cavalier" (132). There is an unacknowledged tension, then, in Malva's identity at this point: she seeks the freedom of estrangement, without the accompanying loss of institutionalized royal power.

She is never, however, truly estranged. Despite declaring herself free from Galnicie, Malva continues to act like a Galnician princess for the entirety of the story. Arguably, however, this is a part of Malva's identity that she is not able to shed — only transform. This is reflected in the novel's ending, where Malva does become a Galnician

ruler. However, she rules the kingdom independently, and not as a wife. Ultimately, readers recognize that Malva's journey is more internal than external, as physically, she is always circling back towards Galnicie. This is reflected in the book's section titles, which underline the importance of movement: Partir (part one), Errer (part two), and Revenir (part three). By calling the middle section "Errer," Bondoux suggests that Malva will not successfully settle anywhere else; she is always moving towards the inevitable third section of the story, "Revenir." "Errer" also undermines Malva's claims to be heading towards Elgolie; in truth, she was only wandering until she returns home. However, it is also through her wanderings that Malva transforms from a selfish princess to a thoughtful, mature leader. On Orfeus's ship, especially during the trials of Catabée, she learns to work together with the others, and to put the needs of the group before her own.

She even realizes the connections between herself and her title; in one scene, when Orfeus is cursed and trying to leave the group behind, he insults Malva in the process. "Depuis quand parlez-vous sur ce ton à votre Princetta," she demands (333). While on the surface, this sounds pompous, she is actually using her title to try to shake Orfeus out of his bewitchment, by reminding him of his duty to his country. When this strategy doesn't work, she immediately tries another tactic, humbly kneeling on the ground next to him and whispering gently that it was time to leave: "Nous partons… nous n'attendons que vous" (333). In this way, Malva accepts and utilizes her continued identity as a Galnician princess, and is consciously wielding it. This is a marked difference from her earlier interactions with Filomene, when she outwardly claimed to be detached from Galnicie while unconsciously still relying on a hierarchal superiority.

Malva's understanding of her Galnician identity comes to a head when she is thrown overboard from the ship after a storm and finds herself on Elgolie during the trials of Catabée. Once again, she has been swept away by forces beyond her control; like the beginning of the novel, this is another moment of passivity in her life. On the island, Elgolie is everything she ever imagined: "un lieu de paix et d'enchantement, un asile reposant, loin de tout ce qui avait rendu Malva malheureuse jusqu'à présent. Ici, personne ne pourrait l'obliger à épouser qui que ce soit, ni à devenir ce qu'elle n'était pas. Ici, tout était possible" (439). Originally, this island represented the culmination of all of Malva's dreams: total isolation from any responsibility or hardship. Yet Malva also realizes that she *does* have responsibilities, and that she misses her loved ones. She must decide whether to stay, or return to an uncertain future and certain dangers with Orfeus: "Tout ce à quoi elle avait rêvé jusqu'à présent ne valait rien sans la présence de ceux qu'elle aimait. Elle s'était trompée! Elle avait cru que le bonheur l'attendait ici, en Elgolie, mais elle n'y trouvait finalement qu'une immense solitude et des remords infinis" (448). Crucially, this moment is for Malva to decide alone, away from the influence or control of others. Ultimately, she decides to return to the real world, and tells Orfeus, "Je souhaite rentrer en Galnicie avec vous, Capitaine" (488). Her use of the verb 'souhaiter' gives Orfeus the space to refuse her request, showing growth in her interpersonal communication skills, an improvement from her previous style of making demands.

The most obvious proof of Malva's growth comes in the third part of the novel, "Revenir." Returning to a decimated Galnicie, Malva reconciles with her father, who is now a weakened old man who admits the error of his previous judgment. Malva immediately sets to rehabilitating the kingdom: allocating housing, reinitiating diplomatic

relations with foreign dignitaries, managing the kingdom's finances, and more. One day, when asked if she would leave Galnicie, Malva responds "je n'ai plus envie de partir… je dois me reposer et le Coronador est malade, alors je dois rester auprès de lui" (531). The Malva who left Galnicie, thinking only of herself, has now become a more thoughtful person, considering the needs of others. Throughout the novel, it was clear that Malva's identity was always bound to her Galnician roots; at first, she defined her identity by how *different* she could be from her perceptions of home. By the end of the novel, however, she recognizes and embraces her home country. This is not to say that she accepts Galnicie's flaws — indeed, she works diligently to improve the institutions that were oppressive or broken in the past. In this way, rather than fleeing anything she did not like, she strives instead to "faire de la Galnicie une sorte d'Elgolie à ma façon" (560). Thus, she recognizes her responsibilities as a leader, as well as her own individual power to drive change. Ultimately, Malva's migration across the world recontextualizes and reconfirms her Galnician identity.

While Malva realizes that her home is Galnicie, the novel does not suggest that everyone need return to their home country. Filomene, for example, ends up marrying Ouzmir and staying with the Baïghour people. When she and Ouzmir visit Malva, years later, Ouzmir speaks Galnician and the two have a son together, who is also bilingual. They present Malva with a traditional Baïghour gift — a chibouk, a type of ceremonial pipe — to commemorate their visit. Though not the focus of the novel, this is an excellent example of the potential of intercultural exchange. It also highlights the importance of linguistics; throughout the novel, the most easily mobile people are those who speak multiple languages like Lei or Filomene.

Ultimately, Malva's identity development is reminiscent of previous chapters' protagonists. Gaston, in *Homme Noir sur Fond Blanc*, must re-learn what it means to be Belgian as seen through the eyes of Brahim, as Malva sees Galnicie and herself through the eyes of others. Like Mila in *Refuges*, Malva recognizes the potential of her own power to enact positive change, as well as the inherent justice in free movement; when she is trapped in the trials of Catabée, she realizes the cruelty of detainment. Djiraël, in *Sarcelles-Dakar*, must accept the ways his time in France has shaped his identity when he returns to family in Senegal who see him as more French than African. Malva, too, learns to recognize, integrate, and appreciate her Galnician identity during her travels and upon her return. Through unfamiliar geography, Malva recreates a familiar journey - one traveled by many protagonists in migration novels before her.

