Face Value: Physiognomy, Portraiture, And The Making Of Subjectivity In Francophone Literature And Visual Culture

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Abstract
This dissertation examines representations of the human face in Francophone literature and visual culture. Of all the discourses that have dominated discussions of France's colonial subjects, nineteenth-century physiognomy was among the most popular. Imperial expansion in the 1830's and the development of physical anthropology transformed the “science of faces” into something it was originally not: a tool for classifying racial types rather than a study of individual, idiosyncratic features. In the following century, Levinas profoundly reshaped how to approach and understand faces. While his ethics has often been framed as a critique of physiognomic description, Chapter one produces a reading of the two that explores some of their less-discussed commonalities, arguing that both ultimately theorized the face apart from its lived experience. The next three chapters examine how current Afro-Caribbean authors such as Max Elisée, Révérien Rurangwa, and Assia Djebar have engaged with this intellectual legacy and articulated, often as a counterpoint, their own imaginaries of the face. Proceeding through a series of case studies centered on portraits of Tutsis, chabins, and (un)veiled Muslims, this dissertation interrogates the modalities through which racial and gender differences have been inscribed on and performed by the body. It is not a history of Francophone portraiture per se, nor is it a history of the face. Rather, it provides a partial inventory of how Francophone artists have positioned themselves within the network of Western discourses on the face, and more specifically, how they have borrowed, re-appropriated, or bent the codes of physiognomic portraiture, using the face as a heuristic device to explore what it means to be human.

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FACE VALUE: PHYSIOGNOMY, PORTRAiture, AND THE MAKING OF
SUBJECTIVITY IN FRANCOPHONE LITERATURE AND VISUAL CULTURE

Romain Delaville

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ABSTRACT

FACE VALUE: PHYSIOGNOMY, PORTRAITURE, AND THE MAKING OF SUBJETIVITY IN FRANCOPHONE LITERATURE AND VISUAL CULTURE

Romain Delaville
Lydie Moudileno

This dissertation examines representations of the human face in Francophone literature and visual culture. Of all the discourses that have dominated discussions of France’s colonial subjects, nineteenth-century physiognomy was among the most popular. Imperial expansion in the 1830’s and the development of physical anthropology transformed the “science of faces” into something it was originally not: a tool for classifying racial types rather than a study of individual, idiosyncratic features. In the following century, Levinas profoundly reshaped how to approach and understand faces. While his ethics has often been framed as a critique of physiognomic description, Chapter one produces a reading of the two that explores some of their less-discussed commonalities, arguing that both ultimately theorized the face apart from its lived experience. The next three chapters examine how current Afro-Caribbean authors such as Max Elisée, Révérien Rurangwa, and Assia Djebar have engaged with this intellectual legacy and articulated, often as a counterpoint, their own imaginaries of the face. Proceeding through a series of case studies centered on portraits of Tutsis, chabins, and (un)veiled Muslims, this dissertation interrogates the modalities through which racial and gender differences have been inscribed on and performed by the body. It is not a history of Francophone portraiture per se, nor is it a history of the face. Rather, it provides a
partial inventory of how Francophone artists have positioned themselves within the network of Western discourses on the face, and more specifically, how they have borrowed, re-appropriated, or bent the codes of physiognomic portraiture, using the face as a heuristic device to explore what it means to be human.
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INTRODUCTION

Drawing on a corpus of texts and images that include war photographs, novels, popular caricatures, and anthropological essays, this dissertation examines how recent Afro-Caribbean artists have positioned themselves within the network of discourses on the face that have marked the history of ideas since the rebirth of physiognomy in late eighteenth-century France. While Levinas described the face of the other in terms of an ethical encounter, Deleuze and Guattari saw in it the expression of something fundamentally inhuman, “un conte de terreur.” Where this dissertation breaks new ground is in its revision of such claims. Focusing on Francophone literature and visual culture allows me to reframe the face as a locus where the boundaries of human subjectivity are neither taken for granted nor completely dismissed, but endlessly negotiated. In doing so, I provide a larger context for the intersection between postcolonial humanism and body studies—two disciplines that have respectively produced a vast literature but whose commonalities have been understudied.

This dissertation is not a history of the face per se. Nor is it a history of the way it has been represented in French and Francophone portraiture. Rather, it is a study of how Francophone artists have borrowed, re-appropriated, or bent the codes of European physiognomy to create new imaginaries of the face and, by the same token, to redefine what it means to be human. By European physiognomy, I mean the brand of physiognomy concerned with the depiction of racial types and popularized by French

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anthropologists like Paul Broca in the second half of the nineteenth-century. It is in this sense that I use the expression in the rest of this dissertation, unless otherwise indicated.

Scholarly essays that address the question of the face in literature, visual arts, and cultural studies have for the most part done so from an exclusively French perspective. Among them are Dominique Baqué’s *Visages: Du masque grec à la greffe du visage*,\(^2\) André Benhaïm’s *Panim: Visages de Proust*,\(^3\) and Francis Saint-Genez’s *Le Visage humain remodelé. Constructions symboliques, reconstructions plastiques*.\(^4\) Even Marie-Annick Gervais-Zaninger’s two-volume essay *Au regard des visages* places very little emphasis on representations of faces in Francophone literature and visual culture.\(^5\) To be sure, she does broach the subject of racism and the discursive construction of alterity, but the bulk of her analysis focuses on authors such as Proust, Michaud, Simon, Beckett, and Artaud for whom these concerns were not particularly central. This dissertation is a first step toward filling this gap in scholarship. By no means does it claim to exhaust the topic. It is merely an attempt to scratch the surface and pave the way for future discussions and investigations.

I suggest reading it as if strolling through a portrait gallery. Throughout the pages, the reader will stumble upon emblematic faces of the Francophone world: Tutsis whose semi-Semitic, semi-Caucasian appearance served to justify their extermination; the


chabin, a figure of black/white mixing long considered in the Caribbean as a pariah; and veiled Muslims whose bodies has recently been the object of heated debates on the relationship between Islam and laïcité in French society. Another metaphor to describe this dissertation could be that of the transformational mask, which Lévi-Strauss famously described as a mask composed of several faces, a mask that opens like two shutters to show a second face and, sometimes, a third one behind the second. This dissertation is divided into four chapters, each opening onto the next one to reveal a new face.

Chapter one compares and contrasts two discourses on the face that have shaped the intellectual landscape of the past two centuries in significant ways: physiognomy (or the study of facial features as indicators of character) and Levinas’s ethics. While the latter’s description of the face as a transcendental presence has often been pitted against physiognomy’s concern with material traits, my reading of the two explores some of their less-discussed commonalities. As physiognomy evolved into a tool for producing racial types, it dissolved the corporeality of the face and reduced it to an abstract construct. I argue that, while Levinas’s ethics was partly meant as a criticism of physiognomic discourse, both ended up treating the face as a disembodied entity. Chapters two, three, and four address the different ways in which Francophone literature and visual culture has engaged with this legacy. Can faces be portrayed in a way that does not succumb to the extreme racialization of physiognomy while avoiding the complete erasure of race in Levinas’s ethics? To what extent was this racial erasure reinforced by the color-blind

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model of French Republicanism? How have Francophone artists navigated between these two poles of representation?

Chapter two starts by acknowledging the role of European anthropologists in creating ethnic divisions between Hutus and Tutsis, and how Hutu propaganda re-appropriated practices of racial classification to marginalize, denigrate, and ultimately justify the killing of Tutsis. The post-genocide literature of Rwanda includes a large corpus of testimonies by Tutsi survivors and second-hand witnesses like Yolande Mukagasana’s *La Mort ne veut pas de moi*\(^7\) and *N’aie pas peur de savoir*,\(^8\) Diop’s *Murambi, le livre des ossements*,\(^9\) and Révérien Rurangwa’s *Génocidé*.\(^{10}\) All three writers have reacted differently to the ethnicization of the Rwandan population. Yet they are bound by a common goal: to redefine the conditions of visibility of the face, after centuries of it being racialized. First, I examine the trope of the ethnic ID card in Mukagasana and Diop’s accounts. Its counterfeiting, which was a common practice during the genocide, allowed Tutsis to pass as Hutus, thus undermining the physiognomic grid on which the latter relied to identify the former. While Mukagasana and Diop insist on the face as a site of opacity, Rurangwa seeks to make it more legible, but in his own terms. His testimony is a gripping account of how he was disfigured by his Hutu neighbor and his attempt to come to terms with his new appearance. I propose to read it as an anti-iconoclastic, anti-Levinasian manifesto. In inviting his reader to scrutinize his face, Rurangwa underscores the redemptive possibilities of representation because it brings to

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light the marks of violence inscribed in his flesh. He describes his scars and deformities as reminders of what he went through, signs of his personal struggle, thus reversing physiognomy’s goal of producing types.

Chapter three shifts the focus from Rwanda to Martinique and from the Tutsi to the *chabin*—a figure of Caribbean *métissage*. With his combination of black and white features, he has been a source of bewilderment and fascination. I trace how he has been perceived in Parisian and Martinican societies. The first *chabin* ever known in France was presumably Alexandre Privat d’Anglemont (1815-1859). Originally from Guadeloupe, he spent most of his adult life in Paris where he led a bohemian life as a writer and journalist. Descriptions of his face all fetishized his racial difference, describing it as the sign of an unbridled sexual energy. I go on to examine how Martinican writers Raphaël Confiant and Max Élisée reacted to this exoticization. The former’s autobiographical narratives and the latter’s novel *Mémoires d’un chabin* lay the basis for a phenomenology of the face that attempts to rehabilitate his *métissage*.11

Chapter four departs from the exclusively male focus of chapter three to concentrate on representations of veiled Muslims both in France and Algeria. It is also a move away from physiognomy strictly understood as the practice of determining someone’s character based on facial features. In this chapter, I focus on the general appearance of Muslim women as they remove their Islamic veils and show their faces in public. From its inception, physiognomy emerged as a hermeneutics of revelation, an attempt to penetrate beyond surfaces to the very essence of self. It provided reassurance

and comfort by transforming visual observation into a source of knowledge and power. To look at people meant to know them. In this respect, physiognomy served as a powerful tool of surveillance. Taking as its case study the figure of the veiled Muslim, this chapter asks what happens when this regime of visual transparency is disrupted.

Drawing on a corpus of ID portraits by Marc Garanger, Assia Djebar’s autobiographical novel *Ombre Sultane*, and the photographic exhibition “Mariannes d’aujourd’hui,” I examine how France's colonial history was instrumental in creating a culture of “facial nudity,” using the threat of the unidentifiable, faceless other—the veiled Muslim—to reactivate the discourse of surveillance in which 19th-century physiognomy was embedded. I also show how this culture has been used in post-colonial France to relegate veiled Muslims to the margins of Republican citizenship.

While Francophone postcolonial studies have engaged with literature through the prism of the body, they have generally neglected the face as a category of analysis. One reason for this omission might be that it is often taken for granted as self-evident. After all, everybody has a face. Yet this truism is much more problematic than it seems, if only because we assign to faces different sets of values. All the artists studied here underscore the importance of acknowledging their degree of constructedness. Like gender, race, and disability, “face” is to some extent a by-product of socio-cultural norms. This raises crucial questions about representation and visibility. Each chapter interrogates the

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modalities through which “black,” “mixed,” and veiled faces have been made (in)visible and, more specifically, the ways in which racial differences have been ascribed and performed. We will not only wonder what race does to the face, but also what its inscription on the face does to “representation”? Which faces deserve to be seen and which do not? Which faces matter? By contrast, which ones are deemed abject? And what does this reveal about the institutions, discourses, and/or entities that decide so?

Framing the face as such implies that it can be “deconstructed” and “refigured” in a variety of ways. This speaks in important ways to the title of this dissertation: “Face Value.” The expression is commonly used to designate the nominal value shown on a coin, a stamp, or a stock certificate, as it differs from its intrinsic or market value. By extension, it has come to denote the superficial appearance or significance of something. Likewise, the expression “to take at face value” means to accept someone or something without considering what they are worth or if they really are what they claim to be. This discrepancy between the essence and the appearance, the surface and what lies underneath offers striking parallels with Marxian economics and recalls the gap between use-value (the utility of an object) and exchange-value (the quantity of other objects it will exchange for). In Capital, the act of assigning an exchange-value to a product is one of alienation not only because it deprives the worker from the product of his labor, but also because it turns his labor into a commodity. This brief lexical detour is important because it reveals the extent to which not to take anything or anyone at face value is fundamentally an act that questions physiognomic correspondences between the outside

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and the inside, the visible and the hidden. Going back to our corpus of Afro-Caribbean artists, how has their critique of physiognomy been developed through assigning new values to the face? What are some of the challenges they have faced in trying to do so? For example, to what extent can the process of refiguring the face avoid falling into the trap of reification against which Marx warned? In addressing these questions, this dissertation ultimately uncovers the ways in which these artists have sought to reclaim their own image—their own face—and assert its importance in contributing to the understanding of what it means to be human.
CHAPTER ONE

Making Faces: Physiognomy, Race, and Colonialism in Nineteenth-Century France

About Face

Nothing is more ambiguous than a face. Every single one of us may have one, but it only comes to life through interaction with others. Indeed, a face does not truly become what it is unless it gazes and is gazed at. This is particularly evident in the etymology of the word “visage.” From the middle ages to the seventeenth century, the French “vis” encompassed a broad range of meanings such as face, sight, and visual field. Its origin can be traced back to the Latin “visus,” which not only designated the ability to look, but also that which is seen, that is, the general aspect or appearance of something or someone. Even the slightest glimpse of a face can yield a trove of information. Gazing at someone’s countenance generally provides an easy way to infer their moods and feelings. For example, a pouting mouth may indicate a feeling of sadness or disgust, while raised eyebrows may be interpreted as surprise, astonishment, or wonder. Faces set the stage for the play of human emotions. They serve as indexes of mental and psychological states, as mirrors for our inner world. Numerous works have been devoted to the study of the relationship between facial movements and the passions of the soul—a discipline known
as pathognomy.¹⁷

The word “face” has been used as a metonym for the whole person. Idiomatic expressions such as “to save/lose face,” “to stuff one’s face,” “to have egg on one’s face,” or “to get in someone’s face” point toward a conflation between the front of the human head and the individual to which it belongs. In French too, the meaning of the word extends far beyond its primary definition. Phrases like “le vrai visage de…” or “le visage caché de…” which are often found in newspaper and magazine headlines insist on the face as a site for the display of truth; as if what it showed were always reliable, obvious, plain as the nose on one’s face. As if it never lied.

Except that it does. And a lot. The face is inherently social and, as such, constrained by a range of forces that delineate forms of acceptable behavior. In order to navigate society, one must get her/his game face on, that is, conform to specific conventions, comply with proper etiquette, or to put it yet another way, adopt the right *persona*—a Latin word that originally referred to an actor’s mask, but that grew to designate the character s/he played, like the ancient Greek *prosòpon*. Self-expression is always to a certain extent the result of calculation and domestication. What happens when we choose to play the social game is that we obey learned codes of conduct and paradoxically hide behind metaphorical masks to express ourselves. The French call it “faire bon visage.”¹⁸

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Although they are synonymous, “visage” and “face” have undergone different historical transformations. The use of the former was officially recognized by the Académie Française in 1694 despite earlier occurrences in the works of Molière, Montaigne, and other Renaissance as well as late medieval authors. Still, “la face” remained more commonly used. André Benhaïm has noted, however, that “au fil du temps, ‘face’ s’est partagé les extrêmes de la langue, du sacré et de l’injure, entre Face de Dieu, Sainte Face et face de rat. Ainsi marquée, ‘face’ a dû (contrairement à l’anglais) faire place au ‘visage.’”

This brief lexical survey demonstrates the degree to which “face” has become a catch-all descriptor both in English and in French, by bringing into play notions as diverse, and sometimes antithetical, as person and personality, self and society, truth and forgery, the religious and the profane. This series of linguistic associations underscores another crucial characteristic of the face: it is enigmatic. As Benhaïm has aptly remarked in his study of Proust, unlike vis or visus, the Hebrew word panim, is always plural, which suggests that the face cannot be reduced to a single aspect, horizon, or unit of meaning: “Plus qu’un indénombrable, panim suggère l’incommensurable, l’insaisissable.” The term should be understood in the sense of a multiplicity that cannot be reduced to a whole; it designates a radiating openness that no predicate can circumscribe, a constellation of forces, planes, and dimensions that defy easy generalization.

This is certainly why the face has long been a source of fascination, especially in Western thought, where a number of philosophers have attempted to make sense of it. Levinas (1906-1995) remains to date the most essential one.\textsuperscript{21} One of his major intellectual contributions was to rethink the Western moral tradition—one characterized by a tendency to use sameness as the basis for ethical relationships. In other words, for that tradition, it has been our likeness to one another, our shared capacity for pleasures, pains, and feelings—in a word, compassion—that has allowed us to define the scope of our responsibility toward one another. According to Levinas, however, ethics should be established on the basis of our relationship with the other. That is to say, it is the alterity of the other that makes ethical demands on me, not my ability to relate to her/him.