Some of the messages in *La Princetta et le Capitaine* are broad: it is good to be brave and kind, or sometimes the grass isn't really greener on the other side, for example. These themes are adaptable and applicable to readers in *any* situation; paradoxically, then, the fantasy can become more universal. Where a reader might feel a disconnect with Alexis because he or she has not lived a similar experience, a reader could feel *more* connected to Malva since the very nature of her fantasy story necessitates the use of imagination to make it relevant to one's life. Malva's story is otherworldly and thus universal, in the sense that her experience is shared equally between all readers.

Elements of fantasy change the narrative in other ways, as well. A particularly pertinent example is the passage of time during the trials. Once Malva and the crew pass beyond the 'limites du monde connu,' time changes. When they return from their roughly two weeks during the trials, ten years have passed in the outside world and Malva barely

recognizes Galnicie. When Djiraël returns to Senegal after many years away, he is struck by how his recollections don't resemble the country's reality. Through a plot device only accessible in fantasy novels, Malva is able to experience the same thing in a much shorter timespan. Though she had already made the decision to go back, returning to a new Galnicie helps her understand a place's potential to change, and her role in shaping its future.

Other than the passage of time, the most striking fantasy feature of the novel is its geography; before even beginning the book, the fantasy geography is obvious with the inclusion of a map in the opening pages. In some ways, Malva's hopeful destination — Elgolie — is reminiscent of the mythical France or Europe in previous chapters' novels. Just as Anthéa's parents in *La Proie* or Brahim's parents see Europe as practically edenic, Malva imagines the island as a perfect solution to all of her problems. She describes Elgolie: "Je connais un pays merveilleux… l'Elgolie, ça s'appelle. Là-bas, tu serais content" (254). Malva's ultimate understanding that Elgolie could not fulfill all of her dreams mirrors Anthéa's and Brahim's realization as well; the novels all suggest that it is irrational to idolize a singular place.

A key difference, however, lies in the fantasy: France is a real place that has a tangible existence. When Brahim or Djiraël's cousins dream of France, it is with the understanding that it could theoretically be possible to go there. Malva only knows of Elgolie, on the other hand, through rumors and stories. The word 'Elgolie' is even a play on El Dorado, yet another unobtainable paradise. The unknowability of Elgolie contributes to Malva's identity as a romantic dreamer; she grew up reading story books and envisioned a pure escape. While other protagonists dream of France precisely

because of its connections to the real world (for example, perceived better education or economic opportunities to support family back home), Malva's escape was to a place where total isolation was possible. Malva's eventual growth, then, is partly in her ability to put aside the notion of escape in favor of actually connecting with her family and responsibilities.

The concept of a fantasy utopia or dystopia is explored further in Daniel Baker's article, "Why We Need Dragons: The Progressive Potential of Fantasy." Here, he argues that the depiction of utopias are crucial for critically interrogating our own reality: "it is only by contemplating the impossible, by journeying into utopian/dystopian alterity, that the limits of our imagination can be found and the impossible enters dialogue with possible" (444). Thus, Malva's promise to "faire de la Galnicie une sorte d'Elgolie à ma façon" (560) reflects the progressive potential of fantasy within her own worldview. Yet, Baker also cautions that a utopian aesthetic must go further than simply portraying regressive ideologies; it must also critique and reimagine them:

> While it is pivotal that dominant ideology be "frozen" through a cognitive map and its "gaps" pried open, this primarily deconstructive approach is not progressive per se: it demystifies with the intent to remove, but does not instill a new subjectivity in the individual. It is primarily deconstructive rather than creative. It exhausts the ideological space via extrapolated "future" landscapes without implementing new, radical subjectivities. Rupturing dominant ideology's organic totality is not enough. While it is an important step, if we consider Althusser's position that ideology mediates between reality and the individual

> subject, then demystification or deconstruction is somewhat sterile: a new subjectivity requires a degree of replacement, a form of re-imagining. (442)

Here, we see the limitations of *La Princetta et le Capitaine*'s progressive potential. Galnicie is a monarchy; at several points in the story, the disadvantages of a single, unelected ruler become apparent. At one point, the Archonte is even able to take over while the king is indisposed, and he easily manages to turn Galnicie into an authoritarian police state before being ousted. Yet, the dominant ideology of a hereditary monarchy is not reimagined or replaced by Malva's experience in Elgolie or elsewhere. When she returns, she continues to perpetuate this system as Galnicie's sole monarch. Elgolie, then, is more of a personal utopia for Malva, helping her to deconstruct and realize her own goals. The novel overall does not manage to "instill a new subjectivity in the individual."

Furthermore, Baker notes that "As a form intrinsically linked to world-creation, fantasy will inevitably — to varying degrees — demonstrate the ways reality is constructed and related to through subjectivity... Fantasy does not escape reality but exposes, subverts, and creates it" (444-445). The question, then, is what version of reality is being exposed and created. While *La Princetta et le Capitaine* does create a "new" world, its geography most often resembles real places. Galnicie itself is distinctly southern European, the Grande Steppe Azizienne is reminiscent of Mongolia, and the Empire d'Orniant has marked similarities to Asia and the Middle East. At times, these places can feel like thinly veiled caricatures, and there is a danger of stereotyping real peoples based on the implied associations. For readers, the story is perilously close to advocating for European superiority, though never explicitly. Malva, then, never develops the global activist identity seen in many of Chapter 2's protagonists; she is

committed to helping Galnicie, but her activism stays within its borders. Beyond Galnicie, the world can be irredeemably dangerous, and part of Malva's identity is based on not only Galnicie, but Galnician nationalism. Though Galnicie had issues, it was still a more advanced civilization than those found on the Azizienne Steppe, and a more morally just society than Cispazie.

This shallow world-building creates further issues for the depth of characters' experiences and interactions. Since Guirkistan, for example, doesn't actually exist, Bondoux can design a country with few wider implications on the story — there is no baggage or history of colonization to add nuance to Malva's perceptions. Thus, as Malva identifies as Galnician (unconsciously or not) throughout the story, the fantasy geography in the novel allows an uncomfortable space where she doesn't need to adapt to a second culture or learn about her own because some other cultures are simply objectively *worse,* and therefore able to be dismissed. There is no point in reflecting on cultural differences with any subtlety when one culture is purely barbaric and evil, such as in Cispazie, whose defining characteristic is its participation in sex trafficking.

In the middle of the story, Malva's is taken captive in Cispazie, in the "Harem de Temir-Gaï… Très célèbre dans tout l'empire d'Orniant! On dit que son rêve est celui-ci: avoir dix mille jeunes filles pour son plaisir" (165).[6] The book never explicitly delves into any sexual scenes, but the implication is clear: Temir-Gaï engages in sex trafficking and abuse. The only kind person Malva meets is another captive; she does not have a single positive interaction with a native of Cispazie. Galnicie - and broader ideologies therewith - can remain unchallenged and unexamined. While Brahim learns to think

[6] For further discussion of cliches of Orientalism, such as the harem, see *Orientalism* by Edward Said.

critically about both Sudan and Belgium, Malva can look at Cispazie as completely brutal with no thought to its history or cultural relativism. Where previous protagonists must learn to construct their identity in a geopolitically fraught world, Malva can retreat into the relative superiority of Galnicie with ease. In this way, the fantasy geography in the novel can be dangerously simplistic, and the novel misses some of the nuance found in previous texts, potentially perpetuating racism and stereotypes. Indeed, Helen Young, in her novel *Race and Popular Fantasy Literature* notes that "Whiteness … characterized much of the Fantasy genre throughout the twentieth century, and … still has significant influence… Whiteness as default setting is as much a feature of the Fantasy genre as it is of western culture and society" (Introduction). Baker also notes the potential for subjectivity: "Like all literature, fantasy is a response to context: the material, historical, social, political reality of the author" (445). This authorial subjectivity, then, carries a risk: that authors can depict overly-simplistic or racist societies and ignore the complexities of actual countries and cultures, implicitly encouraging casual stereotyping, all while maintaining the crucial plausible deniability that their work is portraying any real people or places.

Conversely, as Baker discusses, the ability to invent new worlds can be one of the most powerful tools in fantasy to advocate for change, in a manner unavailable to other fiction. An excellent example of this is *Oceania* by Hélène Montardre, the first in a four-part series. This novel imagines a futuristic world that has been ravaged by environmental disaster, allowing Montardre to showcase the dangers of climate change as a more compelling narrative. Rather than speculating about impending disaster, Montardre *shows* the terrifying consequences of rising sea levels. Baker writes that fantasy often comes

with such a warning: “do something about your present to avoid this future. This is the goal of the Marxist aesthetic: to represent reality as it truly is, cutting through the perception of "daily life" to shock the subject, and open them up to the potential of a new subjectivity” (442). Similarly, Alice Curry notes that in post-apocalyptic fiction, “the ecocatastrophe of tomorrow is graphically invoked to reflect upon the worsening crisis of today” (18). In *Oceania*, then, the goal is to deconstruct and instill new subjectivities specifically through portrayals of environmental catastrophe.

Oceania follows the story of Flavia, a young French girl who lives on the coast with her grandfather, Anatole. Her grandfather tries to teach her the art of “le guetteur” – – he watches the birds’ migratory patterns to predict oncoming ecological disaster. Flavia and Anatole are practically the only two left in the town, as everyone else has moved inland to avoid the inevitable rise of the ocean. Flavia’s grandfather eventually convinces her that she must travel to America; the Americans were more proactive and had built a giant sea wall to mitigate the rising tides. At first, Flavia tries to win passage on a game show. Failing that, she buys passage aboard a ship heading to New York. After a huge storm that tosses her overboard, Flavia must sneak clandestinely into the country. She is helped by Chris, a young American who she meets by chance, and the two fall in love at first sight. Chris lets Flavia hide in his apartment during the day as New York has become an authoritarian police state and Flavia is there illegally. Eventually, the two begin to uncover a conspiracy that implicates powerful governments and people in a criminal effort to silence dialogue around climate change; Flavia and Chris decide to flee to Europe to continue asking questions. After a huge protest in New York that police turn

into a massacre, the two are separated, and Flavia embarks alone. Their stories continue in Oceania's sequels.

Like in *La Princetta et le Capitaine*, Flavia experiences a familiar trajectory of growth throughout the novel. However, given that it is only the first of four in the series, her search for her identity is still incomplete at the end of the first installment; for example, she has questions about mysteries from her past, and her relationship with Chris has room to grow. Yet still in this book, she does begin to interrogate what it means to be French, the difficulties of being a refugee somewhere without papers and without speaking the language, and she has a growing awareness of the geopolitical realities around her. Rather than being content to stay a child with her grandfather, letting him make the decisions for her, Flavia looks to better understand her place in the world, and to make her mark on it; she becomes a more active participant in her own life.

On one level, Flavia's refugee identity also resembles the characters from Chapter 2; it is a difficult position that often threatens to dominate her growing sense of independence and identity. In one scene before her departure, Flavia's grandfather worries about her name: "Flavia… Ça ne fait pas américain ! Ils n'arriveront même pas à le prononcer !" (Location 463). Even her name, her most basic identification from birth, is thrown into chaos when she sneaks into the United States. The threat of losing this basic identifier foreshadows the impending threat to her sense of self. Once in the United States, Chris summarizes the formidable challenges she has faced, "Tu as échappé à la tempête, tu dois assimiler une nouvelle langue, t'habituer à un nouveau pays, sur un autre continent, tu es séparée des tiens… C'est beaucoup, non?" (Location 2185). Integrating into a new country is expected for any immigrant; Flavia's challenges, however, are more

insidious still as she discovers the truth about life inside the sea wall. She does not merely need to learn a new language and integrate into a new culture — she needs to overhaul every notion she had about the United States, and by extension, her conception of society on a global scale.

She realizes that the United States is not the safe paradise for refugees envisioned by her grandfather:

> Derrière la digue, ils ont tout. Derrière la digue, il y a des gens qui vivent, des millions de gens. Et ils ont des maisons, des magasins, de la musique, des cinémas, des voitures… Ils sont en sécurité… Mais la police était omniprésente. Des patrouilles parcouraient les rues et les avenues, effectuaient des contrôles, des sirènes hurlaient, dominant la rumeur sourde et continue de la circulation. Quel endroit curieux. On avait envie d'y vivre et en même temps de s'enfuir en courant. (Location 1460)

Flavia's hopes, like Malva's dreams of Elgolie, are shattered; the United States is not a haven. In fact, the American government is actually working to disseminate false information to make themselves seem safer and happier, to better control and isolate their citizens. This push and pull between paradise and prison is similar to what Brahim experiences in Belgium. It also resembles the story in *Refuges;* though *Refuges* does not show the refugees' futures after the survivors land in Lampedusa, the reader recognizes that they will not have a warm welcome. In *Oceania,* the United States is simultaneously a bountiful refuge, and dangerous cage — Flavia must learn to become more self-reliant and discerning, while reconsidering her previous assumptions about global power structures.