This issue has been addressed at length in one of his most famous texts, \textit{Totalité et infini. Essai sur l'extériorité}.\textsuperscript{22} His ethical theory is grounded in a key existential moment, the face-to-face encounter. Levinas claimed that “l’accès au visage est d’emblée éthique.”\textsuperscript{23} But why is it so? What, in the face of the other, makes it right away ethical? What he means by the face cannot be reduced to perception, to the realm of the seen, of the \textit{visus}. It cannot be seen, known, or represented because it is not a physical, plastic object \textit{per se}, but an appeal, an imperative that forces me to take on a responsibility. The face signifies everything that resists categorization and comprehension because it is fundamentally other. By “other,” Levinas does not necessarily mean cultural others or

\textsuperscript{21} Born in Lithuania, he began to study philosophy in 1924 at the University of Strasbourg where he befriended Maurice Blanchot, and four years later at the University of Freiburg where he discovered phenomenology under the supervision of Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, and introduced it into France. Much of his work, while being indebted to these two thinkers, departs from earlier frameworks and methodologies.


people who live in different times and places, but an abstract alterity with which I can never identify. As such, the face encapsulates the very idea of infinity, of that which, by definition, cannot be contained, restricted, or instrumentalized; that which imposes itself on me and, in doing so, summons me and demands justice. As the face appears, it signifies an absolute commandment that Levinas believes is best summarized as: “Thou shalt not kill.” At the core of my relationship with the other is a prohibition to kill it; its face limits my powers because it appears in such a way that I cannot appropriate it to my own ends and purposes. I cannot but become its hostage.

Of course, Levinas was aware that the way to encounter faces is always as physical objects. Which begs the question: how can a face be at once a material image and the notion of an infinite that cannot be represented? How can a face manifest itself to me without ever becoming a thing? To address this conundrum, Diane Perpich has argued the following:

The face of the other is the image of an absolute alterity and unrepresentable singularity. It represents the inadequacy of every image to the task of representing the other and, as such, paradoxically, represents the impossibility of its own representational activity. Thus, in the figure of the face, Levinas’s text does what must be done by conveying to the reader this notion of the face, and does what it explicitly maintains cannot be done, namely it gives a form to that which “overflows” or “destroys” every form.24

The face occupies a liminal space at the intersection of the material and the immaterial, of physics and metaphysics. It is not a phenomenon *per se* because it cannot be represented, but it is also not a complete abstraction because it needs to manifest itself in order to engage me. Yet, in doing so, it points to something that already transcends it, that escapes

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my gaze, an otherness so infinitely different that it cannot but oblige me.25

The other never coincides with its countenance. In describing its face as a withdrawal rather than an appearing, a presence rather than an image, Levinas stripped it of its lived experience, thus downplaying, if not completely ignoring, components such as age, gender, and race. This understanding of the face inverts physiognomic accounts that saw in its features external signs of character and racial/ethnic origin. From Aristotle’s ancient treatises, to Charles Le Brun’s comparative drawings of human and animal faces, to the current literature on “body language” and “mentalism,” physiognomy has enjoyed considerable attention from scholars and popular commentators alike.26 Yet, its history is rife with complexity and contradiction. Physiognomy is a slippery notion that has raised different sets of questions, taken on different meanings, and achieved different goals with virtually every user.

It reached a popularity peak in the late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-centuries with the publication of Lavater’s essay *L’Art de connaître les hommes par la*

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25 Levinas’s essay made a lasting mark in the philosophical realm. His main opposition came from Deleuze and Guattari. In their collaborative essay *Mille plateaux*, they are less interested in the phenomenological dimension of the face as they are in the concept of “faciality” (*visagéité*), whereby they mean an abstract machine that creates faces as it is set in motion by certain assemblages of power or signifying regimes. This machine operates on two axes: *significance* (white wall) and *subjectivity* (black hole). It is their relationship to one another that brings faces into existence. According to them, the face is a universal, but only if we understand it to be a universal imposition. Indeed, Deleuze and Guattari claim that the process of facialization is an imperialistic one, for the facial standard chosen by this machine has been the archetypical white European man, Christ. It follows that the first deviances from this facial norm are racial. While it remains unclear what Deleuze and Guattari mean exactly by “abstract machine of faciality,” they insist that it operates in a tyrannical way because it orders, judges, classifies, and ultimately marginalizes by rejecting non-conforming, suspicious-looking faces, meaning faces that depart from the standard of the white European male embodied by Christ. Their understanding of the face as a monstrous by-product of ideology stands in sharp opposition to Levinas’s face of the other as the locus of an ethical encounter. See Deleuze, Gilles et Félix Guattari. *op. cit.*

physionomie. Born in Zurich in 1741, Gaspard Lavater was a Swiss poet, philosopher, and theologian. He officiated as a pastor until his death in 1801. Several reasons explain the success of his essay. Once regarded as an occult, speculative practice bordering on superstition, physiognomy became more “serious.” Lavater formalized its use; he created a semiotic system that made facial traits into natural signifiers of the self. This epistemological shift considerably increased the number of its practitioners who were no longer equated with witches or sorcerers. Another reason was Lavater’s marketing skills. In addition to being a particularly talented orator, he was an astute businessman. Initially published as beautifully ornate and expensive display books coveted by higher society, his fragments came out in pocket-sized editions that could be easily carried around. Success was immediate; from 1772 to 1810, his work appeared in no less than fifteen French editions.

An important feature of Lavater’s theory was its claim to improve humanity. Interestingly enough, his Essays on Physiognomy, which were published between 1781 and 1803, bear the following subtitle: For the Promotion of the Knowledge and the Love of Mankind. Lavater believed that every single human being was designed in God’s image. Physiognomy was merely a tool to reveal the beauty of creation and instill in men a sense of “brotherly love.” It was also meant to advance knowledge of humanity by uncovering the self behind the façade. As such, physiognomy inaugurated a new conception of subjectivity. According to Richard T. Gray, it “play[ed] a formative role in

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28 Lavater, Gaspard. Essais sur la physiognomie, destinés à faire connoître l’homme et à le faire aimer. 4 vols. La Haye, 1781-1803.
the ideological self-definition of the emergent civil subject” of the nineteenth-century, which he describes as self-same, self-identical, immutable, and autonomous (the same facial features connote the same psychological traits) as opposed to the pre-1789 aristocratic courtly subject who was essentially a manipulative, masquerading, inauthentic individual evolving in a world of deceit.29

However, as the second colonial empire rose in the 1830’s and New Caledonia, Senegal, Algeria, and Indochina successively fell under French rule, physiognomy transformed into something it was originally not: an instrument of racial classification and denigration rather than a study of individual features geared toward pan-humanistic love. Theorized by Lavater as a tool for capturing faces in their singularity, it became a way of imposing pre-conceived interpretive grids on them. In other words, physiognomy was more concerned with the production of facial types than the recognition of what made them unique. This shift had profound consequences. In neglected the embodied nature of faces; it overlooked their corporeal specificities to frame them in categories to which they did not always belong.

In this chapter, I wonder how physiognomy evolved from a theory of Christian love to a system of racial classification at a time when the French empire expanded, and colonial subjects began to make their way to Paris. How did Lavater’s humanistic project paved the way for a philosophy that ranked ethnic/cultural differences and shifted the boundaries of human difference? And more generally, what role did physiognomy play in the modern understanding of race? To answer these questions, I will examine three racial

caricatures, two of which depict Algerian tirailleurs during their stay in Paris in 1859, and a 1895 ad for Savon La Hêve that features the famous clown Chocolat. While these caricatures were published more than thirty-five years apart, both illustrate the role of physiognomic imagery in the creation of typical “black” faces. In examining the way physiognomy reified the face into a stock visual, I ultimately want to redefine the way we have engaged with discourses on the face. Rather than setting out a schematic opposition between physiognomy and Levinas’s ethics of the face, I will highlight their similarities, by showing how both ended up treating the face as a disembodied, decontextualized entity.

Facing the Turcos: Daumier and Physiognomic Caricature

The appeal of Lavater’s physiognomy was especially prominent in big cities. In the wake of the industrial revolution that swept across Europe, peasants and laborers migrated from the countryside to secure better opportunities, and so did immigrants from the recent French colonies. Following these waves of population displacement, cities such as Paris and London became confusing, chaotic, and altogether illegible. Physiognomy became one way to make sense of them. As Sharrona Pearl has argued, “pocket physiognomy texts and, more important, instincts, could be referenced when people were walking the city and entering relationships, particularly when they needed to

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make social decisions and distinctions or decide whom to trust.”\textsuperscript{31} Lavater’s physiognomy became a policing tool to monitor the underclass, the criminals, and the outcasts that the city harbored, and to eradicate the sense of anonymity provided by the dark neighborhoods where they hid.\textsuperscript{32} While identifying them often required the eye to be trained, colonial subjects could easily be noticed due to the color of their skin. So why did physiognomists feel so inclined to study and represent them?

Despite lack of immediate utility (one did not need physiognomy to identify members of different races), representations of the colonized were found everywhere in the popular press and the scientific media. They were largely influenced by the literary genre of \textit{physiologies} which consisted of short illustrated satiric works in which writers/artists classified and reduced the urban population into social types like the \textit{lorette}, the banker, the cuckold, the law student, etc.\textsuperscript{33} Such stereotyping also played a major role in portrayals of non-European bodies. As the second wave of colonization

\textsuperscript{31} Pearl, Sharrona. \textit{About Faces. Physiognomy in Nineteenth-Century Britain}. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010, p. 27. Although Pearl’s analysis centers on Nineteenth-Century Great Britain, her remarks on the use of physiognomy in cities also apply to the situation in France. In her study of nineteenth-century physiognomy in France, Judith Weschler reached the same conclusion. From the 1780’s to the 1880’s, the population of Paris went from half a million to two million. As a result, “[n]ew informal codes of behavior emerged, for orientation, for emulation and simulation, to recognize others.” See Weschler, Judith. \textit{A Human Comedy. Physiognomy and Caricature in Nineteenth-Century Paris}. Chicago: The University Press of Chicago, 1982, pp. 13-14.

\textsuperscript{32} The incipit of \textit{Les Mystères de Paris} is a famous example. Sue describes the \textit{Ile de la cité} as a neighborhood populated with “des types hideux, effrayants,” “des tribus barbares” comparable to the savages described by Fenimore Cooper in his historical novel \textit{The Last of the Mohicans}. See Sue, Eugène. \textit{Les Mystères de Paris}, 1843-44. Paris: Gallimard, 2009.

\textsuperscript{33} What distinguishes France from other European countries where Lavater’s theories were popular, including Great-Britain and Germany, was the close relationship between physiognomy and literature. Nowhere else did it generate such a large corpus of texts and novels. Nineteenth-century writers such as Balzac, Sue, Constant, and Sand largely drew on the discipline to shape their characters. This popularity gave rise to the genre of \textit{physiologie}. See for example, \textit{Les Français peints par eux-mêmes. Encyclopédie morale du XIXe siècle} (1840-1842), 9 vols. Paris: Louis Curmer, 1842; Lurine, Louis. \textit{Les Rues de Paris}. 2 vols. Paris: G. Kugelmann, 1842. For a scholarly study of the genre of physiologies, see Preiss, Nathalie. \textit{Les Physiologies en France au XIXe siècle. Étude historique, littéraire et stylistique}. Mont-de-Marsan: Éditions InterUniversitaires, 1999.
started in the 1830’s, and New Caledonia, Cambodia, Senegal, and Algeria became French possessions, the use of racial imagery proliferated and naturalized an imaginary of the “other” as backwards and savage in order to justify France’s conquests. In this context of imperial expansion, portraits of “black” and “brown” faces served to calm popular fears about immigration, miscegenation, and assimilation, especially after the Crémieux decree of 1870 created a pathway to French citizenship for the Jewish, and Muslim Arab and Berber populations of Algeria. The debasement of non-white races ultimately functioned to establish and legitimate the superiority of the white French bourgeoisie.

In this respect, physiognomy proved a powerful tool. It was informed by a Eurocentric worldview that celebrated certain members of the white race—especially the French, the German, and the British—as the epitome of human evolution while regarding others as naturally inferior. For example, Lavater heavily drew on Pierre Camper’s theory of facial angle, and described the black face as having a “nez gros, plat, et épais” and a profile that suggested a low intelligence. Regarding the Tartare or Kalmouck (Asian) face, he wrote:

Le front bas et ces yeux de singe enfoncés sont, à ce qu’on dit, les indices de la poltronnerie et de l’amour du pillage. Accueillez, mes lecteurs, comme une vérité sûre et confirmée par mille expériences, que toutes les concavités principales des profils, c’est-à-dire les concavités de la forme, indiquent la faiblesse des facultés intellectuelles.

Physiognomy, and more specifically what Lavater called “national physiognomy,” was a precursor of racial ethnology because it allowed for the creation of a community

grounded in the exclusion of those who did not fit the appropriate standards. As Richard Gray put it, the (pseudo-) science of reading faces became “one of the primary tools deployed by civil society for this fabrication of the individual according to preordained ethical, characterological, national, or racial definitions.” The study of racial others presented physiognomy with a major conundrum. Lavater intended it as an illustration of how human beings were crafted in God’s image. But with the rise of the second French colonial empire, a shift occurred; its practitioners started doing the crafting instead. Physiognomy went from being descriptive to being prescriptive. In the process, it became the negation of what it was originally meant to be. The creation and proliferation of racial stereotypes served as an excuse for not evaluating individual features.

As one would expect, physiognomic caricature was one of the most popular genres to describe France’s colonial others at the time. The use of humor provided reassurance and consolidated the idea of a France as a white Catholic nation by mocking those who departed from such a tradition. Among the body of caricatures published at the time, Daumier’s depiction of the Turcos, the Algerian tirailleurs that served in the Crimean War (1853-1856), are particularly emblematic. They sought, through the use of humor, to neutralize the threat posed by colonial others in France.

Honoré Daumier (1808-1879) was a French painter, sculptor, and caricaturist born of a working-class family in Marseille. He moved to Paris with his parents at the age of eight and started taking drawing lessons from Alexandre Lenoir, Director of the Royal Museum of French Monuments before learning lithography. He later joined the staff of

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La Caricature, a satirical weekly launched by Charles Philippon. His fierce opposition to the Second Empire and his Republican convictions are reflected in a number of his satirical prints. In 1832, Daumier started drawing for Le Charivari, another illustrated paper intended to be a cheaper and more accessible version of La Caricature.37

Many of the lithographs he published in both journals take as their subject matter the representation of extra-European cultures and individuals. Among such individuals were the indigenous Algerian tirailleurs known as “Turcos.” Daumier portrayed them in a series of seven prints in the late summer of 1859. At the time, the French army had just defeated Austria at the battle of Solferino. As the troops returned to Paris, they were greeted in triumphant fanfare. Many Parisians would make their way to the Camp de Saint-Maur, near the bois de Vincennes, where the soldiers had settled their bivouac. Daumier’s caricatures stage this encounter between the French bourgeoisie and the exotic other. The Turcos’ arrival was considered a major event. Most Parisians had never seen them before and their temporary stay in the capital provided the perfect opportunity to change that. Soon, Saint-Maur became a pilgrimage destination. The camp gradually turned into a sort of human zoo, where urban dwellers were completely free to gaze upon the soldiers. As Sandrine Lemaire and Pascal Blanchard have remarked, “[l]es Français ont exhibé leurs sujets coloniaux davantage que les Anglais et les Américains. […] La recette mêlant étranger/étrangèreté et caractère animal ou primitif a parfaitement fonctionné auprès des différents publics qui se rendaient en masse voir les ‘sauvages,’ qu’ils n’avaient jusqu’ici appréhendés que par le biais de la presse populaire ou des cartes

The visit at Saint-Maur was a form of bourgeois entertainment. As such, it anticipated a tradition of showing the colonial other that found further concretization in the recreation of “negro villages” and “ethnological expositions” from the 1870’s onward.

A caricature published in *Le Charivari* on August 15th, 1859 shows a bourgeois Parisian couple strolling through the camp. As they come across two tall Algerians, the woman, who is in awe of their beauty, wants to stay around longer, much to her husband’s disapproval. The cultural clash provoked by the encounter is enhanced by the symmetrical composition of the print: the Parisian couple stands on the right while the Turcos are on the left. It is worth noting that the woman is pregnant, which explains her husband’s reluctance to let her admire the *tirailleurs*. Indeed, according to an old superstition, when a pregnant woman looked at an unpleasant or ugly animal, her baby would take on the likeness of that animal. A small caption that appears below the lithograph confirms this interpretation:

La Dame: Oh! mon ami… quel beau turco!... quel beau turco!!... laisse-moi le contempler encore un peu!
Le Mari: Non… allons-nous-en… tu oubliés, bichette, que tu es dans une situation intéressante… je crains que tu n’attrapes un regard… et que tu n’accouches d’un petit nègre.

The woman’s fascination is evidenced in the repetition of exclamative sentences. She sees Turcos as both courageous heroes and attractive men. The sexual charge of this encounter is further hinted at by the phallic shape of the tent in front of which she stands.

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The husband experiences her physical attraction to the black soldier as a direct threat to his masculinity. Indeed, the sophistication and refinement of the male bourgeois stands in sharp contrast to the Turcos’ height, rugged physique, and vitality. His discomfort also stems from a fear of adultery and *métissage*. The fact that the soldier’s mere presence is enough to turn his newborn into a “petit nègre” triggers anxiety about miscegenation. Daumier’s caricature reignited concerns about racial degeneracy and the downfall of civilization by showing a potential consequence of the Turcos’ stay in Paris: the birth of a black child from a white mother, the risk of tainted bloodlines, and the potential dissolution of the most bourgeois institution of all—marriage.

According to Elizabeth Childs, “the flirtatious encounter of the white woman and the Algerian soldier was a common motif in the commentary and caricatures surrounding the arrival of the Turcos in Paris.” 39 One could see in the Parisians’ fascination with black bodies a prefiguration of the 1920’s vogue for Negrophilia. Daumier used this motif in at least one other caricature, where a soldier is seated in a public omnibus, surrounded by a crowd of Parisians. 40 While the previous caricature showed the Parisians visiting the Turcos, the situation is reversed here: one of the soldiers has ventured outside of the camp to come meet the Parisians. Below the print, the caption shows a conversation between him and M. and Mme Potard: “N’est-il pas vrai, brave Turco, que vous préférez les Françaises aux Africaines?” she asks. To which her husband jokingly replies: “Chut!... ma bonne… tu vois bien que tu vas le faire rougir!...” Here again, the women’s

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40 “Mme Potard—N’est-il pas vrai…” *Le Charivari*, 31 Aug. 1859.
fascination for the soldier is made quite obvious. Their curiosity is reinforced by the composition and perspective. At the center of the drawing is the Turco and he is directly facing us. The limits of the image coincide with the contours of the omnibus window through which we are observing the scene. The visual mechanism deployed by Daumier is an intricate one. The Parisians’ gaze mirrors not just our gaze as we look at the Turco as if through a window, but that of the nineteenth-century readers of *Le Charivari*, many of whom craved portraits of exotic others and displayed the same curiosity as the women in the caricature. The framing of the image puts us in the Parisians’ shoes and compels us to interrogate our own desire to look at the Turco.

The husband’s reference to blushing is an interesting one because it revives old debates about blackness and subjectivity. As colonial expansion accelerated and fears of miscegenation rose, blushing stopped being a mere marker of beauty and virtue to become a racial marker. When Daumier published his caricature, the idea that black people were devoid of emotions and feelings, and therefore closer to animals than human beings simply because they were incapable of blushing, was very popular. While M. Potard makes fun of the Turco for being unable to turn red, he seems to forget that the only person who should be blushing here—his wife—is not. Indeed, bourgeois etiquette demanded that omnibus passengers kept to themselves, that they did not make eye contact with anyone, let alone engage in conversation. Mme Potard’s question is therefore shocking on at least two accounts: first because it is directed to a complete

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stranger, and second, because she asks the Turco about his sexual preferences while her husband is standing right next to her. The Turco’s supposed inability to blush only underscores the fact that the Parisian women should but do not. This allows Daumier to criticize the codes of bourgeois morality and women’s hypocrisy and false sense of modesty.

In both caricatures, Daumier uses the figure of the Turco as a heuristic device to mock the ethnocentric attitudes of Parisians. As Elizabeth Childs has argued, “[his] satires in the Au Camp de St. Maur expose the racism and naïveté of those who seek in the Turcos evidence to reconfirm their stereotypes of the inherently violent, sexual and ‘barbaric’ nature of North African man.”42 She has also claimed that Daumier’s “sympathy usually lay with the victims of colonization, expansion, and international conflict.”43 He satirized the French by staging situations in which the parochialism of bourgeois society was revealed. In this respect, his caricatures revealed more about nineteenth-century Paris than non-European, colonial individuals and cultures.

This is not to say, however, that Daumier’s portrayal of the Turcos was not racist. In other words, just because Daumier sought to make fun of the ethnocentric attitudes he observed in the Parisian bourgeoisie does not mean that he did not give in to racist denigration himself. To be sure, Childs has argued that Daumier’s caricature of the omnibus “rejects the racist generalization applied to the Turco: the Algerian is as shocked as the surrounding crowd at the pronouncement made by the Parisian.”44 She contends

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42 Childs, Elizabeth C. *op. cit.*, p. 91.
that his racism is problematic because he does not use stereotypes to support the idea of European superiority but to criticize French society. This was a common motif at the time. Many French writers and artists used the technique of the “ethnographic detour,” portraying strangers in Paris, to mock their own mores. Montesquieu’s *Lettres Persanes* remains the most emblematic example. The *Au camp de Saint-Maur* series belong to the same tradition. Daumier particularly enjoyed mocking the bourgeois for their “unexamined racism,” but in the process, he failed to examine his own racist views.

Unlike Childs, I do not think that Daumier’s racism is problematic. His depiction of the Turcos taps into a catalog of physiognomic signs that worked as evidence of black inferiority. He consciously adopted, emphasized, and manipulated them to produce his drawings. In figure one, the soldiers are characterized by their exaggerated prognathous profiles and projecting jaws while in figure two, the Turco is portrayed with full lips, very dark skin, and a flat nose. These facial traits were not chosen at random. Daumier hardly ever travelled outside of Paris and never left France; his vision of foreigners was therefore based on a combination of orientalist clichés and ethnographic accounts. His caricatures are embedded in a network of naturalist discourses that shaped the Western imaginary of the “Negro.”

Among them is Buffon’s monumental, thirty-six-volume *Histoire naturelle, générale et particulière*. The French biologist argued that in black Africans, “thick lips, broad and flat noses appear formed as gifts of nature” and not acquired traits. Similar

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observations are found in Dutch anatomist Pierre Camper’s *Dissertation physique sur les différences réelles que présentent les traits du visage chez les hommes de différents pays et de différents âges*. Of Africans in general, he wrote:

[C]hez les Nègres la mâchoire supérieure s’avance considérablement, & […] par suite la Ligne Faciale MG s’incline en arrière, jusques là il en résulte un angle de 70 degrés. On peut donc regarder comme une conséquence Physique également certaine que les dents doivent être placées obliquement en avant & non pas en direction perpendiculaire; de plus, […] en vertu de cette même disposition, les lèvres & surtout la supérieure, qui doit pouvoir les couvrir, sera de toute nécessité plus longue, plus grosse, & plus grande.47

One of Camper’s major contributions to the field of anatomy was the notion of “facial angle.” Many used it in his wake to give their work the scientific credibility that earlier accounts of human races, such as Buffon’s, lacked. Among them was French anthropologist Julien-Joseph Virey (1775-1846), who described black features as “un teint de couleur marron ou tout noir,” “des cheveux noirs plus ou moins laineux, toujours très crépus ou courts,” “des lèvres gonflées,” and “un angle facial ouvert de soixante-quinze à quatre-vingt degrés.”48 Georges Cuvier (1769-1832) portrayed Africans in very much the same light, arguing that “[l]a race nègre est confinée au midi de l’Atlas, son teint est noir, ses cheveux crépus, son crâne comprimée et son nez écrasé; son museau saillant et ses grosses lèvres la rapprochent manifestement des singes.”49 Similar descriptions can be found in the works of Carl Vogt (1917-1895), Gobineau (1816-1882), Quatrefages de Bréau (1810-1892), Bory de Saint-Vincent (1778-1846), and Paul Broca

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(1824-1880), to name a few.

Many ideological differences separated them. For example, Gobineau’s racial thought revealed a pessimistic view of History as a process of degeneration. Le Bon’s outlook was more in line with Darwin’s theories of evolution, while Vacher de Lapouge’s work paved the way for modern eugenics. But their main point of contention concerned the origins of mankind. Some like Buffon and Cuvier believed in universal monogenesis, that is, the hypothesis that all human races share a common descent. By contrast, Broca and Carl Vogt speculated that races might be descended from distinct ancestors. Others like Gobineau switched from the former to the latter during their lifetime. As a consequence, not all believed in the applicability of the civilizing mission and the idea that some races could be improved or “tainted” through contact with other races. And even more problematic, not all agreed on what “race” actually meant. Yet, they unanimously subscribed to the physiognomic premise that facial features signal moral and intellectual qualities. According to them, the prognathous jaws, broad noses, and plump lips commonly observed in black Africans were clear indicators of a lazy, savage, instinctive nature that placed them at the bottom of the evolution ladder. At the top stood the white European subject whose facial angle is the closest to the ideal ninety-five degrees of human perfection.

Such ideas became so pervasive and taken for granted throughout the nineteenth-century that Daumier was no doubt familiar with them. According to Childs, his use of racial stereotypes is partly redeemed by the fact that they were not meant to vilify black Africans, but to satirize French attitudes toward them. I do believe, however, that criticizing the Parisians’ fetishization of exotic difference is not the same as criticizing
the physiognomic discourses that created this difference in the first place. Daumier, it
seems, only engaged in the former. In other words, he denounced reactions to blackness,
but not the representations of blackness that caused such reactions. The reason may be
that, in order to do the latter, he would have had to question his own practice as a
caricaturist which was his main source of income at the time.

One could also argue that Daumier was not a racist because of his Republican
engagement in the fight to end slavery. This is unconvincing on two accounts. First,
many white abolitionists believed that black peoples were naturally inferior. Second,
basing the definition of racism on personal intentions and opinions ignores the nature of
what it was or was becoming at the time: a systemic phenomenon.\textsuperscript{50} Just because
Daumier did not intend to denigrate black Africans does not mean he was not racist. In
other words, racism is not what one believes it to be or says it is, but an objective reality
that operates through social, epistemic, normative mechanisms. It was not always so,
however. The solidification of race and racial hierarchies in society and their
institutionalization precisely occurred throughout the nineteenth-century, during
Daumier’s lifetime. This transformation owes to a combination of factors, including, as
mentioned, the rise of the second colonial empire and the popularity of physiognomic
ideas, but also technological progress, especially in the field of statistics and physical
anthropology.

\textsuperscript{50} Nineteenth-century naturalists and anthropologists were instrumental in the redefinition of “race” as a
system for classifying human groups based on biological data—a conception that is still acknowledged
nowadays. Under their impulse, the traditional understanding of race as bloodline gave way to the notion of
race as species. Physiognomy, through its diverse iterations and models, played a major role in this
reformulation.
Physiognomy After Physiognomy: Chocolat and the Staging of Race in *Fin-de-Siècle* France

A common attack on physiognomy was that its empirical, embodied nature made it too unreliable. For example, Swiss naturalist Carl Vogt resented in his *Leçons sur l’homme* that:

[l’a] la plupart des figures de races qui ont été publiées jusqu’à ces derniers temps, qu’elles aient été exécutées d’après le vivant ou d’après des crânes, n’ont que peu ou point de valeur. Un grand nombre de figures faites d’après le vivant sont, à l’insu de leurs auteurs, de véritables caricatures, parce que, même le peintre exercé, habitué par les exigences de sa profession, à faire ressortir la ressemblance individuelle, exagère les traits qui appartiennent en propre au sujet qu’il veut représenter. Il est certain que souvent ces traits ne sont point ceux qui appartiennent à la race, et la font considérer comme telle; souvent aussi, précisément les traits qui appartiennent à la race, frappant surtout le peintre, il les exagère trop; souvent enfin, les particularités de la race seront un peu amoindries, pour faire ressortir plus complètement la ressemblance de l’individu, que le dessinateur est habitué à rechercher avant tout.51

In Vogt’s words, physiognomic portraiture is fundamentally an art of caricature—one that falls short of the mimetic ideal of transparency in representation because the observer may either exaggerate racial features (hyperbole), diminish their presence (euphemism), or consider personal, idiosyncratic features as emblematic of a whole race (metonymy). In all three cases, the human gaze is to blame because of its fickle, selective, biased, and impressionistic nature. It is never purely neutral, for there is always a risk of projecting one’s own desires or anxieties, in a word, one’s subjectivity, onto the observed individual.

Lavater himself partly agreed and hoped that, one day, physiognomy become “definable in mathematical terms.”\textsuperscript{52} This process was facilitated by the development of statistics in the first half of the nineteenth century. Belgian astronomer and sociologist Adolphe Quetelet (1796-1874) was the first to introduce the discipline into France. He came up with the idea of applying the Gaussian “law of error,” which astronomers had been using to locate stars, to calculate the distribution of human features, including height and weight. This allowed him to formulate the concept of “l’homme moyen”, an abstract construct that represented the average of all human characteristics in a specific country, a combination of what he called, in almost physiognomic terms, “l’homme moyen physique” and “l’homme moyen moral.”\textsuperscript{53} His work helped popularize the ideas of “norm” and “normalcy” which were quite new at the time. Interestingly enough, many statisticians were also anthropologists and/or eugenicists. Sir Francis Galton (1822-1911) and Karl Pearson (1857-1936) in Great Britain, and Paul Broca and Georges Vacher de Lapouge in France were among the most notable ones. Their use of statistical methods was not only meant to advance the knowledge of human races, but also to improve the inferior ones such that they would fit the norm (of European whiteness). In doing so, they gave scientific sanction to prejudice and presented a major justification for the “civilizing mission” of colonialism.

However, as it transitioned from metaphysical speculation to positivist investigation, from interpretation to explanation, the science of faces turned into the

\textsuperscript{52} Quoted in Gray, Richard, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 5.
science of skulls: phrenology. Mental faculties were no longer inferred from facial
features, but from their corresponding bumps, enlargements and indentations on human
crania. In France, its main proponent was physician Paul Broca. Although he is best
known for his research on brain development and speech production, Broca also devoted
part of his career to anthropological research. He founded the Société d’Anthropologie de
Paris in 1859, the Revue d’Anthropologie in 1872, and the School of Anthropology in
1876. Throughout his lifetime, Broca measured a wide variety of heads, weighted them,
carefully observed their shapes, their curvatures and anfractuosities, and compiled his
findings to rank races in a scale of intellectual abilities. This comparative anatomy of
skulls was judged groundbreaking because it used quantitative analysis to delineate
specific human groups and determine their relative worth. If Broca was among the first to
use scientific data in the service of evolution and biological determinism, his
methodology was nonetheless deeply flawed. Instead of letting his own data speak for
itself, he used it selectively to prove prior prejudice. This is not to say that this data was
not reliable, but Broca exploited it in a way that allowed him to corroborate his own
theories.⁵⁴

This shift of interest toward skulls was a sign that physiognomy was literally and
figuratively losing face. Indeed, the use of statistical methods was meant to recast it in a
scientific framework, but in privileging the examination of skulls over faces, it did just

⁵⁴ As Stephen Jay Gould best put it, “Conclusions came first and Broca’s conclusions were the shared
assumptions of most successful white males during his time—themselves on top by the good fortune of
nature, and women, blacks, and poor people below. His facts […] were manipulated unconsciously in the
service of prior conclusions.” Gould, Stephen Jay. The Mismeasure of Man. New York: W. W. Norton,
the opposite: it dismissed its object. It is generally admitted that physiognomy died out in
the second half of the nineteenth-century after being replaced with phrenology, yet I
would like to qualify this grand narrative. While it certainly fell out of favor around that
time, a certain physiognomic “imagination” persisted in the minds of the French.
Through close examination of an 1895 ad that portrays the famous Afro-Cuban clown
Chocolat, I want to show how popular representations of race underscored the enduring
power of the facial imaginaries that underpinned physiognomy in its heyday. The
pictorial conventions of physiognomy became firmly established as the dominant
aesthetic lens for envisaging other races, and have continued to operate long after the
discipline fell into discredit.

Mass advertising was an important platform to convey or reinforce ideas about
blacksness in fin-de-siècle France. Commercial images often portrayed Africans to
promote dark-colored or “exotic” products such as tea, coffee, cocoa, and cleaning
supplies such as shoe polish, laundry detergent, toothpaste, bleach, and soap. In most
cases, black subjects were represented as field laborers, domestic servants, buffoons, or
childlike adults. These images were a clear indication of how the general public
perceived race and which roles they wanted Africans to fulfill in French society. One
such image, which was released around 1895, was for a brand called “Savon La Hève.”
To advertise the cleaning power of their new soap, the company chose to feature one of

55 See Hale, Dana. “French Images of Race on Product Trademarks during the Third Republic.” The Color
Press, 2003. For more information on representations of black bodies in advertisement, see Mireille
Rosello’s discussion of “Banania” in Rosello, Mireille. Declining the Stereotype: Ethnicity and
the then most popular couples in Paris—a duet of clown-stars known as Footit and Chocolat. Together, they performed at the “Nouveau Cirque” from 1895 to 1905. While Footit was the authoritarian white clown or “clown blanc,” Chocolat represented the clumsy “auguste.” Their slapstick routines played a major role in the development of European clowning. Chocolat, whose real name was Rafael, immediately rose to fame.

Very little is known about his early life. He was most likely born a slave in Cuba sometime between 1865 and 1869 before being sold, as a young boy, to a Spanish trader who took him to the village of Sopuerta in Northern Spain. After enduring years of ill treatment, Rafael fled for Bilbao. He worked several menial jobs, as a porter, a servant, a dockworker, before turning to clown comedy. His physical strength and dancing skills quickly vowed the public who could not get enough of his performances. In 1887, Rafael was chosen as the hero of a comic pantomime entitled *La Noce de Chocolat*. He became, as a result, the first black clown to play a lead role and one of the first black entertainers in Paris, before Josephine Baker took the capital by storm. His life trajectory has been a source of fascination and inspiration for many artists. The Lumière brothers featured him in their short film *Chaise en bascule* (1899), and so did Colette, almost a half a century later, in her novella *Gigi* (1944). More recently Chocolat was briefly portrayed in *Moulin Rouge*, a 2001 movie directed by Baz Luhrmann, and in 2016, Roschdy Zem made him the central character of his movie *Chocolat*.

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This renewed interest in Rafael also manifested in the field of academia, with the publication in 2012 of Gérard Noiriel’s monograph on Rafael, followed by a second study in 2016.\(^\text{59}\) In both works, the French historian has argued against critics’ tendency to use what he considers anachronistic tools of analysis to denounce the “racism” of the French toward Chocolat. He warns against the danger of interpreting the Foottit-Chocolat duet as a reflection of colonial relations; suggesting, instead, that this view only became prevalent when the duet’s reputation faded. I want to nuance Noiriel’s argument and show how the “Savon La Hêve” ad, which came out circa 1895, that is, at a time when the duet’s popularity reached its peak, is concerned at its core with colonial politics. This ad underscores an interesting tension: while Chocolat was celebrated as a star, he was also made into a racial caricature. In fact, his celebrity stemmed from his ability to fulfill the stereotype of the childish, silly “Negro.”