Though she is isolated and in hiding, her situation is also not unique. One striking feature of each novel in Chapter 2 was the inclusion of other refugee characters. Alexis in Miami meets countless others in his same situation, Brahim travels with and befriends several refugees in Europe, and *Refuges* highlights multiple refugee stories. *Oceania*, too, is careful to show that Flavia is one of many in New York: "Deux mondes s'y côtoient. Le monde officiel, celui de ces Américains heureux de vivre qui vont et viennent, ont un travail et des loisirs, et l'autre monde, les sans-papiers, qui vivent dans l'illégalité la plus totale. Il paraît qu'il y en a des milliers" (Location 1484). In previous novels, the inclusion of other refugees served to highlight that the devastating situations of the protagonists were not outliers. In *Oceania*, the effect is the same: Montardre does not allow the reader to envision Flavia as a lone, fantastical hero. The reader is forced to admit that her ordeal — being a climate refugee — is only one of many stories.

Unlike Chapter 2, however, fantasy in *Oceania* plays a direct role in Flavia's identity. It even goes farther than *La Princetta et le Capitaine*; whereas Malva was a normal girl, *Oceania* hints that Flavia has some higher connection to birds that separates her from most of the rest of the world. The magical nature of this connection, however, is not immediately apparent or explicit. Unlike *La Princetta et la Capitaine*, which was always high fantasy, Montardre in *Oceania* creates tension between fantasy and reality. Though the book has obviously fantastical elements, it is also always grounded in a sort of plausibility that enables the reader to see how real life could *become* the world she describes. Flavia's connection with the birds is an example of this, blending scientific observation with a mixture of mysticism and strong intuition.

Growing up with her *guetteur* grandfather, Flavia had always paid scrupulous attention to the birds she could see from her Atlantic coastal home, recording their comings and goings with prevision: “Elle s’installa à la table de travail commune, ouvrit un gros registre, et, sur une page vierge, écrivit la date. Puis elle nota leurs observations du jour, soulignant en rouge le mot "arrivée" pour qu’ils repèrent au premier coup d’oeil le moment où les oiseaux étaient venus” (Location 115). The presence of science in the novel is hugely important; *guetteurs* like Anatole tried to warn the world of the impending climate disaster: “Si on avait écouté les gens comme votre grand-père… Voici longtemps que les guetteurs ont alerté les pouvoirs publics sur l’évolution du climat, les risques liés à la montée des eaux. On les a ignorés…” (Location 336). The connection between the observations of the *guetteurs* and the rising sea levels is apparent and accepted in the novel. Despite the futuristic setting, the changing migration patterns of birds have a solid base in our reality — the decline of certain species and changing patterns in animal migration actually are harbingers of climate change. Because of her upbringing, Flavia understands this on a rational, scientific level. Yet, her knowledge also seems to go beyond that familiar scientific base that drives the other characters.

For example, at key moments in the story, Flavia becomes connected to the birds and the ocean in an almost spiritual way. During a particularly tense moment when she is a competitor on the game show, she pauses: “Flavia ferma les yeux. Elle était à mille lieues du jeu. Dans sa tête, les vagues de l’océan murmuraient et le cri des oiseaux se répétait, lancinant” (Location 537). Later, in a conversation with another *guetteur*, Flavia tries to describe what she felt:

> – La porte secrète dont vous parlez, dit Flavia. Je crois que chez moi, elle a toujours été ouverte… Flavia hésita un instant. La scène vécue dans le studio du *Choix Final* était gravée dans sa mémoire. Elle n'en avait parlé à personne, cependant l'émotion ressentie lorsque les battements de son cœur avaient ralenti demeurait aussi forte. – Mais j'ignore où elle conduit, termina-t-elle. (Location 1075)

Flavia's connection is subtle; there is no blatant magic here, but it is also undeniable that she feels something that most other characters do not. The secret door metaphor continues as Flavia watches a ship's captain navigate rough waters by carefully observing the birds' flight paths. She realizes that her own understanding is limited: "À quoi cela servait-il et comment l'utiliser? Elle en avait eu un léger aperçu lors de l'enregistrement du *Choix final*, mais à présent, ce qui s'était produit lui semblait relever du hasard. De toute évidence, le capitaine, lui, savait utiliser sa connivence avec les oiseaux" (Location 1349). The word 'connivence' here hints at the fantastic; the possibility of using this innate connection that goes beyond the logical data-collecting of the other *guetteurs*. Flavia sees that, like the captain, this is a part of her identity that she can use and explore further.

Although she does not discover the full meaning of her connection in the first *Oceania* book, it is still clear that she carries more than a scientific curiosity. Instead, she has a deep, almost magical link to the birds and, by extension, nature itself. Indeed, one of the strongest messages of the novel is that cold scientific knowledge alone would not have prevented the environmental crisis; humanity had also become perilously detached from nature. Curry observes that this is a larger trend in environmental fiction

scholarship: “underpinning the counter-hegemonic potential of much ecofeminist critique is resistance towards the segregation of the natural world from human conceptions of identity and selfhood” (2). Through fantasy, then, Flavia is able to represent the possibility of those two dualities — science and spirituality, or nature and culture — being rectified as she seeks to understand not only the reasons that led to the current crisis, but the potential solutions that could exist. In later books, Flavia begins to actually follow the birds; Bondoux hints at this phenomenon in the first *Oceania* book, as Flavia begins to notice that birds are able to fly above and through the American sea wall at hidden navigable points. Thus, part of Flavia’s personal, literal migration is tied to her ability to decode this part of herself, learning to trust her instincts, and following where her innate abilities lead.