\(^{59}\) See Noiriel 2012, \textit{op. cit.} and Noiriel 2016, \textit{op. cit.}
The ad portrays Rafael in a similar light. Foottit can be seen in his traditional clown outfit, holding a bar of “La Hêve” soap in his right hand and using it to wash Chocolat’s face, which is turning white as a result. Interestingly enough, the bottom of the ad indicates that the soap is meant for wool and flannel fabrics, but the reason it is used on Chocolat is likely to insist on its scouring power. What “La Hêve” wanted their customers to believe was that their soap was so efficient it could even turn a “Negro” white. The ad relies on an easy symbolism, in which whiteness becomes a symbol of cleanliness and purity; and blackness, its opposite. Chocolat’s face is the main focus.
point. It displays all the features traditionally associated with black physiognomy at the time: a flat nose, full lips, and a broad forehead. But in scrubbing Chocolat so hard, it is as if Foottit tried to erase them. In this respect, the ad could be said to offer an example of Deleuze and Guattari’s process of “facialization.” The soap acts as a sort of catalyst to make the black other into the image of the white European man.⁶⁰

References to the circus are obvious. In addition to Foottit’s costume, the two characters appear in exaggerated, pantomimic postures. Foottit’s high, graceful stature and smiling expression contrast with his partner’s awkward stance, his air of discomfort, and his ill-fitting suit which makes him look grotesque. This comic element is central. The ad is not just about selling soap, it is also a justification of France’s “civilizing mission.” Unlike Daumier’s caricatures of the Turcos which were published during a period of colonial expansion, by 1895 the limits of the Empire were circumscribed. It was now time to civilize France’s colonial subjects. Preparing them to become French citizens and to function in society required a number of iterative steps: receiving an education, speaking French, becoming a Christian, having a good personal hygiene, and adopting new cultural codes, including for example, wearing appropriate clothing, which usually meant trading the African pagne for the European suit. The ad legitimates this process, but it does so in an ambiguous way. While it celebrates the civilizing mission, it also implies that this mission is doomed to failure because its ideal of whiteness is unattainable. Indeed, customers were not so gullible as to believe that the soap would wash off black skin, although there was something quite reassuring about that possibility.

⁶⁰ See footnote 26, p. 13.
Chocolat’s whitening would dissipate the threat of intermixing and allow for the continuation of untainted bloodlines. Laughing at him was, therefore, a way to exorcize the threat that his blackness would always be there, visible forever. Ultimately, the ad stages a fantasy of erasing racial difference to preserve the purity of whiteness following the arrival of France’s colonial subjects in the mainland.

Hygiene was a major concern at the time. Epidemics of smallpox, tuberculosis, and cholera were recurrent. To contain their spread, piping was gradually installed to bring water directly to homes. This effort was further promoted during the Paris world’s fair of 1889 where colonial pavilions praised the benefits of public health. As Lynn E. Palermo has argued, “[t]he Republic’s plan for colonial development paralleled the plan for national development already under way; progress and its benefits for the French working class were demonstrated in the pavilions of […] hygiene in the social economy exhibit across from the colonial section.” The “civilizing mission” did not simply apply to colonial subjects, but also to French laborers and workers, most of whom lived in the countryside where they did not have access to the modern amenities of city living. Going back to the “La Hêve” ad, one could see in Chocolat a figure of the French provincial whose condition also needed to be improved. The parallel between non-urbanites and savages was pretty common at the time. Parisians and other city dwellers often regarded peasants and members of the working class as uncivilized, thus blurring the distinction

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between the “province” and the colonies.63

Although Daumier’s caricatures of the Turcos and the “La Hève” soap ad were published more than thirty-five years apart, they tap into the same repertoire of visual symbols to represent their subjects and accentuate their exotic qualities. The use of specific physiognomic signs (flat nose, full lips, etc.) did not just participate in the production of the “negro” as a figure of otherness, they also attested to its enduring appeal, even at a time (1895) when physiognomy was being discredited. All three caricatures participate in a “visuality of Empire”64 that played a crucial role in emerging nationalistic ideas about what it meant to be French, especially as the Dreyfus affair was heating up. However, such portrayals of the Turcos and Chocolat fulfilled different functions. While Daumier sought to reform the Parisians by exposing their ethnocentric views (albeit in a racist way), the soap ad was meant to civilize the French provincials who were often equated with colonial subjects at the time.

**Conclusion: Subjectivity Without a Subject**

As this chapter demonstrated, physiognomy is a slippery discipline because it encompasses an ever-evolving set of practices. Lavater described it as a Christian endeavor to promote love and understanding of mankind. With the advent of the industrial revolution and rural exodus, it became a tool of surveillance that helped

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63 Descriptions of Bretons were particularly telling. For example, in his novel *Riche et pauvre*, Émile Souvestre describes Antoine, the main protagonist, as belonging to the “race dure et chaste de la vieille Armorique” and behaving “comme un sauvage, sans tribu et sans famille.” Souvestre, Emile. *Riche et pauvre*. Paris: Michel Lévy, 1836, p. 21 and p. 39.
64 Pearl, *op. cit.*, p. 204.
urbanites negotiate the chaos of city life by allowing them to identify who to trust. Finally, as the colonial empire grew again in the 1830’s, it turned into a technology of racial classification that served to alleviate fears about immigration and miscegenation. In all cases, physiognomists were bound by a mutual objective: how to make sense of a rapidly changing world, whether at the scale of the city, the nation, or the empire.

The migration of colonial subjects to hexagonal France, coupled with progress in statistics and physical anthropology, profoundly redefined what it meant to be human. As the territorial boundaries of the Empire expanded, so did the epistemological boundaries of physiognomy. Initially a study of idiosyncratic facial features, it evolved into a way to define groups. In other words, it shifted from a discussion of individuals to a discussion of communities and became a way to draw general assumptions about certain categories of people.65

Through the study of three racial caricatures, we considered how physiognomy served to assign racial difference and to create typical “black” or “brown” faces. It was no longer a way to get information about how to perceive people; rather, it produced information about how it wanted certain people to be perceived. In developing into a diagnostic for group traits, it started shaping ideas about human types and communities. In other words, instead of uncovering the self behind the face, it contributed to the production of this very self. To do so, physiognomists developed a repertoire of

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65 One such example is found in Pierre Camper’s *Dissertation Physique*. He developed an etiology of black African physiognomy using one single head as his representative sample: “La tête du nègre d’Angole peut servir pour toute l’Afrique & pour les Hottentots qui dans le fait ne diffèrent aucunement des Nègres. Elle peut servir d’après la même raison pour les Caffres & pour les habitants de Madagascar.” Camper, Pierre, *op. cit.*, p. 22.
metonymical signs that reduced the complexity of human faces to their component parts, thereby reifying their subjects. According to Sharrona Pearl, these new signs paradoxically came to “stand for and even replace physiognomy.” Indeed, physiognomy transformed into the opposite of what it was originally. In denying the lived experience of the face, it removed the individual from the equation, it took the subject out of “subjectivity.” Physiognomy was no longer the science of reading faces; it was now the science of making faces. But, as I argued, this making was paradoxically an act of caricature, if not disfigurement. In mapping (racial) types onto the face instead of letting it speak for itself, physiognomy ignored the complex nature of embodiment and gave an excuse for not evaluating idiosyncratic features.

The face has been an object of various and sometimes contradictory discourses. The extreme racialization to which it was subjected in physiognomic thought seems to contrast with the way Levinas stripped it of its biological/racial component. And yet, these discourses have more in common than we think. In both cases, the face is ultimately treated as a disembodied entity. Indeed, Levinas considered it strictly out of context, describing it not as a thing or an object but a radiating presence that resists formal representation because it is always bigger than the sum of its parts. In physiognomy, the face was gradually reduced to a group type; it became a sort of blueprint or metonym, an emblem of racial affiliation theorized apart from its lived reality. The overall impression is that these discourses, in wanting to talk about the face, end up somewhat missing their

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66 Pearl, op. cit., p. 22.
67 Levinas’s de-racialization of the face may have been precisely in reaction to the dangers of physiognomy. As someone who was deported to Germany during WWII, he was certainly familiar with the Nazi iconography that reduced Jews to their supposedly hooked noses.
The following chapters examine how Afro-Caribbean writers have engaged with this double legacy. Each one of them sets out to explore the “afterlife” of European physiognomy. The use of quotation marks is important here, for focusing on representations of race will precisely allow me to qualify the idea that physiognomy died out in late nineteenth-century—something I already suggested in my analysis of the *Savon La Hêve* ad. The next chapter will focus on descriptions of Tutsis in Rwanda and analyze their racialization as enemies of the nation by Hutu propaganda as an example of physiognomy being applied to a different, extra-European context. What are some of the discursive/narratological strategies developed by Rwandan writers to disrupt this process of racialization and to reclaim their own faces—their own humanity?
CHAPTER TWO

“Comment distinguer le cancrelat du Hutu?”68 Reframing Physiognomy in the Post-Genocide Literature of Rwanda

The post-genocide literature of Rwanda is filled with mentions of dead bodies. From her first visit to the country in 1998, Véronique Tadjo remembers “[l]es crânes de couleur noire […] trouvés dans les latrines ou enfouis dans le sol,” and “[c]eux qui sont blancs […] trouvés dans la nature, entre les hautes herbes.”69 Likewise, Diop’s novel Murambi, le livre des ossements includes a description of “un crâne isolé […]. La victime—sans doute un colosse de son vivant—avait eu le nez tranché avant d’être décapitée. […] On aurait dit un masque mortuaire oublié au milieu des autres corps.”70 In his account of the genocide, Abdourahman Waberi went as far as equating what happened in 1994 with “une moisson de crânes.”71 Skulls are a recurring motif. In their silent immobility, they act as reminders of past atrocities, as haunting sites of postcolonial memory. There is simply no avoiding them. In the previous chapter, I showed how physiognomy became a tool of classification that gradually stripped the face of its lived expression and gave rise to phrenology, the study of skulls. In this chapter, I will flesh out these “mortuary masks,” to borrow Diop’s expression, and, in doing so, I

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68 Diop 2000, op. cit., p. 43.
70 Diop 2000, op. cit., p. 188. My emphasis.
will reverse the physiognomic process of disembodiment and depersonalization that justified the extermination of Tutsi.

The Rwandan genocide, which came to be known as the last genocide of the twentieth century is particularly well-documented. Narratives of all kinds have been published in the wake of the killings, including testimonies by Tutsi survivors and works of fiction by secondary witnesses. Various films have also been produced in English, French, and Kinyarwanda. Finally, documentaries have been released and aired on international television networks. Images and representations of the genocide are not only numerous, but also diverse in genre and country of origin (Rwanda, Ivory Coast, Ivoir):

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Djibouti, Senegal, Belgium, France, Canada, and U.S.A.). Moreover, they fulfill a variety of purposes. While some seek to memorialize the past, bring therapeutic relief, raise awareness, and educate the general public, others are more concerned with making political claims, that is, denouncing the role of French authorities in arming and training Hutu militias, and seeking reparations. Such images and representations can be easily accessed by twenty-first-century audiences, and just as easily shared, reproduced, or circulated. With the rise of modern technology, they have pervaded our screens and infiltrated our lives, making it difficult to escape them.

Yet, their ubiquitous presence betrays a false sense of visibility. In Le Monde diplomatique, Edgar Roskis described what happened in Rwanda as “a genocide without images.” To be sure, a great many journalists were stationed in the country when the first fights broke out in April 1994, but most of them were evacuated within one week of Habyarimana’s death to ensure their protection. The few who chose to stay, such as Patrick Robert and Luc Delahaye, were met with a number of challenges that made their work risky and trying. For one, they could not get too close to the barricades and checkpoints where most of the massacres occurred for fear of putting their own lives in danger. Second, the lack of digital technology available at the time made it difficult for them to send their clichés abroad. And finally, French political censorship played a significant role in blocking the dissemination of pictures and footage that showed the atrocities of a Hutu-led government backed up by the Elysée. As Roskis noted:

Not until 18 May did a photograph of the Rwandan atrocities make it onto the front page of a French newspaper, the Quotidien de Paris. And even this image,

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of a dozen decapitated bodies in Rukara, mangled and partly eaten by animals, was just a snapshot taken by a doctor, Eric Girard, not by a photojournalist. That same day, another Paris daily, *Libération*, was headlined “Rwanda: France’s guilty friendships,” but except for another photo by Eric Girard, the accompanying photos showed only some Rwandan refugees in Tanzania.\(^{76}\)

Also drawing attention to this relative lack of coverage, Alexandre Dauge-Roth has lamented that the Tutsi genocide “remained culturally off-screen in the Western world until 2004 when Terry George’s Hotel Rwanda forbade to reproduce any longer this denial.”\(^{77}\)

The events of 1994 shed light on a range of complex issues regarding the production, uses, circulation, and reception of “genocide images” in popular culture. The scarcity of live footage and press photographs to reach mainstream media during the killings created a representational void that was filled years later by writers, filmmakers, and survivors. Their work has raised crucial methodological and theoretical questions: What does it mean to bear witness to the past? How do testimonial literature and film retrospectively contribute to deciphering the experience of genocide? How does one forge forms of social recognition and appeal to a Western audience that generally feels foreign to the events?

A number of scholars have recently engaged with these issues. In his essay *Filming and Writing the Genocide of the Tutsis in Rwanda: Dismembering and Remembering Traumatic History*, Alexandre Dauge-Roth focuses on the multitude of...

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\(^{76}\) Loc. cit.

conflicting discourses that claim to speak the truth about the Tutsi genocide. Operating on
the assumption that to remember is also, in some way, to forget, he describes the
Rwandan government’s recent call to “turn the page,” “move on,” and “unite” as a form
of institutional violence that silences survivor’s voices. The situation of post-genocide
Rwanda is one in which the moral “duty to remember” must compete with efforts to
impose an official narrative of the past in which Tutsi experiences are often marginalized
in the name of national reconciliation and cohesion. Drawing on a corpus of filmic and
literary works that circumvent this form of censorship, Dauge-Roth wonders what it
means for us, Westerners, to read/watch such accounts. He ultimately shows how writers
and directors seek to enlist our participation and “position us as heirs of this genocide”78
by making us aware that no other country is immune to the kind of violence that Rwanda
faced at the time.

A different set of questions is raised by Zakaria Soumaré’s Le Génocide
Rwandais dans la littérature africaine francophone.79 Drawing on six novels from the
literary project “Rwanda: Écrire par devoir de mémoire,” this essay addresses the role of
literature in creating an archive of the Tutsi genocide. Soumaré starts off by locating this
project within a tradition of anti-colonial “littérature engagée” that originated in 1920’s
France and Francophone Africa. He then proceeds to an analysis of the rhetorical
strategies used to express the unspeakable violence that swept through Rwanda in 1994.
How did these six authors manage to describe incidents that they did not witness first-

78 Ibid., p. 29.
79 Soumaré, Zakaria. Le Génocide Rwandais dans la littérature africaine francophone. Paris: L’Harmattan,
2013.
hand? What devices did they use to account for the inexpressible nature of what happened? How can literature produce and communicate knowledge of the genocide? And how to testify in the name of the dead?

A thorough analysis of what happened in Rwanda demands that these questions be asked, but should not be limited to them. Just as problematic as the “images” that were captured during the 1994 massacres or produced in their wake are the ones that paved the way for the genocide. As French historian Jean-Pierre Chrétien repeatedly pointed out, conflicts between Hutus and Tutsis only started in the late nineteenth century, with the colonization of Rwanda by Germany, then Belgium.80 The first ethnographers to make their way to the “land of a thousand hills” noticed, much to their surprise, that some locals did not conform to the caricature of the “Negro,” so popular in Europe at the time. To explain this racial variation, they started to collect anthropometric data (height, weight, skin color, facial features), using Campus’s facial angle as well as the craniometric instruments pioneered by Paul Broca. Based on their findings, they created a scale of differential worth with the goal of establishing where these locals would rank. The result was a topography of black bodies that drew on and allegedly nuanced the descriptions of Buffon, Vogt, and Cuvier discussed in Chapter one.

In his study of the Rwandan population, historian Louis de Lacger described Tutsis as unmistakably different and questioned whether they were “real” Africans:

Quand on arrive de la Haute-Egypte ou des plateaux d’Abyssinie au Ruanda, on les reconnaît tout de suite. On les a déjà vus ces hommes de haute taille, atteignant la moyenne de 1, 79m. et dépassant deux mètres chez quelques géants, minces de corps, aux membres longs et grêles, réguliers de traits, de port noble,

graves et hautains [...]. Ils ont le type caucasique et tiennent du sémite de l’Asie antérieure. Mais ils sont noirs de teint, parfois cuivrés ou olivâtres; leurs cheveux sont crépus…

His description echoes that of German geographer Hans Meyer who, in 1916, had already portrayed Tutsis as “des personnages fiers, élancés, dépassant les deux mètres, au profil de médaille et d’un maintien aristocratique: au premier abord ils en imposent à l’Européen qui a beaucoup voyagé.” Other distinctive features include their nose “au profil fin et au bout mince, aux narines fines” and their “bouche relativement petite et des lèvres minces.” Because of their appearance, Tutsis were believed to be a “higher” nomadic people from Ancient Egypt or Ethiopia—the Hamites, a lost branch of the “Caucasian race” that blended black and white. This hypothesis, known as the Hamitic hypothesis or the myth of the Hamite, was proposed without real evidence by British explorer John Hanning Speke after he visited Rwanda while trying to identify the source of the Nile. It was revitalized during the genocide and certainly played a role in framing Tutsis as foreign invaders in their own country.

Hutus, on the other hand, looked more “typical.” Their appearance was allegedly in line with the European stereotype of the African. According to Lacger, “Le type physique du muhutu est le type le plus commun et le plus général du noir, [...] : taille moyenne de 1,67 m., coloration très foncée de la peau et frisure des cheveux, brachycéphalie et prognathisme, nez écrasé et lèvres épaisses, belles proportion des

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According to Hans Meyer, some of their features include a “silhouette trapue,” a “stature ramassée et musculeuse,” a “crâne prograthec authentiquement nègre, and “jambes courtes.” Similarly, Belgian doctor Joseph Sasserath saw in them “des nègres qui en possèdent toutes les caractéristiques: nez épaté, lèvres épaisses, front bas, crâne brachycéphale. Ils conservent un caractère d’enfant, à la fois timide et paresseux, et le plus souvent sont d’une saleté invétérée. C’est là la classe des serfs. La race des chefs exige d’eux multiples corvées.” Interestingly enough, Sasserath’s description does not just rehash tropes of colonial portraiture (infantilization, idleness, etc.), it also draws on the physiognomic premise that human identity can be gleaned through observation and interpretation of the face by moving from an examination of physical traits to a consideration of psychological features before concluding with a series of remarks on social status, as if the three were naturally connected.

Colonialism acted as an agent of ethnic division and segregation by grouping Hutus and Tutsis into categories established solely on the basis of phenotype. According to Meyer, Lacger, and Sasserath, the formers’ low intelligence and stocky physiques naturally predisposed them to field work while Tutsis’ noble stature and “Caucasian” appearance, which earned them various epithets such as “‘faux nègres” or “Européen[s] sous une peau noire,” made them more fit to lead. Historians have thoroughly documented how this ethnic polarization resulted in the establishment of an unfair

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84 Lacger, op. cit., p. 49.
85 Meyer Hans, op. cit., p. 18.
political system. For example, Jean-Pierre Chrétien has noted that numerous discourses served to legitimize the idea of ethnicity in Rwanda, including, of course, racial theories, but also a number of “politi
ces jouant tantôt de l’élitisme, tantôt de la démocratie; légitimation des fratricides par une lutte des classes.” He has argued that in all those discourses, “[l]’élément permanent se trouve dans la structure du regard posé sur la société, dans une cristallisation du visage de “l’autre” en termes de marginalité, d’infériorité ou d’exclusion. […] Le piège d’un racisme interne s’est ainsi refermé sur des populations entières.” The Rwandan genocide illustrated the dangers inherent in institutionalizing the discourse of physiognomy that was imported by European explorers during the early stages of colonization. Descriptions of local populations showed how facial appearance was used as the basis for assigning ethnic labels. As Hutus rose to power after Rwanda became independent, political leaders took up and reversed the colonial rhetoric that identified Tutsis as bearers of a higher order of humanity by describing them as inkoza (snakes), inyenzi, (roaches), or cannibals.

The arrival of European ethnographers in Rwanda inaugurated a “crisis of the face.” From the colonial invention of race/ethnicity in the late 1890’s to the hateful pro-
Hutu propaganda campaigns that caricatured Tutsis as aliens, the modern history of Rwanda set the stage for what Chrétien aptly called a “crystallization” of the other’s appearance into an abstract type (the long-nosed, clear-skinned, fine-featured Tutsi). This

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chapter will explore the many ways in which African writers have responded to this “crystallization” by drawing on a corpus of literary testimonies by Tutsi survivors and novels by second-hand witnesses. Those include Yolande Mukagasana’s *La Mort ne veut pas de moi* (1997) and *N’aie pas peur de savoir* (1999), Boubacar Boris Diop’s *Murambi, le livre des ossements* (2000), and Rèvérien Rurangwa’s *Génocidé* (2006). The past two decades witnessed a proliferation of genocide stories. My choice of these three authors is not fortuitous. While they address the 1994 events from a range of different perspectives (as witness, survivor or victim, as mother and wife, orphan or as “tourist”), they have in common a commitment to depoliticizing ethnic boundaries or to destroying them altogether. How did these authors engage with this history of physiognomic profiling? How did they redefine the modalities of Tutsi embodiment and what rhetorical/narrative strategies did they use to do so?

In the first section of this chapter, I want to focus on one of the most emblematic instruments of the genocide introduced by the Belgian administration in 1933, the ethnic identity card. I analyze the modalities of its circulation, uses, and manipulation in Mukagasana’s *La Mort ne veut pas de moi* and *N’aie pas peur de savoir*, as well as Diop’s *Murambi, le livre des ossements*. The counterfeiting and theft of ID cards that allowed Tutsis to pass as Hutus reveal a deep anxiety about identity and collapse the border between self and other. The manipulations to which these IDs were subjected ultimately undermine and reframe the discourse of physiognomy that racialized Tutsis as enemies of the nation.

In the second part of this chapter, I turn my attention to Rurangwa’s *Génocidé* —a story of disfigurement in which the author recounts how he was almost killed by his Hutu
neighbor in April 1994 before taking refuge in Switzerland where he currently lives. Rurangwa’s account constitutes an attempt to reclaim his own image. Indeed, Génocidé is a manner of response to both the naïve iconography which dominated late nineteenth-century European ethnography and the Hutu propaganda that saw in him a “white negro.” A recurring device in his testimony is the use of circumlocution to describe his disfigured appearance. The long developments that this figure allows for constitute an invitation to scrutinize what is left of Rurangwa’s face—an invitation reiterated on the cover of his testimony where his picture appears. With its inclusion of both photographic and literary portraits, Génocidé ultimately offers an alternative take on the ethnic identity card.

“Mon visage appartient aux autres”\textsuperscript{91}: Identity Trafficking in Murambi, le livre des ossements, La Mort ne veut pas de moi, and N’aie pas peur de savoir.

While Belgian colonization of Rwanda started in 1922, the first administrative structure to officially discriminate between Hutus and Tutsis was created in 1930. The following year, King Musinga was removed and replaced with the Belgian-approved King Rudahigwa who was forced to cooperate with the colonial system in place. In the wake of this reshuffling, Tutsis were appointed to head all chieftancies. The final step in reshaping the political landscape of Rwanda at the expense of Hutus occurred in 1933 when the colonial administration implemented a discriminatory system of identity cards that listed the bearer’s gender, clan, date of birth, and most importantly, her/his ethnicity—“Tutsi,” “Hutu,” or “Twa.” The consequences were profoundly disturbing:

\textsuperscript{91} Mukagasana 1999, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 130.
tribal identity became hereditary and patrilineal, thus creating irreparable divisions in Rwandan society.

In her first testimony *La Mort ne veut pas de moi*, Tutsi survivor Yolande Mukagasana dismissed the ethnic identity card as “[u]ne invention des Belges, qui n’ont rien compris à notre société en perpétuelle mutation,”92 a stance she reiterated almost verbatim in her second book *N’aie pas peur de savoir*: “Une belle invention des Belges, ça, la carte d’identité ethnique! La maladie de classer, comme d’autres ont la maladie d’aimer.”93 Born in 1954, she worked as a nurse and anesthetist in Kigali until she fled to Belgium a few weeks after the genocide broke out. Both of her accounts describe her journey to survive as well as her attempt to mourn the death of her husband and children who died at the hands of Hutu extremists in 1994.

Other writers were just as adamant in condemning ethnic IDs, among them Senegalese novelist and journalist Boubacar Boris Diop. His fictional account of the genocide *Murambi, le livre des ossements* was published as part of the literary project “Rwanda: Écrire par devoir de mémoire.” In 1998, two African artists—Nocky Djedanoum from Chad and Maïmouna Coulibaly from the Ivory Cast—and RFI journalist Théogène Karabayinga invited him to take up residence in Kigali along with nine other African writers, including Véronique Tadjo and Abdourahman Waberi. From this trip, Diop wrote a polyphonic novel in which the atrocities of the genocide are approached through the perspectives of both victims and perpetrators.

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93 Mukagasana 1999, *op cit.*, p. 27.
Much has been written about this project. Essays like Catherine Coquio’s *Rwanda. Le Réel et les récits* and Josias Semujanga’s *Origins of Rwandan Genocide* frame the “Écrire par devoir de mémoire” texts as commemorative works of fiction that develop a “multidirectional,” pan-African memory of the genocide and, in doing so, contest the grand narrative that has been imposed by the post-1994 Rwandan government.\(^\text{94}\) In her recent book *Rwanda Genocide Stories: Fiction After 1994*, Nicki Hitchcott resents the way these fictional accounts have monopolized critics’ attention, often at the expense of other equally important works by Rwandan writers such as Benjamin Sehene and Gilbert Gatore.\(^\text{95}\) She underscores how problematic it has been to let “tourists with typewriters” who based their accounts on their experiences as visitors in a country they did not know before suggest how to memorialize trauma.\(^\text{96}\) What does it mean that writers who did not experience the genocide first-hand played such a major role in its remembrance? To a certain extent, however, Nicki Hitchcott also participated in the academic “overemphasis” on the “Écrire par devoir de mémoire” project.\(^\text{97}\) Several of her articles focus on Véronique Tadjo and the relationship between trauma and memory in Boubacar Boris Diop’s *Murambi*.\(^\text{98}\) My reading of his novel, while

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\(^{97}\) *Loc. cit.*  
reproducing this monopoly, is partly redeemed by the fact that it addresses a new thematic: the ethnic ID.

Although such IDs appear in the majority of genocide testimonies, from Kayimahe’s *France-Rwanda, les coulisses du génocide* to Mukasona’s *Inyenzi ou les cafards*, their importance has been overlooked by literary critics. One reason is that they are generally alluded to, mentioned in passing, in other words, relegated to the “episodic,” the “anecdotal,” confined to the margins of narrative discourse. Even so, their significance should not be underestimated. In Mukagasana’s testimonies and Diop’s novel, the ID card functions as a site where traditional notions of identity, personal and national, are questioned and the discourse of physiognomy that played such a strong part in dividing Rwandans along ethnic lines exposed for what it is: a fabricated lie.

Originally meant as a means of identification, personal information collection, and discrimination by the Belgians, the ethnic ID became a powerful tool in the unfolding of the genocide. Following Habyarimana’s death, Hutu militias erected makeshift barricades along the main traffic arteries and screened local populations for suspicious individuals. Hutus were generally safe, but the Tutsis who dared show up ran the risk of being injured or killed. This monitoring of public space is described in the first pages of *La Mort ne veut pas de moi*. Mukagasana’s testimony opens with a particularly troubling scene in which a Tutsi named Makuza is being tended to after his leg was slashed open by a member of the presidential guard on duty: “Un militaire me demande mes papiers, le milicien me dévisage d’un air soupçonneux. ‘Tutsi! Tutsi!’ qu’il crie brusquement. Je n’ai pas le temps de me retourner, je ressens une douleur violente dans la jambe. Et je
The use of the narrative present enhances the dramatic tension and involves the reader as a direct witness and potential collaborator by giving the impression that the events are happening as they are being recounted.

Similar scenes abound in her testimony. At least four others describe the deleterious use of ethnic IDs in the context of the genocide. For example, Mukagasana remembers the stream of insults spewed continuously by pro-Hutu radio stations such as RTLM and Radio Rwanda and the step-by-step instructions given on how to dispose of Tutsis: “Chaque barrière a son chef, lui sait le travail à faire et il mettra les hommes au courant de leur devoir. […] Toute personne qui ne sera pas connue à la barrière, demandez-lui sa carte d’identité. Si c’est un cancrelat, attrapez-le. Le chef de la barrière vous expliquera ce qu’il faut en faire.” This passage exemplifies what might be called a rhetoric of restraint. The use of an animalistic metaphor to describe Tutsis (“cancrelat”) and the final euphemism “ce qu’il faut en faire” downplay what is essentially a call to murder. Many died at the barricades, including Mukagasana’s husband. Remembering this particular moment, she wrote: “Je distingue Joseph, il se tient droit et regarde les militaires dans les yeux. On examine les cartes d’identité. […] Une rafale de mitraillette déchire l’air.” Not everyone showed the same stoic resignation. Moments later, Mukagasana’s cousins appeared “comme folle à la barrière. ‘Je ne suis pas une Tutsi, je suis une Hutu,’ disait-elle en larmes aux miliciens qui examinaient sa pièce d’identité.

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99 Mukagasana 1997, op. cit., p. 16.
100 Ibid., p. 46. The same scene is described word for word in N’aie pas peur de savoir on page 48.
101 Ibid., pp. 81-82.
‘Pourquoi est-il indiqué que tu es tutsi, alors?—C’est une erreur. Je suis hutu.’ Un coup de machette achève l’entretien.”

ID cards were used as a policing tool to strengthen and crystallize ethnic allegiances because they allowed for the identification of Rwandans in a direct and unambiguous manner. According to Mukagasana, Hutu militias showed such blind faith in them that “ils ne regardent même plus ni les photos ni les visages des gens. Ils sont obnubilés par deux traits de plume sur la carte d’identité, il faut que l’un au moins de ces traits biffe la mention ‘Tutsi’ imprimée à côté des mentions ‘Hutu’ et ‘Twa,’ dans trois petits rectangles.”

Like *La Mort ne veut pas de moi*, it is with a scene of ID check that Diop’s novel opens. As Michel Serunmundo, the owner of a video rental shop in Kigali, makes his way home after getting off from work in the evening, he is called out by a presidential guard: “Un des trois soldats en tenue de combat m’a demandé poliment ma carte d’identité. Pendant qu’il se penchait pour la lire, j’ai suivi son regard. Ça n’a pas loupé: la première chose qui les intéresse, c’est de savoir si vous êtes censé être hutu, tutsi ou twa.”

Serunmundo later finds out that Habyarimana’s plane crashed that evening, causing tensions to soar between Hutus and Tutsis. This event added to a climate of suspicion and distrust that culminated in the 1994 genocide, marking the end of a peaceful, quiet era, a “monde serein” echoed in Michel’s last name, Serunmundo.

Identity cards are a recurring motif in both works. Their ubiquitous presence in other works makes them, I would argue, a topos of recent Rwandan literature and a

recurring trope of francophone African literature. They play a central role both in Jean-Marie Adiaffi’s novel _La Carte d’identité_ and Lucio Mad’s _Les Trafiqueurs_ where they serve as springboards for rethinking the identity of the African subject in the wake of négritude. Diop and Mukagasana describe them in a variety of ways, as means of ID verification, of course, but also of “passing.” _La Mort ne veut pas de moi_ and _Murambi_ are filled with scenes in which ethnic IDs are stolen or falsified in order to help Tutsis go through checkpoints and flee the country for safer havens. While taking refuge in the Nyamirambo church, Mukagasana is given a new ID in the hope of escaping her persecutors:


This passage is structured around a series of syntactic “slippages.” Mukagasana goes from bearing the name of a dead woman to thinking that she might actually be dead. She also goes from feeling like a zombie (“Je me sens comme ces âmes des défunts…”) to believing that she is one (“Je suis un zombie.”). In doing so, she identifies with figures who are either defined by ontological lack or lack of free will (“ces âmes […] réveillées par des sorciers qui les mettent à leur service”). This new identity manifests in her appearance and physical bearing. She looks like a sixty-year old woman but she is only

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106 Mukagasana 1997, _op. cit._, p. 156.
forty. In resenting her decrepit image, Mukagasana expresses nostalgia for her “visage de référence.” According to David Le Breton, “chaque homme porte en lui un visage de référence à l’aune duquel il mesure son visage d’aujourd’hui. Le premier étant le seul envisageable. Un visage intérieur que ne reproduit plus la réalité actuelle des traits."

The loss of Mukagasana’s former, younger-looking appearance is experienced as a form of dispossession. Her new face is a distant memory of what it used to look like, that is, a remnant of her former self, and a face in which she fails to recognize her new identity, a face from which she feels completely alienated. Interestingly enough, this sense of alienation is described by Le Breton as a form of death: “L’Autre a perçé sous les traits. Le lent travail de la mort est devenu sensible à la conscience et l’individu se refuse à le reconnaître.”

Ultimately the interest of this passage lies in its description of identity as “passing” in both senses of the term, meaning as the act of pretending to be someone else and as a form of death, a dangerous slipping into non-existence, echoed by the series of syntactic slippages mentioned above.

A few pages later, Mukagasana is given yet another ID: “Encore un nom. Emmanuelle me tend une carte d’identité hutu. ‘Désormais, tu t’appelleras Nyiraminani Alphonsine. Et tu seras notre tante, à moi et à ma soeur.’” This assumed name allows her to stay under the protection of colonel Rucibigango, a FAR pro-Hutu extremist who offers her shelter and food in exchange for sexual favors. But as his advances become

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109 Ibid., p. 176.
110 Mukagasana 1997, op. cit., p. 172. The same scene appears in Mukagasana’s second testimony N’aie pas peur de savoir on page 76.
more and more pressing, Mukagasana comes up with a plan to run away. She blackmails Rucibigango into driving her to the Saint Paul church. If he refuses to comply, Mukagasana threatens to call the Military Chief of Staff and denounce him as Tutsi: “Je ne suis pas tutsi. Je le prouverai. J’ai une carte d’identité,” Rucibigango tells her. To which Mukagasana replies: “Pensez-vous, colonel, que j’aurais oublié de signaler au chef d’état-major que votre carte d’identité est falsifiée?”