Though the reader recognizes that Flavia’s avian ‘connivence’ is, at some level, fantastical, Montardre still keeps the novel grounded in the tension of plausibility. There are moments when it could be assumed that Flavia’s connection is not mystical at all; rather, she is simply acutely connected to nature in a way that is so foreign to most characters in *Oceania* that it resembles fantasy in the context of the story. After all, her connection is spiritual and internal, impacting only her own personal decision-making. Flavia grew up in a lonely household watching the birds with her grandfather every morning; perhaps she is just one of the very few people in the story that is attuned to the workings of the natural world, while others are more concerned with political ambitions or capitalist political machinations. With this subtlety, the fantastical elements of the story can serve as a sharper critique for the real world today; unlike *La Princetta et le Capitaine*, readers cannot completely separate Flavia’s experience with the real world as

we know it. This tension is also reinforced with the geographical and geopolitical landscape of the novel, which is simultaneously fantastic and familiar.

A huge part of Flavia's identity becomes her French refugee status, and her time as an undocumented person in the United States. As discussed in Chapter 2, the refugee crisis is an actual, growing global issue that affects millions of people around the world. As of June 2022, however, climate change is not yet a recognized basis for refugee status: "the term "climate refugee" is not endorsed by UNHCR, and it is more accurate to refer to "persons displaced in the context of disasters and climate change" (UNHCR). Furthermore, in 2020, World Bank data states that only 49 out of over 26,000,000 refugees were French (World Bank). In realistic fiction, France is traditionally portrayed as a geopolitically powerful country; yet in *Oceania*, the script is flipped, with many refugees desperate to flee French soil. Montardre ultimately takes the reader on an uncanny journey through a warped simulacrum of the United States and France (a particularly chilling scene has Chris walking through the abandoned, wasteland of the former Long Island). Flavia's refugee status, then, has elements of fantasy and fact, disorienting and familiar. *Oceania* intentionally plays with shifting power structures and borders. Michel Agier observes that "nous savons maintenant que la mondialisation, dans laquelle nous sommes bien entrés, n'a pas supprimé les frontières : elle les transforme, les déplace, elle les multiplie et les élargit, tout en les rendant plus fragiles et incertaines" (29). In fantasy novels, borders can then have the same function that Curry mentions for environmental crises: their displacement can be graphically invoked to reflect the geopolitical situation of today.

Like many immigrants and refugees, Flavia struggles to fit in with her new country; after having lived in America for a while, she is still separate: “Elle n’était qu’une étrangère ici” (Location 3,242). The United States, in *Oceania,* is particularly interesting; readers, too, may feel like *étrangers* in this uncanny reflection. The Americans, protected behind the sea wall, are not interested in Europe or its climate problems. A fellow undocumented person — a climate scientist — explains to Flavia that this ignorance is by design:

> ...pour conserver le pouvoir, les autorités en place doivent maintenir un certain bien-être parmi les populations. Il y a plusieurs façons d’y parvenir. L’une d’entre elles consiste à ne pas les informer sur ce qui se passe ailleurs… Une autre façon consiste à prétendre : « Attention, ailleurs, c’est dangereux, les autres aussi sont dangereux ; restons entre nous et ne laissons personne entrer. » ... Mais pour mettre en œuvre un tel programme, il faut se débarrasser de ceux qui réfléchissent, qui posent des questions, qui étudient la façon dont les peuples et la planète se comportent. Ils sont trop dangereux. Et s’ils parlaient, ce serait plus difficile de berner les gens. (Location 2,658)

Again, Baker’s depiction of a function of science fiction dystopias is apt here:

> By making visible reality's dehumanizing aspects, its gaps and obstacles, [it] becomes a locus for dissatisfaction. Society must change, and change for the better, because it is under the control of shadowy forces, in a constant state of war, approaching a fully mechanized, exploitative existence, where individuals are alienated from the world and from one another. (456-457)

Flavia, then, is still stuck between multiple identities. She does not feel American — she doesn't speak English, and the country is too authoritarian, too rigid, and too callous to feel like home. She also does not feel particularly French. Flavia is decisive and action-oriented, while France was so paralyzed by the impending disaster that the country got ravaged immediately by rising sea levels. Instead, Flavia starts to find more of her place in the aforementioned underground movement of clandestine immigrants — scientists and *guetteurs* — those who "posent des questions." *Oceania*, then, begins to *reimagine* a new subjectivity, fulfilling the progressive potential of fantasy elicited by Baker.

Ultimately, Flavia realizes that the morally just path forward — as well as the only way to save the world — is to understand the roots of global power and conspiracy, expose political lies, and bring science and nature together to the forefront of peoples' conscience. She learns that the current disaster could have been prevented had any government been more willing to listen and act. The same urgency driving Mila, Alexis, and Gaston in Chapter 2 now pushes Flavia, once again providing the impetus for demanding social and political change. Whereas Bondoux used fantasy to avoid explicitly critiquing or analyzing any real countries, *Oceania* purposefully lambasts climate change inaction among global world powers. Though Montardre creates a dystopian version of France and the United States, the mechanics of fantasy actually allow her to point out the flaws in their real-life counterparts. In turn, readers can recognize their own potential today to prevent Flavia's reality from becoming theirs.

Flavia's journey — both a metaphoric identity journey and a literal physical migration — are inextricable from the fantasy elements of the novel, especially her refugee status and connection to the natural world. Fantasy in *Oceania* noticeably differs

from *La Princetta and le Capitaine*: Malva's story is able to be read almost in a complete vacuum, with a fantasy setting fending off any overt political commentary. Similar escapism in *Oceania* is impossible; Flavia's story and identity are fantastically bound to the United States and France, as well as to modern debates about climate change and its consequences.

Le Dos au Mur by Christophe Lambert blurs the line between fantasy and reality even further. Published in 2008 and set in 2020, the novel imagines a dystopian version of the United States with a massive wall along its southern border. Every month, two hundred Mexican citizens compete on a gameshow called *America's Most Hunted*; contestants cross the wall, and are immediately hunted by border police. The last immigrant to be caught wins $100,000 and citizenship. The story follows nineteen-year-old Diego Ortega as he competes on the game show - not for citizenship, but for the money. He hopes to pay off his father's debts.

During his journey, Diego befriends several other contestants, including Pablo and Guadelupe, while contending with hostile anti-immigration sentiment across the United States. American citizens are rewarded if they aid in the recapture of one of the contestants, thus turning the entire country into a dystopian sort of panopticon. What's more, Diego learns that the show is not only inhumane — it is unfair. One of the contestants is actually planted by the police to win the show; when Pablo reveals that he is the mole, Diego feels an intense betrayal. The corruption of the police is further concentrated in the novel's villain character: Patrick Rooney. Rooney is a racist police officer and serial killer who has used the show as cover to murder several past contestants. As a character, Rooney is not subtle; it is as if Lambert wanted to distill all

possible negative traits or ideologies into a single, easily identifiable character. The novel ends with a standoff: Rooney has taken Guadelupe hostage, after it is revealed that she is the sister of one of his previous victims. Diego and Pablo rescue her, but Pablo dies in the process. The novel's epilogue reveals that Diego returned to Mexico with an advance to write a book (titled *Le Dos au Mur*), and *America's Most Hunted* has received enough backlash to be canceled.