The counterfeiting of ethnic IDs is also a recurring theme in Murambi. Diop’s novel offers another example of the illegal use of ethnic IDs during the genocide. One of his characters, Jessica Kamanzi, maintains a somewhat ambiguous identity but as her story unfolds, the reader finds out that she is a member of the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) infiltrated among the Hutu government forces in Kigali. This double life as a secret agent is made possible by her fake ID: “Les rares gens qui osent encore sortir de chez eux, ce sont les étrangers ou, bien sûr, les Hutu. Ou ceux que leur carte d’identité présente comme tels. C’est mon cas. Tous les autres se cachent où ils peuvent.” The chapter in which she is introduced to the reader (“Jessica”) ends with a scene in which she goes through one of the countless checkpoints that were erected in the wake of Habyarimana’s death. There, she is approached by a helpless Tutsi woman who has just been injured by a guard on duty:

Elle jure qu’elle n’est pas tutsi et me supplie de l’expliquer au responsable de la barrière. Je m’écarte très vite d’elle. Elle insiste. Je lui dis sèchement de me laisser tranquille. Voyant cela, le milicien Interahamwe est convaincu que je suis de son camp. Il me lance un joyeux éclat de rire […]. Puis il repousse sans

111 Ibid., p. 230. The same scene appears in Mukagasana’s second testimony N’aie pas peur de savoir on page 87.
112 Diop 2000, op. cit., p. 41.
As we saw, Mukagasana pretends to be a Hutu in Rucibigango’s company. In this excerpt, Jessica takes on a similar role in front of the Interahamwe soldier. Her “Hutu-ness” is not portrayed as something she is, but as something she does, an act to be rehearsed, a script to be enacted, or to put it yet another way, a verb rather than a noun, a doing rather than a being. This “Hutu-ness” is brought to life through her discourse and attitude, one of cold distance and lack of empathy for the sake of her Tutsi interlocutor. This performative aspect is key. The ethnic ID allows her to create new life stories, to embody fictional identities without which she would have ended up like her Tutsi counterpart, dead at a checkpoint. In this respect, one could describe Murambi as a narrative about alternative narratives and fictional experiments (what if Jessica were Hutu?). The falsification of ethnic IDs allows for more than a mere refashioning of identities. In enabling Jessica to pass as Hutu at a time when being Tutsi was enough to be killed, it underscores the redemptive power of fiction. This is hardly surprising from Diop. Like the other writers who participated in the “Rwanda: écrire par devoir de mémoire” project (with the exception of Vénuste Kayimahe), he never directly experienced what happened in Rwanda. Murambi is a fictional account of the genocide—but one in which fiction is described as essential, retributive, and salutary. It is a book that justifies its own raison d’être and legitimates itself to speak critically about what it

113 Ibid., p. 47.
attempts to do: bearing witness to a past event that its author did not directly experience.\textsuperscript{114}

In Murambi, ethnic IDs are used as means of negotiation and transaction; they are typically produced in exchange for one’s life. They also appear as a privileged site for deploying the imaginative, transformative possibilities of fiction. If Diop stresses their redeeming power, Mukagasana is more skeptical. While her testimony initially casts IDs in a similar light, she gradually insists on their irrelevance. Indeed, counterfeiting ethnic cards became such a widespread practice that Rwandan authorities were caught short. To address this situation, RTLM would launch calls to encourage increased scrutiny:

“Souvenez-vous tous que nous n’avons qu’un seul ennemi, le Tutsi. Parmi eux, certains ont changé leurs cartes d’identité. Ne soyez pas dupes des papiers. Regardez leur constitution.”\textsuperscript{115} Instructions were clear. Since IDs became increasingly unreliable, failing as indexical markers of race/ethnicity, the only text to be trusted was that of the face.

Two scenes are worth mentioning in this respect. The first one occurs as a Hutu soldier tells his colleague how he killed a fugitive: “Je lui ai demandé ses papiers. J’ai vu qu’elle était Hutu. Mais j’ai eu un doute. Tu sais c’est une fille assez grande. Alors je l’ai interrogée. Je voyais qu’elle avait peur. Elle m’a finalement avoué que son père était tutsi. Tu vois la suite…”\textsuperscript{116} The soldier’s suspicion upon checking the woman’s papers


\textsuperscript{115} Mukagasana 1997, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 170.

\textsuperscript{116} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 187-88.
ultimately led him to guess her real ancestry based on the stereotype that Tutsis are tall. Doing so required him to tap into racial fantasies produced within and by the discourse of colonial anthropology (cf. Lacger, Sasserath, etc.)—a discourse that paradoxically gave rise to the very ethnic ID that he fails to trust in this passage. The creeping doubt Hutus experienced upon checking IDs turned into complete mistrust as the genocide progressed. Mukagasana remembers the situation clearly: “L’armée rwandaise est en déroute,” she wrote after the RPF attempted to take over Kigali. “Les soldats sont de plus en plus nerveux. Et les miliciens ne demandent même plus les pièces d’identité avant d’abattre les gens. Un rapide coup d’oeil suffit pour identifier le Tutsi.”

What the ID hid, the body supposedly revealed. The human face—with its shape, contours, features, complex architecture, and shifting landscape of wrinkles, craters, crevices, and shadows—was considered a depository of truth that no falsification, no counterfeiting could possibly alter. A man can lie but his face will always tell the truth. A good look at it can capture more meaning than a mere piece of paper. Under the mask of expressions, faked emotions, and subterfuges, biology always prevails. Or so thought the parme-Hutu ideologues. In the context of the genocide, the rampant suspicion of ethnic IDs reactivated and magnified the colonial imaginary of race/ethnicity that portrayed Tutsis as tall, light-skinned, and fine-featured. As Cornélius summarizes in Murambi: “Dans le passé, les étrangers avaient dit aux Tutsi: ‘vous êtes si merveilleux, votre nez est long et votre peau claire, vous êtes de grande taille et vos lèvres sont minces, vous ne pouvez pas être des Noirs, seul un mauvais hasard vous a conduits parmi ces

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sauvages."

A similar description is found in *La Mort ne veut pas de moi* as

Mukagasana recalls some of the hate messages spread on the radio:

Comment distinguer le cancrelat du Hutu? Plusieurs moyens sont à votre disposition:

- Le cancrelat a les incisives écartées.
- Le cancrelat a le talon étroit.
- Le cancrelat a huit paires de côtes.
- La femme cancrelat a des vergetures sur les cuisses, près des fesses.
- Le cancrelat a le nez fin.
- Le cancrelat a le cheveu moins crépu.
- Le crâne du cancrelat est long derrière, et son front est incliné.
- Le cancrelat est grand et il y a de la morgue dans son regard.
- L’homme Tutsi a une pomme d’Adam prononcée.\(^{119}\)

This description combines popular beliefs, myth, and pseudo-scientific knowledge, including a watered-down version of phrenology (“Le crâne du cancrelat est long derrière, et son front est incliné”). The anaphoric repetition of “cancrelat” hammers home the message that Tutsis were merely animals, non-human creatures with eight pairs of ribs as opposed to twelve in normally constituted individuals. In addition, the use of metonymies to describe them conveys an impression of dismembering. It is as if their bodies were being scrutinized by the dissecting gaze of Hutus. This imaginary portrait gained such momentum during the genocide that it gradually supplemented ethnic IDs, rendering them obsolete. What Diop and Mukagasana describe is a situation of suspicion and crisis in which some people ran the risk of being killed for bearing some degree of resemblance to a racial caricature created a century earlier by European explorers and taken up by extremist Hutu authorities.


Tracing the circulation of ethnic IDs in La Mort ne veut pas de moi showed their irrelevance. One could go even further and argue that ethnic IDs were worthless by virtue of their very existence. Indeed, if ethnic divisions between Hutus and Tutsis were so obvious, easily decipherable, and directly inscribed on faces, in other words so self-explanatory, there would not be any need for ethnic IDs to begin with. As we saw, one way in which Diop and Mukagasana discredit them is by showing how easily falsifiable they are. Another way is by turning the body that such IDs are meant to identify into a site of illegibility. In her testimonies, Mukagasana breaks down the ethnic categories produced by colonial discourse and, by describing Hutus and Tutsis as bodies that cannot be read, interrogates in meta-critical fashion our own practice as readers and the way we should approach her testimonies.

La Mort ne veut pas de moi and N’aie pas peur de savoir are filled with descriptions of bodies that call into question the racial fantasies of Hutu propaganda, bodies that defy traditional expectations of what they should look like. Among them is the Hutu soldier who chased Mukagasana in the wild shortly after she left her house. He had red eyes but most importantly, “comme celui des Tutsi, son nez est fin.”

She also recalls Paddy, a dwarf that everyone believed to be a Tutsi despite the long-standing belief that Tutsis are tall:

Côme s’étonne de voir Paddy, un nain, du côté des Hutu. J’enregistre des bribes de dialogue.
“Mais Paddy, tu es tutsi!
—Mais non, fait le nain, je suis hutu.
—Mais tu as toujours dit que tu étais tutsi!

120 Ibid., p. 64. The same scene appears in N’aie pas peur de savoir on page 37.
Much to her surprise, Mukagasana also finds out that the famous Rwandan singer Masabo Nyangezi was a Hutu. Similarly, she mistakenly assumes one of her neighbors, Pauline, to be a Hutu because her husband was one as well. But the most striking instance has to do with Mukagasana’s appearance itself. As she makes her way back to Rwanda several years after the genocide, she comes across what she believes to be her daughter’s shoe in the ruins of her former house: “Je hume encore. Je cherche cette odeur que je leur connaissais à chacun. […] Mon nez plat s’aplatit encore contre le cuir craquelé de cette godasse desséchée.” Strangely enough, Mukagasana’s nose is flat—a characteristic most commonly associated with Hutus. In describing bodies that undermine the physiognomic beliefs of the time, bodies onto which ethnic/racial markers cannot be mapped accurately, Mukagasana’s testimonies articulate a politics of representation that redefines the modalities of Tutsi embodiment.

Placing Diop and Mukagasana’s works in dialogue raises a series of meta-critical questions about textuality, reception, and authority. On the one hand, Murambi lays out the principles of what one could call an ethics of fiction. By “ethics of fiction,” I do not mean how Diop’s narrative acts on the readers in good or bad ways or what reading commands them to do, but how Murambi produces a discourse of legitimation, meaning, a discourse that justifies its own logic. In other words, by “ethics of fiction” I do not so

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121 Ibid., p. 81. The same scene appears in N’aie pas peur de savoir on page 48.
122 “Le cuisinier accourt. Il aime Masabo autant que moi […] ‘Si un seul Tutsi doit être épargné, petit, que ce Tutsi soit Masabo! —Masabo! Mais Masabo est un Hutu. On dit même qu’il fait bien son travail!’” Ibid., p. 214.
much mean an ethics of reception as one of genre and mode. In Diop’s novel, the
counterfeiting of ethnic IDs makes it possible to take on fictional (Hutu) identities that
allowed Tutsis to stay alive. The ethnic ID becomes a site of openness and re-
signifiability where fiction (and the range of personas it enables) is celebrated. *Murambi*
is perhaps best described as an exercise in self-justification; the way it portrays fiction as
good and redemptive serves to legitimate what the novel itself attempts to do: to talk
about the real-life events of 1994 through the fictional accounts of Cornelius, Jessica,
Serunmundo, etc.

Mukagasana’s treatment of ethnic IDs slightly differs from Diop’s. To be sure,
both describe them as a form of currency traded in an underground economy. But while
Diop emphasizes the redemptive possibilities that such IDs enable, Mukagasana insists
on their precarious status due to the range of abuses, manipulations, and violations to
which they were liable. In her testimonies, IDs fail to fulfil their original purpose; they
are discredited because they cannot testify to the “richesse du visage noir”
or account
for the complexity of black embodiment. In other words, Mukagasana describes ethnic
IDs as simulacra, that is as copies of things, objects, or realities—someone’s body or
face—that are deprived of originals (in this case, the fantasized caricature of the tall,
long-nosed, fine-featured Tutsi). *La Mort ne veut pas de moi* and *N’aie pas peur de
savoir* seek to demystify the set of discourses that caricatured Tutsis. While Diop uses the
ethnic ID as a site for articulating an ethics of fiction, Mukagasana uses it for establishing
a new politics of representation. Her testimonies attempt to correct such IDs.

124 Ibid., p. 138.
Yet they also share a number of commonalities. To a certain extent, the ethnic ID functions as a metafictional device that draws attention to the status of the testimony in which it appears. Just as IDs were not trusted and therefore lacked power and convincing force, in a word, authority, her work lacked authorial confidence and control. On several occasions, Mukagasana contrasts the shortcomings of her writing skills (and of writing in general) with the spectacular, traumatic dimension of the events she attempts to recount. The fact that she wrote two testimonies signals her difficulties in articulating what she went through. *La Mort ne veut pas de moi* and *N’aie pas peur de savoir* are a series of trials and errors in which Mukagasana attempts to process, make sense of, and bring order to the chaos of her experience as a survivor. *Murambi* is similar in many respects. Diop originally wanted his novel to be a short travelogue first because, as a Senegalese writer, he did not think he had much to say about what happened in Rwanda, and because he was concerned that the “réalité proprement innommable” to which he was exposed upon visiting the country in 1998 would deprive him of the desire to write.

“*Un visage qu’on n’aime pas devant un miroir qu’on redoute*”\(^{125}\): Profiling Révérien Rurangwa.

The inability to communicate trauma is a recurring trope of genocide literature. It is no surprise to see it re-emerge in Révérien Rurangwa’s testimony. Like Mukagasana, Rurangwa was born in Rwanda to a Tutsi family. Like her, he also directly witnessed the events of 1994. Published almost a decade after *Murambi, Génocidé* (2006) recounts his

\(^{125}\) Rurangwa, *op. cit.*, p. 126.
encounter with violence, the experience of loss—he is the only survivor in a family of forty-four—, and his attempt to start over in Switzerland where he took refuge after being disfigured by his Hutu neighbor. Finally like Mukagasana, Rurangwa did not initially commit himself to a literary career. What happened in Rwanda compelled him to write and share his story—a process he repeatedly describes as daunting if not impossible: “Cette tragédie avec laquelle il me faut cohabiter […], je veux la retracer sans trembler, même si je ne pourrai jamais la décrire dans toute son horreur.”

Nevertheless, Génocidé stands out from the majority of Tutsi testimonies in the way it treats the injured body as a key narrative theme. While scenes of torture, murder, and rape are commonplace in the literature of the Rwandan genocide, they are almost always tangential or anecdotal, their main purpose being to convey the violence of the atrocities committed at the time. Rurangwa’s approach is different. His testimony primarily concentrates on the experience of disfigurement and the sense of alienation that he suffered as a result. This is evident in the cover where a black and white portrait shows him scarred, in a three-quarter profile with the right side of his face off the frame. This partial “amputation” is an echo to the title itself—Génocidé—, an adjective cut off from the noun it is supposed to modify.

Emphasized in the paratext, this “thematic body” will be the focus of my analysis.\textsuperscript{127} \textit{Génocidé} can be read as a series of what the French call “délit de faciès,” that is, broadly speaking, a form of discrimination based on an individual’s facial appearance. While in Rwanda, Rurangwa’s Tutsi features made him an easy prey, the wounds and scars he was left with in the wake of the genocide have earned him wary glances in his new home in Switzerland. Twenty years after he was disfigured, in 2014, Rurangwa became the subject of a photo essay entitled “Rwanda: Life After Genocide” where he appears in a series of postures ranging from traditional portraits to more complex poses.\textsuperscript{128} Displayed in London, Berlin, New York, and Hong Kong, these photographs were an opportunity for Rurangwa to finally reclaim his body and re-gain control of his own image—one taken away by colonial and pro-Hutu ideologies.

To be sure, \textit{Génocidé} rehashes many of the tropes found in the testimonial literature of Rwanda. Like Mukagasana’s accounts, it opens with a critique of colonial discourse and the establishment of ethnic boundaries. Rurangwa remembers leafing through one of his history textbooks and coming across the following illustration: “Il y a le Tutsi, fin et de haute taille, surplombant les deux autres, avec une coiffure travaillée en forme de ‘banane.’ […] A côté du Tutsi, sur l’illustration, voici le Hutu (dont le nom signifie ‘cultivateur’), plus foncé de peau, trapu, le visage négroïde, nez épaté et traits plus épais. Enfin, le Batwa—le pygmée—, plus petit, vif et nerveux, d’un noir très


Rurrangwa’s description echoes Sasserath’s account of the Rwandan population almost verbatim and underscores the role of institutions (here the school) in perpetuating a discourse of racial disparity. Other examples include the way he was targeted during the genocide for having a long nose: “les Tutsi n’ont pas le nez épaté et négroïde des Hutu—motif supplémentaire de jalousie? Lors du génocide, ces derniers ont mis un soin spécial à réparer cette inégalité naturelle.”

Finally, as Rurangwa looks at his reflection in a mirror after Sibomana attacked him, he cannot help but notice this “balafre boursoufflée [qui] part de l’oreille droite […] va jusqu’au nez, épaté et tranché car c’était un nez fin de Tutsi.”

Like Diop’s and Mukagasana’s testimonies, Génocidé denounces the ethnic propaganda that was instrumental in caricaturing Tutsi. Unlike them, however, it does not do so by make the body illegible. Rurangwa critiques the notion of reparation, asking what it means to repair one’s body and whether it should be done if it entails erasing the physical traces of genocide. His refusal to undergo cosmetic surgery after he was injured and the way he has repeatedly exposed his face—on book and magazine covers, in photo essays and documentaries—stems from a desire to be recognized as a victim of the genocide, or rather as a survivor. His testimony can therefore be considered as a sort of meta-discourse or meta-commentary on how to read the marks of violence on his face.

Génocidé is both a text that describes his face as a text to be read and that tells us how to

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read it. In this respect, it breaks away from a third type of discourse: Levinas’s conceptualization of the face as that which escapes representation.

Rurangwa was disfigured by his Hutu neighbor Simon Sibomana on April 20th, 1994 because he was a Tutsi. The memory of this event permeates his account in both direct and indirect ways, altering for example his perception of the places and landscapes around him. Rwanda appears to him as “la curieuse forme d’un crâne,” but not any skull, “un crâne fendu par une machette,” while the Swiss Alps where he took exile remind him of “une énorme mâchoire de squale, ornée d’incisives.” These examples are part of an affective topography that reveals the emotional trauma of disfigurement. Rurangwa’s appearance is the object of many descriptions, including a five-page long portrait symbolically situated halfway through the testimony, in a chapter simply titled “Oser me regarder en face.” As noted, this chapter is mainly descriptive and stands out from the others because it momentarily disrupts the narrative flow. As the course of the story is suspended, the reader is invited to scrutinize the author’s face.