Diego's identity in the beginning of *Le Dos au Mur* is already fairly strong. At nineteen, he has been accepted to a prestigious medical school where he hopes to train as a doctor and open up a clinic for impoverished people. Before achieving his own goal, he also feels he must compete on *America's Most Hunted* to help his father. Thus, Diego is established as a selfless, caring person with a clear plan for his future. His time on *America's Most Hunted*, then, does not develop this aspect of his identity so much as solidify it in the face of numerous challenges; when the show ends, Diego immediately returns to Mexico to open his clinic with the funds from his book advance. Where he has room to grow, however, is in his attitude towards the United States. Diego's initial focus is entirely on helping the people of Mexico's *bidonvilles*. The little thought he gives to the United States is disparaging; he sees Americans as corrupt, selfish people deluded by the myth of an American dream. Those who would chase that dream are, in Diego's mind, fools. Yet, he meets more and more people that defy these stereotypes, forcing him to recognize the nuance of an incredibly diverse country and the complexity of immigration. In *Le Dos au Mur*, Diego's identity is then both solidified and challenged by his journey through the United States.

Before he travels to the United States, Diego sums up his impression of an American mentality: “Chacun chez soi… une vraie mentalité de cow-boy” (30). When Pablo asks if he would choose to remain in America if he wins citizenship, Diego scoffs, “Les Etats-Unis puent” (80). He goes on to mock Pablo: “Ma parole… ne me dis pas que tu as gobé le bobard de l’*american dream*?” (81). Diego’s language — ‘gobé le bobard’ – – reveals his disdain for those who would pursue a life in the United States. Later, upon passing through a homeless encampment, Diego again taunts Pablo: “tu vois, ici c’est comme au Mexique. Il est où, ton *american dream*?” (130). Yet, while scorning the American dream, Diego is also solidifying his strongly-held belief in helping others. Diego detests the perceived egocentric individualism of the United States; proving himself to be above it, he insists that should he and Pablo win, they share the show’s prize: “J’emmerde leur règlement individualiste; Chacun pour soi, écrasez les autres… On va leur montrer qu’on peut gagner autrement, main dans la main! On est des *partners*, n’est-ce pas?” (83).

Of course, the revelation that Pablo has been working with the police shocks Diego. The two get into a fistfight, with Diego renouncing their friendship. Yet, although Pablo was originally a mole with the police, he ultimately chooses to help Diego and Guadelupe: “Je croyais tout connaître de l’immigration. J’avais lu tous les dossiers et appris les statistiques par cœur… Mais quand j’ai découvert la réalité derrière les chiffres, ces hommes, ces femmes… Ça a changé beaucoup de choses pour moi” (209). Pablo goes on to criticize Diego’s uncompromising attitude directly: “Ouvre les yeux! … Tu t’imagines qu’on vit dans un monde en noir et blanc avec les gentils d’un côté et les méchants de l’autre?” (212). When Pablo is shot, Diego must simultaneously reaffirm his

ability to deeply care about others, as well as admitting that Pablo was not a stereotypically selfish American. As Pablo is dying, Diego finally forgives him, and begins to cry: “Des larmes tièdes se formèrent aux coins de ses yeux. Lorsqu’elles roulèrent sur ses joues, la poigne de Pablo se relâcha. Le jeune flic avait cessé de vivre” (234). Here, Pablo is both “Pablo” and “le jeune flic,” highlighting the complexity that Diego must recognize.

Throughout the story, Diego often meets other characters who challenge his simplified perceptions of Americans and America-bound immigrants. There is an American newscaster who passionately defends immigrants’ rights and condemns anti-immigrant sentiment. Diego also meets Alfred, who “comme tant d’autres, s'était endetté auprès de son passeur quand il avait traversé la frontière en cachette” (136) and Justin, an American who helps Diego and Pablo find shelter and safety (“C’est normal. On doit se serrer les coudes” (134)). During his American sojourn, Diego realizes he had been too hasty and cavalier in his former opinions: “Diego n’avait jamais réfléchi à tout cela en profondeur” (151). Diego does not change his opinion on the inherent cruelty in an extremely materialistic society; if anything, his experiences confirm the systemic abuse that is possible under such a system. However, he also recognizes that individuals within the country are all multifaceted. Ironically, after criticizing the United States as callously individualistic, Diego realizes he had not seen people *as* individuals, and had instead judged them all as one.

In the novel’s epilogue, readers do see stability and growth in Diego’s identity. Significantly, his commitment to his family and Mexico remains steadfast: “Avec l’avance qu’ils [l'éditeur] m’ont versée, j’ai de quoi sortir mon père du pétrin. Et avec le

reste, je compte bien réaliser mon rêve: la création d'un centre de santé pour indigents" (244). In this way, Diego is similar to Anthéa. Both characters underwent challenging ordeals that could have easily embittered them or caused them to close themselves off to the rest of the world. Yet, just as Anthéa returns to Cameroon with an optimistic attitude and the ability to reconnect with childhood friends and her family, Diego does not waver in his profound desire to return and improve his community. Furthermore, Anthéa learns that France and the French people aren't easily reduced to a single stereotype; though she had positive stereotypes of France, she leaves with a more balanced perception. Diego also went into the United States with a single (negative) mindset, and leaves with the ability to see beyond 'un monde en noir et blanc.' After *America's Most Hunted* is shut down amid massive protests and accusations of human rights violations, Diego even muses that "peut-être, un jour, apprendrons-nous à vivre tous ensemble, dans le respect et la tolérance" (243). Though this statement feels overly saccharine and perhaps heavy-handed, it is a significant change from the same character who initially felt Americans "se regroupaient par classe sociale, par religion, par goût pour un même loisir… et tous qui n'appartenaient pas à la communauté devaient montrer patte blanche avant d'y entrer" (59). Thus, while the larger trajectory of Diego's life remains the same, it is clear that he has also grown in his beliefs and perceptions of the world around him.