In this chapter, Rurangwa mentions his difficulty confronting external gazes, the insults to which he is continuously subjected, and his inability to accept his new appearance as his own. This representational crisis finds an echo in the use of circumlocution, which I argue is one of Rurangwa’s stylistic signatures. To be sure, other figures of speech can be found in his account, including metonymies—let us remember Rurangwa’s emphasis on his Tutsi nose—and oxymoron. On multiple occasions,

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132 Ibid., p. 38.
133 Ibid., p. 85.
134 Ibid., p. 124.
Rurangwa portrays himself as a “cadavre vivant,”\textsuperscript{135} a “mort vivant,”\textsuperscript{136} and a “zombie solitaire”\textsuperscript{137} deprived of his characteristic horde. Despite such occurrences, circumlocution remains Rurangwa’s preferred option to describe his face.

As Christine Noille has argued, circumlocution occupies a singular position in the hierarchy of tropes in the sense that it straddles the line between what she calls “les deux grands pôles définitionnels des figures,” namely “l’écart” and “la substitution.”\textsuperscript{138} Indeed, circumlocution generally designates the use of a large number of words to express an idea where fewer would do. For example, the phrase “conseiller des grâces” is just another, longer (and more affected) way of designating a “miroir.” The former both replaces and differs from the latter. The rhetorical effects produced by circumlocution are numerous. It can be a figure of suspension in the sense that it stretches the sentence to greater lengths. It can also be a figure of mitigation or understatement because it conceals the original designation by replacing it with more words than necessary. Finally, it can be a figure of emphasis or exaggeration that privileges the circumstantial, the incidental, and the literal over the direct denomination. As such, it became popular with the advent of préciosité in seventeenth-century France. According to Noille, circumlocution “sert à éviter et à souligner, à dire et à ne pas dire. Elle vise autant à l’amplificatio qu’à l’attenuatio, à une herméneutique de l’interdit qu’à une herméneutique de la suggestion.”\textsuperscript{139}

\textsuperscript{135} Ibid., p. 82.
\textsuperscript{136} Ibid., p. 96
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid., p. 111. Mukagasana describes her condition as a survivor in similar words.
\textsuperscript{139} Ibid.
Both functions—hyperbolic and euphemistic—are found in Génocidé. I first propose to interpret the use of circumlocution as symptomatic of a crisis of subjectivity. In describing himself as “un épouvantail mutilé et cramoiisi,”

140 “un gamin sans visage,”

141 “un être difforme et défiguré,”

142 and “un visage qu’on n’aime pas devant un miroir qu’on redoute,”

143 Rurangwa denigrates his appearance in such a way that he hides behind his words and refuses to identify with his own image. In every single instance, the use of the indefinite article “un” creates a grammatical split between the speaker (Rurangwa) and what he says about himself (the predicate), ultimately disconnecting the representation from its object. The most striking example is perhaps to be found in the title itself—Génocidé. The adjective clearly designates Rurangwa’s condition although no formal linguistic marker such as a noun or a personal pronoun makes it clear. These circumlocutions are marked by a series of tensions. While they allow Rurangwa to define himself as a survivor, they only do so in a way that prevents him from fully embracing this condition.

In Génocidé, circumlocutions also take the form of what Noille calls “interpolations encyclopédiques,” whereby she means circumlocutions that require the reader to tap into a repertoire of cultural references to be fully understood.

144 For example, chapter eight opens with the following biblical epigraph from Isaiah 52:14:

“Des multitudes avaient été saisies d’épouvante à sa vue car il n’avait plus figure

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140 Rurangwa, op. cit., p. 79.
141 Ibid., p. 99.
142 Ibid., p. 112.
143 Ibid., p. 126.
144 Noille, op. cit.
humaine, et son apparence n’était plus celle d’un homme.”\textsuperscript{145} Taken to describe Jesus as he was scourged prior to his crucifixion, this excerpt invites the reader to see in Rurangwa a figure of martyrdom. A similar comparison is made in the last chapter, but this time using two circumlocutions: “ce crucifié de la chapelle de La Vue des Alpes, avec sa gueule défigurée, son corps coupé et son cri de silence qui envahit la vallée des mille montagnes, ressemble à quelqu’un que je connais.”\textsuperscript{146} Rurangwa also compares himself to Joseph Merrick also known as “Elephant man.”\textsuperscript{147} While Jesus is certainly a more popular figure, the reference to Merrick is arguably more efficient because it makes it easier for Western readers to visualize the author’s appearance. Finally, he describes himself as “un Tutsi de Mugina qui effraie les petits enfants blancs avec sa gueule tranchée (en d’autres temps, on aurait été le voir dans un cirque pour se faire peur) et qui ne peut pas leur dire la vérité sous peine de se faire traiter de fou.”\textsuperscript{148} Made up of two relative clauses, an adverbial phrase introduced by the preposition “sous peine de,” and a parenthetical clause or “incise,” this circumlocution provides a variety of information that makes it easy to identify Rurangwa. What matters therefore is not so much what it fails to mention explicitly (the author’s identity) as what it literally designates. The reference to the circus is particularly telling. In conjuring up a dark chapter of France’s history—a history of colonial freak shows and human zoos in which the black body was treated as a mere object of curiosity—, it affiliates Rurangwa with the likes of William Henry Johnson, Saartjie Baartman, Ota Benga, and Joïce Heth, and in doing so, questions our

\textsuperscript{145} Rurangwa, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 69.
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid., p. 200.
\textsuperscript{147} Ibid., p. 111.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., p. 165.
desire to look at his face. After all, is the reason we are reading his testimony not to satisfy the same voyeuristic, sensationalist urge that led Parisians to attend freak shows in the last century? While this might certainly be the case for some, Génocidé avoids feeding into colonial stereotyping by providing an alternative way to show Rurangwa’s body. His testimony reverses the dialectic of gaze and power by orchestrating the display of his own image. Rurangwa is the one who ultimately decides how to frame his face.

Finally, circumlocutions are also used as figures of emphasis. In some instances, Rurangwa invites us not to translate them directly, that is, not to guess the original designation at which they hint, but to embrace the rhythm, the phrasing, the movement that they create in the sentence. Indeed, it is often in what appears as secondary, circumstantial, a mere detour in form and expression, that the main idea, the “message” so to speak, lies. It is as such that I propose to read Rurangwa’s following self-portrait:

Un visage qui n’est plus mon visage. Une tête de “nègre” qui semble avoir été découpée sur toute sa circonférence avec de mauvais ciseaux, en son milieu. Une balafre boursouflée part de l’oreille droite (l’une des consignes des génocidaires précisait de porter le coup à hauteur de l’oreille) et va jusqu’au nez, épaté et tranché car c’était un nez de Tutsi. Une seconde cicatrice, à partir de l’oreille gauche, essaie de la rejoindre mais s’égare sur le front en une boucle qui ressemble à un accroche-coeur (mais quel coeur accrocher avec cette gueule?), ou au point d’interrogation que j’ai dans la tête en permanence: pourquoi?

Rurangwa’s face becomes a site in which he is made aware of his own irreducible otherness. This sense of alienation finds once again an echo in the use of impersonal, indefinite articles. The phrase “tête de ‘nègre’” is also particularly notable. On the one hand, the genericity of “nègre” underscores Rurangwa’s loss of individuality; on the other hand, “tête de ‘nègre’” can be read as another example of “interpolation

encyclopédique,” that is, as a reference to the infamous pastry, usually a chocolate-coated marshmallow or cream treat shaped like a ball and known for its racist undertones. In this excerpt, the anaphoric repetition of indefinite articles at the beginning of each sentence seems to create a semblance of structure, only to be undermined by the alternation of verbal and nominal sentences, interpolated clauses, direct interrogative subordinate clauses, and a colon. This broken syntax disrupts the flow of the sentence and reproduces, within the figural space of the text, the striations on Rurangwa’s face. It is as though the use of circumlocutions established some sort of mimetic relationship between the detours in expression that they allow for and the long, winding scars that mar Rurangwa’s flesh.

_Génocidé_ shares with _La Mort ne veut pas de moi_ and _Murambi_ a common purpose, namely re-imagining the stakes of Tutsi embodiment. But while Mukagasana and Diop are concerned with preserving the enigma of the face to undermine long-standing physiognomic assumptions, Rurangwa is more preoccupied with explaining it away. His self-portrait still relies on a physiognomic logic. For example, he sees a direct parallel between the question mark-shaped scar on his forehead and the sea of questions (and the existential angst) that overflow his mind. Unlike Diop and Mukagasana, Rurangwa does not seek to undermine this logic, but simply to reverse its terms and ultimately make his face legible on his own terms. Rather than portraying his deformities in ways that would evoke a post-colonial freak show, he describes them as reminders—as _testimonies_—of his painful past. In other words, bearing witness means exposing his body, albeit in a way that avoids reducing it to a fetish or an object of curiosity for the enjoyment of Western audiences. Instead, he invites us to see in his scars a symbol of
Tutsi resilience. In that sense, Génocidé appears as a “copy” of another text, that of his disfigured face.

To put this face into words, Rurangwa primarily resorted to circumlocution. Its use may at first seem symptomatic of a difficulty to represent because it hides more than it shows. Yet I argued, against Rurangwa’s claim that language always fails,\textsuperscript{150} that a rhetoric of detour is arguably the most apt way to portray his disfigured appearance. As Noille has noted, circumlocution is a device of both amplification and euphemism, of “écart” and “substitution” that constantly straddles the line between essential and incidental. This oscillation makes it a protean,\textsuperscript{151} shape-shifting, and blurry figure—an attribute that it shares with the very theme of the testimony: Rurangwa’s face.

His attempt to make his “gueule esquintée”\textsuperscript{152} legible provides a radical counterpoint to Levinas’s ethics.\textsuperscript{153} Rurangwa’s face is vulnerable in the traditional sense of the word. It denotes a state in which damage is inflicted, or likely to be inflicted, by individuals and/or institutions—a state that can be remedied through activism and the exercise of political agency. In other words, vulnerability is both the experience of exposure to danger and a mode of resistance to it. Both aspects define Rurangwa’s condition of “génocidé.” Exposing his wounds is an act of political protest that has allowed him to be taken seriously in formulating a series of claims and demands. Those include asking for his attackers to be punished, for the Rwandan government of the time

\textsuperscript{150} See footnote 125, p. 68.
\textsuperscript{151} The word comes from the Ancient Greek “Proteus” which referred to a sea god known for his ability to assume different forms.
\textsuperscript{152} Rurangwa, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 125.
\textsuperscript{153} See Chapter one, pp. 12-14.
to be held accountable, and for France to acknowledge its involvement in arming Hutu militias.

According to Levinas, however, vulnerability is not a political concept but an ethical one. What he describes as “the face of the other” is not so much one’s actual, physical countenance as it is precisely what in her/him escapes our gaze and cannot be reduced to a mere picture, an image, or a representation. It is therefore more of a withdrawal than an apparition or a phenomenon. There is always more in one’s face than what is immediately visible to the eye, something irreducible and enigmatic that exceeds human perception, something best described as an epiphany. For Levinas, a face is vulnerable because of the possibility to reduce it to its plasticity. Attempting to grasp the other in an image is a negation of what makes her/his face what it really is: the manifestation of an alterity so radically different that it reaches beyond my capacity to control or possess it. This type of vulnerability serves as the cornerstone of Levinas’s ethical system. While the face of the other always appears to me in its nakedness, I must resist the urge to reduce her/him to that appearance. Rurangwa’s invitation to look at his face stands in sharp contrast with Levinas’s famous argument that “[c]’est lorsque vous voyez un nez, des yeux, un front, un menton, et que vous pouvez les décrire, que vous vous tournez vers autrui comme vers un objet.”

The latter viewed reducing the face to its plastic form as a kind of murder that it is my ethical duty not to commit: “Thou shalt not kill.” On the contrary, Rurangwa sees in this gesture a form of empowerment that has

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allowed him to testify. In his view, representation is redemptive because it brings to light the traces of violence inscribed in his very flesh.

**Conclusion**

Through close examination of four texts—three personal testimonies and one novel—that centrally feature Tutsi characters, this chapter has underscored the various ways in which contemporary African authors have begun to react to the genocide that swept through Rwanda in 1994 and to the culture of hatred promoted by Hutu authorities at the time. Since the early 2000’s, literary exploration of Tutsi experiences has burgeoned and grown increasingly varied, despite a series of calls from the Rwandan government to put the past behind. Writers are not merely sharing survival stories; instead they are experimenting with novel ways to write, expose, and re-claim the Tutsi body after more than a century of it being racialized, tortured, and killed. In this chapter, I showed how the most dramatic expression of this violence targeted the face. Not only did Hutu extremists endorse the discourse of European physiognomy that caricatured Tutsis in colonial times, they went a step further and disfigured them, cutting off their noses, among other things, during the 1994 massacres. Mukagasana, Diop, and Rurangwa’s response to this (post-)colonial legacy is nuanced. While the first two offer portraits that subvert traditional physiognomic reading grids, thus rendering Tutsi faces illegible; the latter took an opposite approach. *Génocidé* provides a template for making sense of Rurangwa’s disfigured appearance. I proposed to read this testimony as an invitation to scrutinize his face and become aware of his deformities. Yet I also insisted that it does
not stage a voyeuristic fantasy of otherness. On the contrary, looking at Rurangwa reveals the trauma and pain of genocide violence.

His faith in the meaningfulness of the face’s appearance inverts the deep mistrust with which faces are consistently regarded in Diop’s and especially Mukagasana’s works. Regardless of the myriad ways in which they write (or write off) the face, these three authors are bound by a common vision. In each of the texts studied above, the face appears as the symbol for a new politics of memory that seeks to rehabilitate the complexity of Tutsi identities, experiences, and bodies. The next chapter will focus on a popular figure of the Caribbean—the *chabin*—with a similar goal of looking through the veil of stereotypes that was cast over him. His face has been described as a dramatic juxtaposition of black and white features—a supposed sign of his angry personality. This parallel between facial appearance and psychological trait offers another example of physiognomy being exported beyond the boundaries of Europe, to a different location. Keeping in mind the specificity of this location, I examine how physiognomic imaginaries of the *chabin* have been used to interrogate what it means to be Martinican in a society where *métissage* and racial mixings are commonplace.

CHAPTER THREE

Spectacular *Métissage*: Portraying the *Chabin* in French and Francophone Literature
“[N]ous autres, un peuple bâtard au visage brouillé par d’inédits métissages”

—Ernest Pépin

Introduction

Métissage and its Metaphors: From Local Rootedness to Global Branding

The question of what counts as métissage has prompted significant debate within academia, producing a body of scholarship that ranges from Glissant's seminal work on antillanité in the 1970’s to our current “Age of Critique” in which mixed race studies scholars “continue to grapple with unresolved tensions between identification and categorization and structure and agency.” While many disciplines have contributed to the discussion, métissage remains a poorly defined, and perhaps inherently undefinable, notion that straddles the line between biology, culture and politics.

And yet, or precisely for this reason, it has never been talked about as much as nowadays. Passed into everyday speech in French, the word has become a catch-all buzzword for just about “tous les phénomènes de mélange ou de fusion affectant la réalité sociale.” Some critics have even suggested that it is a constitutive part of everyone’s

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identity. Indeed, in his essay *La Découverte du monde*, political journalist Edwy Plenel argues that “nous sommes tous tissés de cultures et d'identités, quoi que nous en ayons ou pensions. Tous mêlés. Tous issus de contaminations et d'influences, sans racine unique ni repère invariable,” a sentiment echoed by Tzvetan Todorov who remarked in a recent interview for Quebecois magazine “L'Actualité” that

> [n]ous sommes tous des métis, si on veut bien accorder au mot culture ce sens large qui est un ensemble de comportements, de règles que nous partageons avec d'autres et qui nous permettent de communiquer avec eux. Tout le monde participe de plusieurs règles de comportement, donc de plusieurs cultures, et nous apprenons à passer de l'une à l'autre avec la dextérité d'un jongleur.

Michel Serres adopts a similar stance in his essay on pedagogy, *Le Tiers-Instruit* (1991), which describes learning both in the classroom and beyond as a process of

“crossbreeding,” whereby the self is reshaped and enriched through inter-subjective exchanges with others. The quest for knowledge and experience is a transformational journey, an invitation to venture beyond one's familiar horizons into unknown territory and to welcome difference, to embrace it in its variegated forms. Using the figure of Harlequin whose multicolored outfit points to the patchwork of experiences that fashioned him into a hybrid or “tiers-instruit,” Serres offers a new understanding of pedagogy as métissage.

Yet one might wonder, if anyone is a métis simply by virtue of being in the world (Plenel/Todorov), or susceptible to become one over the course of their upbringing (Serres), does it still make sense to talk about métissage at all? The astonishing ubiquity

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with which the term has wound through our culture owes much to the combined effects of globalization and postmodernism. With the dissemination of technology, commodities, people and ideas across national borders, métissage has become the dominant paradigm of identity formation. Likewise, because it brings into play notions of deconstruction, “bricolage,” and hyphenation, it has found in today's academic discourse a critical breeding ground.

The current popularity of the term should not overshadow its past significance. Indeed, the mantra of “we are all métis” is far from new. In 1289, someone like Jacquemars Giélée had already made clear that “Li mondes est […] mestis.”162 In the early seventeenth century, philosopher Pierre Charon worried that “[t]outes choses en ce monde sont mixtionnées et destrempées avec leurs contraires […]; tout est meslé, rien de pur entre nos mains”163 and in 1885 anthropologist Paul Topinard acknowledged that “[n]ous sommes tous des métis.”164 Over the course of the twentieth century, however, métissage took on a new meaning. Originally synonymous with racial miscegenation and degeneracy, it became a metaphor for our postmodern condition. This semantic transformation was part of a larger celebratory discourse privileging conceptual approaches that construe racial/ethnic identities as “baroque,” dynamic, and protean rather than atavistic and stable.