Interestingly, fantasy does not play a large role in this identity development; Diego could undergo the same transformation had he simply gone to the United States as, for example, an exchange student, or as an undocumented person himself. Ultimately, *Le Dos au Mur* is the least fantastical of the three novels analyzed in this chapter: it is set in modern times, in a realistic and recognizable geography, with entirely normal (not

supernatural) characters. It can be argued that *Le Dos au Mur* has even gotten less fantastical since its publication: it was published eight years before Donald Trump's election, and the rallying cry of "build the wall" had not yet entered the public lexicon. Lambert's "fantastical" reimagining of the United States, then, is actually uncomfortably close to current political discourse.

Besides the wall, the most obvious source of dystopian fantasy in the novel is *America's Most Hunted*. However, lest the reader imagine that a show like this would never air, Lambert writes in a footnote that the concept is explicitly based on the actual show *America's Most Wanted*. Lambert actually uses footnotes throughout the novel to help explain potentially unfamiliar concepts, either from American geography or culture, or Spanish words. For example, 'WASP' (White Anglo Saxon Protestant) and 'coyote' (a person who smuggles immigrants across the border) both have their own definitions included. Thus, while Montardre grounded *Oceania* in a fairly even tension between the fantasy-reality binary, Lambert tries to familiarize his novel and downplay its fantastical elements. Like *Oceania*, *Le Dos au Mur* does use fantasy elements — the wall, *America's Most Hunted* — to better critique an actual socio- and geopolitical reality (in this case, immigration). Unlike *Oceania*, however, *Le Dos au Mur* does not rely on fantasy elements for developing the identity of its protagonist. Rather, Diego's identity is developed, like countless others, through his experience in a new place.

In some ways, this can make *Le Dos au Mur* feel like a less complex narrative than *La Princetta et le Capitaine* or *Oceania*. It is a dystopian fantasy that explicitly seeks to lessen the complexity and impact *of* its fantasy; there is very little world-building, for example, and characters like Patrick Rooney can seem one-dimensional.

However, it also defies some of the stereotypes of young adult literature. For example, in her analysis of the genre, Joanne Brown notes the "almost unfailingly" optimistic ending of young adult literature, and how this effect bleeds into immigration narratives:

> Most often, the family is reunited, and the promise of a good life beckons. Even when events are shaded with doubt… the reader can read the closing paragraphs with peace of mind… Because the United States is, indeed, a nation of immigrants, the millions of actual examples of those who have already journeyed from their native lands and established stable, positive homes in the United States allow us to extrapolate… and to say with some certainty that the characters in them will almost certainly do likewise. (145-146)

Le Dos au Mur allows no such easy extrapolation; Diego even gives a self-aware nod to this perception of both the unfailingly optimistic American stereotype and the young adult trope. As he prepares to return to Mexico with his book deal money, he says with irony, "N'oublie pas qu'on est à Hollywood ici; et Hollywood aime les *happy end*…" (244). *Le Dos au Mur*, despite being dystopian, in the years since its publication has become astoundingly prescient. This adds a layer of intricacy to an otherwise simpler novel, once again highlighting the dichotomy of fantasy seen in this chapter: it has either the potential to ignore complex issues (*La Princetta et le Capitaine*), or to address them directly and relentlessly. Furthermore, the fantasy elements of *Le Dos au Mur* disrupt Brown's analysis. Indeed, the fantasy elements create an unpredictability that subverts expectations just enough; readers cannot "say with some certainty" what will or won't eventually happen to a character in a genre that allows for significant deviations from

reality. Arguably, this holds true across each novel in this chapter: even when fantasy has the potential to simplify, it also undermines predictability or easy assumptions.

Conclusion

Interestingly, the coming-of-age stories told in this chapter feel reminiscent of those in chapters one and two; trajectories of personal growth are grounded in a distinctly human familiarity, despite fantastical settings. Themes of first love, for example, are present in each novel: Malva and Orfeus, Flavia and Chris, and Diego and Guadelupe all develop from platonic to romantic interpersonal relationships. This is typical of adolescence; Szwedo et al. note that "Adolescence is marked by the developmentally appropriate emergence of increased interest in the peer group relative to parents, first with regard to interest in friendships and later with increased interest in romantic relationships" (950). This developmental familiarity, however, does not imply that the fantasy novels of *La Princetta et le Capitaine, Oceania,* and *Le Dos au Mur* can be disregarded.

Instead, fantasy permits each story to go "past reality, by plunging through and beyond it, … [offering] an interesting, at times disturbing, perspective" (Baker, 2). Indeed, Baker notes the potential of fantasy to imagine new subjectivities and realities, while Curry highlighted its role in depicting the effects of environmental disaster to dispel modern apathy. However, as *La Princetta et le Capitaine* makes clear, the fantasy subgenre does not guarantee progressive messaging. Bondoux's novel showcases the chance for fantasy to become incredibly reductive, glossing over complex geopolitical realities in favor of trivialized caricatures. One area of further exploration could be novels such as *Le Dos au Mur,* which become *less* fantastical over time. Just as definitions of

'young adult' are currently in flux, constantly redefining the genre itself, fantasy novels have the ability to shift genres. If fantasy permits stories to go 'past reality,' what does it mean when it circles back?

Ideally, more critical insight in general is needed in this genre. None of the novels in this chapter have received much, if any, scholarly attention. This is perhaps due to both young adult literature and fantasy often being reduced to the 'popular' or 'entertainment' categories. Yet, their commercial viability does not diminish their complexity or academic potential. Baker proposes that the fantasy genre "is a pervasive phenomenon, demanding critical evaluation of its emotional appeal and its political implications" (437). I would argue that the critical evaluation he demands of the fantasy genre should be extended to the *young adult* fantasy subgenre as well; each novel in this chapter highlights overt or implicit political and societal implications with the potential to reach a wide readership. Indeed, young adult novels are today read by demographics beyond young adults[7], and each young adult fantasy novel here can serve as an insight into broader, real-life social phenomena.

[7] See Introduction

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The coming-of-age story is a classic tradition in young adult literature, a genre already defined by "maturation, de-identification, and … questions of identity and life-purpose" (Chambers 281). When examining the genre through the lens of migration narratives, these questions of identity become even more pronounced, as protagonists navigate new geopolitical situations alongside physical displacement. Throughout this work, I have articulated the ways in which various migrations impact the development of young adult identity within the young adult genre. In particular, I have explored how the challenges of migration complement and transform the traditional developmental passage to adulthood. Furthermore, I have posited that young adult novels are potentially rich sources for scholarly analysis, defying a tendency to relegate the genre to the periphery of literary academia.

In Chapter one, I examine postcolonial identities as protagonists journey to and from France. Here, identity development was inextricable from the deconstruction of myths of French identity. In *Un Papillon dans la Cité,* protagonist Félicie also develops an identity that incorporates her Guadalupian roots with her new life in Paris. Here, identity is constructed through a polyphony of voices as she exemplifies the linguistic and cultural hybridity typically found in French Caribbean literature. Djiraël, the French-Senegalese protagonist of *Sarcelles-Dakar* also develops an identity that consolidates different cultural aspects of both France and Senegal. He must contend with the uncomfortable contrast between his internal perceptions of self with the external perception of his extended Senegalese family. In *La Proie*, the allure of France is directly

juxtaposed with actual experiences in the country, as Anthéa seeks to return to Cameroon, in defiance of her parents' assumption that France would create more prosperous opportunities. Each protagonist ultimately questions their internalized perceptions of the country (and by extension, themselves), while simultaneously approaching the biases and stereotypes unconsciously shared by their families and larger community. In learning to recognize the (in)validity of the myth of France, they are able to develop their own independent identities that synthesize their in-country experiences with their implicit and explicit perceptions and beliefs.

Chapter two moves, geographically, outside of France, and focuses on refugee identities. In these stories, I examine protagonists facing the compounding challenges of physical migration alongside issues of lawful residency, adding new layers of instability to identity development. Like in Chapter one, the novels deconstruct myths of idealized refuges, while also highlighting the real-life refugee crisis. *Alexis, Fils de Raphaël* showcases the arrested development of the refugee process, as Alexis and his mother languish for months in a camp in Miami. When he reaches Montreal, he must integrate his own identity with his new city and within the larger Haitian diaspora. In *Refuges*, Italian protagonist Mila is juxtaposed with a polyphony of Eritrean refugee voices. Mila's identity clearly develops alongside her growing awareness of the larger geopolitical context in which she lives. *Homme noir sur fond blanc* challenges conceptions of age in identity, as Gaston and Brahim each take on roles more traditionally assigned to the other — Gaston as an idealistic youth, and Brahim as the wiser adult. Here, it is Brahim's migration and Gaston's stagnation that create life experiences and identities that defy conventional conceptions of aging. Each story in Chapter two also functions as an

endorsement of youth activism, with both explicit and implicit examples of social justice movements and initiatives.

Finally, in Chapter three, I delve into a critically overlooked subgenre: young adult fantasy novels of migration. In the novels I chose, young adult identity develops similarly to the previous two chapters, with protagonists deconstructing and reconstructing their worldviews as they experience migrations. Typical markers of adolescent development are still present, from a growing independence from family to a more confident sense of self. However, the fantasy settings also enable a potentially fascinating reimagination of dominant ideologies, allowing readers to make connections to their own lives and beliefs. While this is subtler than the youth activism outlined in Chapter two, fantasy settings still have unmistakable implications for real world conclusions. Yet, across Chapter three, arguably only one novel truly achieves this potential: *Oceania*, which can be seen as a catalyst for dialogue and action around climate change. *Le Dos au Mur* occupies a strange space in the fantasy genre: since its publication, its 'fantastical' elements have gotten decidedly less far-fetched as modern political dialogue has progressed. *La Princetta et le Capitaine* demonstrates a potential pitfall of fantasy novels. The world constructed here feels like a shallow mimicry of our own; consequently, neither the protagonist, Malva, nor the reader can move beyond reductive constructs of identity or ideology.

Across these chapters, I establish the scholarly potential of young adult literature; this is particularly relevant today as the genre continues to mature and evolve. Many critics of young adult literature cite its supposedly simplistic or superficial construction. I have found this to be untrue; in my research, young adult literature is capable of

expressing deeper themes such as postcolonial identities, the violence of exile, or linguistic hybridity, to name just a few. Even structurally, upon examination, young adult literature surpasses the expectations of critics. Numerous works forgo the stereotypical "happy ending" or play with first-person narration to intentionally include a polyphonic narrative structure, for example. In my analysis, I further connect the genre with another increasing modern phenomenon: global mobility. In relating the two, I demonstrate the strong influence migration narratives have, both as a real-world phenomenon and as a construct, on negotiating identity construction. I also make the leap into analyzing fantasy narratives, an often-neglected subgenre — despite the existence of a vast corpus. This project establishes a foundation for further study into not only young adult works from acclaimed authors, but newer or more obscure titles as well.

There is significant potential for future research in young adult migration narratives. First of all, it has thus far received little scholarly attention; it is especially disproportionate given the popularity of young adult literature and the sheer volume of works published that deal with themes of migration and displacement. Secondly, the definition of 'young adult' continues to fluctuate, meaning that traditional markers of identity construction are also liable to shift. The young adult genre itself consequently has a nebulous definition which, over time, I would expect to transform. Interestingly, the same can be true of fantasy narratives; *Le Dos au Mur* proves that a fantasy today can become a reality tomorrow, giving a surprising edge to the realism of fantasy. In either case, novels can constantly be reanalyzed and recategorized as modern definitions progress; already, Chambers cited a definition of young adult that went up until age 35. Given the wide variability of conceptions of life stages, novels of migration could

conceivably be published as adult novels and re-studied as young adult in the future. Finally, identity construction could be analyzed using further specificities, either geographic or conceptual. For example, two novels in this analysis focus on protagonists with Caribbean origins, and five feature female protagonists. Three end with characters explicitly planning to write or publish their own story, while four end with the death of a main character. There are potential connections to explore between identity and migration, and structure, textuality, gender, geography, culture, or more. The possibilities are many; very little work addresses migration in young adult novels specifically, leaving space for intersectional analyses. Ultimately, I believe that young adult fiction is a genre with enormous potential for future study. Here, I lay the foundation for critical insight into the convergence of migration and identity development in the genre, clearly demonstrating the capacity of young adult novels to act as viable additions to the field of literary studies.

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