Postcolonial studies have actively participated in this process. Homi Bhabha's work has been instrumental in bringing the notion of hybridity to the forefront of scholarly attention. His essay *The Location of Culture* interrogates the relationship between identity and national belonging within the context of (post)colonial power relations. Against the idea of multiculturalism—one that endorses diversity while positing a normative, essentialist understanding of culture as a specific set of values and attitudes to which a given group would invariably identify—Bhabha proposes the idea of a “third space” in which colonizer and colonized come together to compound a shared culture. This interstitial space is not to be mistaken for a third term, a dialectical way of reconciling antagonistic attitudes. Rather, it is as a space of negotiation in which authority is challenged and subaltern agency reinscribed in a way that allows it to participate in the elaboration of “a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy.” Bhabha's reflection assumes that representations of cultural identity are best analyzed contextually—a view that Caribbean critic Roger Toumson also endorses in his essay *Mythologie du métissage*: “Résultant d’un mélange, le métis serait soumis à l’influence de plusieurs agents, ressentirait d’une façon qui lui est propre l’influence de ces divers agents. L’étymologie tendrait à le prouver (‘idiosyncrasie’: de ‘idio’ (particulier), ‘syncrasie’ (mélange), de ‘syn’ (avec) et ‘cratos’ (crase)).” Toumson's definition of *métissage* as idiosyncratic mixing challenges recent discourses that have described it as a universally shared trait of our condition. Moving

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166 Ibid., p. 4.
away from such discourses, this chapter will reframe métissage within the specific context of Caribbean history.

In her essay Les Enfants de la colonie: Les métis de l'Empire français entre sujétion et citoyenneté, Emmanuelle Saada contends that the status of métis children was largely debated in the colonies where the “code de l'indigénat”—a set of institutional laws distinguishing between French citizens and “indigenous” natives—was enforced (Indochina, New Caledonia, Algeria, Madagascar). In the old colonies (Guadeloupe, Martinique, Guyane), however, what she calls “la question métisse” never took on a political or social dimension because of a 1833 law that granted civic equality to free people of color, banning any mention of race or origins from official state-issued documents—a freedom that became even more prevalent after the abolition of slavery in 1848. This does not mean that métissage was never an issue, but it was never a legal one. Instead, métissage was primarily experienced as a cultural predicament.

In 1989, a group of three then-budding Martinican writers—Patrick Chamoiseau, Raphaël Confiant and Jean Bernabé—collaborated on a manifesto entitled Éloge de la créolité. According to them, “[l]e monde va en état de créolité,” meaning that processes of cultural intermixing have been reworking the parameters of collective and individual identities in ways that fully acknowledge what they call the “Divers.” Following in Glissant's footsteps, Confiant, Chamoiseau and Bernabé construe the Caribbean as a laboratory in which the sudden confluence of people, cultures and ideas

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168 Saada, op. cit.
170 Ibid., p. 52.
171 Loc. cit.
that resulted for the most part from European colonization have given rise not just to new identities but new ways of thinking about identity. Their notion of créolité serves as a corrective to négritude's obsession with African rootedness. It also offers a counterpoint to antillanité, which they define as “le seul processus d'américanisation d'Européens, d'Africains et d'Asiatiques à travers l'archipel antillais.” While antillanité designates the degree to which a given culture adapts to a Caribbean milieu, créolité refers to the circumstances under which this culture is not only assimilated by, but coexists with and even reshapes surrounding cultures. The notion offers striking parallels to Glissant's créolisation—a form of métissage characterized by unpredictable outcomes.

A number of criticisms have been leveled against Eloge. To say that “[l]e monde va en état de créolité” is problematic in many ways. If indeed the world is becoming creolized, then créolité carries with it the possibility of being expanded to other non-Antillean areas. As Bernabé, Confiant and Chamoiseau observed, “[i]l existe donc une créolité antillaise, une créolité guyanaise, une créolité brésilienne, une créolité africaine, une créolité asiatique et une créolité polynésienne, assez dissemblables entre elles mais issues de la matrice du même maelström historique.” Mapping créolité across a variety of contexts might be a problematic gesture. What relationship does the expanded notion have with the original? What is cast aside, overlooked and forgotten in

172 Ibid., p. 32.
173 One of the most famous critics of créolité has been Maryse Condé. She has particularly resented the provincialism of the manifesto and the implicit hierarchies that its authors established, placing the créolité of Martinique above that of other areas such as Haïti, Guadeloupe, and Cuba. She has also taken issue with the phallocratic discourse of the essay which ignores important contributions by Caribbean women’s writers like Suzanne Césaire and herself. See, for example, Condé, Maryse. “Chercher nos vérités.” Penser la créolité. Condé, Maryse & Madeleine Cottenet-Hage, eds. Paris: Karthala, 1995, pp. 305-311.
174 Bernabé, op. cit., p. 31.
the process? Bonniol raised a similar criticism when he resented that the word *métissage* lost its primary force and became a cliché as a result of its metaphorical extension. How does one negotiate between the necessity of contextual analysis that notions like *créolité* and *métissage* seem to require, and their new ubiquitous applicability, without jeopardizing their conceptual relevance?—a question that Bernabé, Confiant and Chamoiseau left unanswered.

In response to this conundrum, French anthropologist Jean-Loup Amselle has suggested to replace the notion of *métissage*, “trop marquée par la biologie,” with one borrowed from the field of electrical and computer engineering, that of “branchement,” by which he means “une dérivation de signifiés particularistes par rapport à un réseau de signifiants planétaires.” This notion allows him to bridge the gap between the local and the global that has been the object of interpretive controversy. Amselle challenges discourses that view our current globalized world as a catalyst for cultural mixings. According to him, the phenomenon of globalization is far older than we take it to be, which means that *créolisation* is not the by-product of “pure” influences that suddenly came together, but of already diverse ones. Operating on the assumption that cultures have always been open to the incursion of difference, he blames *créolisation* for reinforcing the essentialist logic that it paradoxically makes a point of denouncing.

This perusal of scholarship on *métissage* seems to confirm our initial remark that there is something inherently undefinable about the notion. It has spawned a variegated vocabulary. Notions like *hybridity*, *tiers-instruit*, *créolité*, *créolisation*, *branchement* have

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been used to designate a phenomenon that seems to elude the grasp of critics. It has
served as an umbrella term that has allowed virtually anyone to identify as métis. It has
been called “une des bannières du post-modernisme et d’un monde globalisé.”\textsuperscript{176} It has
also been described as idiosyncratic mixing. This chain of signifiers suggests that any
attempt to approximate métissage is partly doomed to miss its object, and can at best only mimic it. Indeed, metaphors and definitions of the notion are numerous, diverse, caught
in a web of discourses where they are constantly reshaped. They are themselves métis. As
I have started to suggest, this lexical inflation points to deeper epistemological and
methodological issues. In reaction to the reified, mainstream use of the word, a number of scholars have called for a reappraisal of the notion, which they claim should be
investigated in its context of formation. Against current discourses that have turned it into
a cliché, closer attention needs to be paid to its local understandings as well as to the
specificity of the lived experiences it has produced.

This contextual approach is found in Chantal Maignan-Claverie’s essay \textit{Le Métissage dans la littérature des Antilles françaises: Le Complexe d’Ariel}.\textsuperscript{177} In an
attempt to counter our postmodern “mythology” of métissage, she engages in a
topological and diachronic analysis of the term, delineating the successive stages in the
evolution of how mixed-race Antilleans have been portrayed in literature. Such stages
include the advent in seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries ethnographic accounts of the
métis as a “homo duplex”; his portrayal in romantic literature as an avatar of “satan
révolté”; how in the context of négritude, he became a figure of the assimilationist

\textsuperscript{176} Bonniol 2001, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{177} Maignan-Claverie, \textit{op. cit.}
bourgeois; or more recently the way créolité has served as an aesthetic response to the existential crisis he faced in the wake of WWII and the departmentalization of Guadeloupe, Martinique, and Guyane. In this chapter, I intend to elaborate on Maignan-Claverie’s analysis by investigating a specifically Caribbean form of métissage known as chabinité. In doing so, I seek to produce a narrative that circumvents postmodern, mythologizing discourses on intermixing and to reinstate the significance of contextual analysis.

The notion of chabinité has received little critical attention so far. It has often been mistaken for a form of mulâtrisme. Indeed, the two words are often used interchangeably in everyday speech—a confusion that arises from the conceptual slipperiness of racial/phenotypical categories. For example, the Ti Diksyonné Kreyòl-Franse: Dictionnaire élémentaire Créole Haïtien-Français defines the chabin as an “individu au teint clair et aux cheveux crépus” —a physical description that fails to differentiate him from the mulâtre, an individual of mixed black and white ancestry.  

This is hardly surprising given the way the category of mulâtre has generally served as a synecdoche for a variety of other ethnonyms. In the sixteenth century, the word used to designate any “métis (en général).” While in the early stages of colonization, métis referred to the offspring of Europeans and Amerindians, it became synonymous with mulâtre, quadroons and octoroons when more and more métis assimilated into the white

majority. Due to these semantic overlaps, few scholarly works have been devoted to the
chabin proper—a lack this chapter seeks to address.

Another reason that chabinité has yielded so few studies has to do with the
notion’s lack of applicability and resonance beyond the Caribbean. Raphaël Confiant
(1951-), a prolific Martinican writer known for his efforts to rehabilitate Creole language
and culture, the author of over thirty-seven novels, one of the forefathers of the créolité
movement, and a self-proclaimed chabin, explained in an interview with scholar Lucien
Taylor that “[i]t’s almost impossible for a non-Antillean to grasp the social significance
of chabinité. […] I remember being interviewed several times in the U.S. by Charles
Rowell for a journal called Callaloo, and he was completely unable to grasp what I was
going on about. The very concept of chabinité seems out of bound in the black-white
discourse of the States.” So what exactly is chabinité? And what is a chabin?

“C’est quoi, un chabin?”

The emergence and evolution of ethnonyms have been thoroughly documented by
scholars. While the majority of these terms are borrowed from Spanish and Portuguese,
like métis, créole, and mulâtre; chabin is not. According to Edouard Le Héricher, its
etymology can be traced back to the latin caper, meaning “bouc.” Chabin would be the

180 Chabin(e) is mostly used in Martinique, Guadeloupe, and Saint-Lucia. The word also appears, albeit in a
different form, in Derek Walcott’s “The Schooner Flight,” a poem that features Shabine, a protagonist
named after “the patois for/any red nigger...” Walcott, Derek. “The Schooner Flight.” The Oxford Book of
In Haiti, chabin(e) are generally referred to as grimos and chabin(e)s as grimelles.
182 Le Héricher, Édouard. Histoire et glossaire de deux préfixes, dans les patois, le vieux Français et le
Français. Paris: Maisonneuve et Cie, Libraires éditeurs, 1883, p. 82.
hissed form of *cabre* or *cabe* which is found in some Norman dialects, not to be mistaken with the Middle French *cabre*, derived from the latin “capra,” “chèvre,” and which eventually became *çapre*. In 1884, Littré defined *chabin* as “nom vulgaire des hybrides du bouc et de la brebis,” insistence that the term had become obsolete, although by 1903 it was still used in the patois of Gaye, in Marne, to refer to a “peau de mouton teinte en bleu dont on garnit les colliers des chevaux de trait ou de labour.” In *Unité de l’espèce humaine*, Armand de Quatrefages suggests that *chabins*, to which he also refers as *ovicâpres*, originate from a “croisement des espèces chèvre et mouton.” He goes on to add that this specific breed is difficult to obtain: “l’hybridation du mouton et de la chèvre est loin d’être aussi commune qu’on l’a prétendu, et […] elle est fort incertaine,” and that its fleece is of too poor quality to be used in any industrial way. Interestingly enough, while Quatrefages’s definition presents the *chabin* as the hybrid offspring of a *chèvre* and a *mouton*, Littré describes it as the progeny of a *brebis* and a *bouc*. Christian Meyer, in his *Dictionnaire des sciences animales* conflates the two definitions. According to him, the *chabin* is a “[h]ybride bouc x brebis ou bélier x chèvre. Il est très rarement obtenu.” The 1965 edition of *Le Larousse* offers a fourth variation, defining it as a “race de moutons au poil grossier […] Considérée à tort comme un hybride de la chèvre et du mouton.”

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183 Littré, Émile. *Dictionnaire de la langue francaise. Supplément renfermant un grand nombre de termes d’art, de science, d’agriculture, etc.* Paris: Hachette, 1884, p. 68.
câpre, mulâtre and métis, chabin was originally an agricultural/zooological term. Second, this series of ambiguous, if not conflictual, definitions raise the question of which breeds are necessary in the production of a chabin. No clear biological formula seems to account for its existence. This last characteristic also applies to chabin as an ethnonym. As Confiant remarked:

[unlike the mulâtres (mixture of black and white) and câpres (mixture of mulâtre and black) there’s no racial grouping of chabins, discrete or otherwise. You can find chabins in any family: two very black parents could have a chabin, mulâtres can give birth to chabins, and so on—just like chabins can have a mulâtre baby. [...] Chabins are an accident of history, apparently something to do with the chromosomes of some of the early white settlers and the Africans. In the chabin, you see both elements, white and black. We have light skin and clear eyes—often they’re green—but we have an African physiognomy. We’re clear with nègre features. Our hair is light or red, but it’s always kinky. So when you look at a chabin, you immediately see the two races, each setting the other off in relief.]

Confiant describes the chabin as a living embodiment of métissage both by virtue of his mixed origins and the unpredictable circumstances of his birth. In doing so, he invalidates certain definitions that have excluded chabinité from the various degrees of métissage that constitute the racial make-up of the Caribbean. Such definitions claim that only those born to parents of different “racial” backgrounds qualify as métis. Yet, as Confiant indicates, racial determinism plays little role in accounting for the chabin’s birth.

While the word shares an animalistic origin with other ethnonyms like mulâtre and câpre, it is, unlike them, nowhere to be found in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century racial taxonomies, whether it be Cornelius de Pauw’s or Hilliard d’Auberteuil’s. Even

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Moreau de Saint-Méry’s monumental *Description topographique, physique, civile, politique et historique de la partie française de l’isle Saint-Domingue* makes no mention of him whatsoever.\(^{190}\) A Creole colonist, historian and slave owner born in Martinique, Moreau de Saint-Méry studied law in Paris and became a jurist before travelling to Haïti in 1776. In 1797, he published what is considered his most notable essay, a throughly detailed account of his stay there, only years before the slave revolt broke out. Although wide in scope, Saint-Méry's *Description* is mostly known for the 20-page typology of skin color it comprises. Elaborating on De Pauw and Hilliard d’Auberteuil’s research, *Description* starts off listing eleven racial categories: “blancs,” “nègres,” “mulâtres,” “quarterons,” “métifs,” “mameloucs,” “quateronnés,” “sang-mêlés,” “sacatras,” “griffes,” and “marabous.” Traced back over seven generations, these eleven categories ultimately turn into 128 phenotypes, the underlying assumption being that skin color and facial features both function as indicators of race. Examples are legion and range from the *mulâtre*’s “caractère laineux dans les cheveux,”\(^{191}\) the *quarteron*’s freckles, the *griffe*’s “figure désagréable,” the *caraïbes*’ face, “triste et moins agréable que celle des mulâtres,”\(^{192}\) to the *Indiens Orientaux*’s “nez [...] élevé, et leurs cheveux [...] très longs.”\(^{193}\) And yet, despite the exhaustive nature of his work, despite the 128 phenotypes


\(^{191}\) Ibid., p. 76.

\(^{192}\) Ibid., p. 80.

\(^{193}\) Ibid p. 81.
he referenced, despite the sea of publications on race and color that flooded Europe at the
time, the *chabin* was nowhere to be found.

De Pauw, Hilliard d’Auberteuil, and Saint-Méry failed to acknowledge his presence because their works posit an understanding of race that his very appearance undermines. As the only brand of *métissage* in which heredity does not produce the physical traits one would expect to encounter, *chabinité* challenges the colorist ideology that informed eighteenth-century anthropological discourse. The *chabin*’s traits do not fall within any of the conventional categories used at the time, but are randomly distributed across them. As such, they call into question the biological shortcuts that gave rise to colonial descriptions of the *métis*’s body.

While scholars have singled out Saint-Méry *Description* for its exhaustive taxonomy of color variation, relatively few have remarked upon its methodological flaws. Doris Garraway has shown how “at every turn, the tabulations seem only to suggest the absurdity of dividing humanity by degrees of skin color, for even Moreau cannot quite decide to what extent heredity drives physical appearance.” On multiple occasions, he admits that inconsistencies between skin color and the corresponding racial category are likely to arise. A *mulâtre* may, for example, be of a darker complexion than a *câpre* although *câpres* are technically 3/4 black and *mulâtres* 1/2. Aware these inconsistencies, Saint-Méry devised a “mathematical coefficient as a surer way to delimit genetically determined color categories.” Under this new measurement, *mulâtres* range from 49 to

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195 Ibid., p. 232.
70 parts white and *quarterons* from 71 to 100. As for the eighth generation of *sang-mêlés*, it is described as one-part black to 8,191 parts white. In such extreme cases where the trace of blackness is hardly detectable, Saint-Méry contends that “si ce n’est pas dans la couleur que l’indice [du mélange Africain] se rencontre, il est dans l’assemblage des traits, dans un nez épâté, dans des lèvres épaisses, qui ne montrent que trop l’origine,” thus formulating what I believe to be a proto-description of the *chabin*.\(^{196}\)

**Chabinité and the Phenomenological Gaze**

Saint-Méry’s *Description* suggests that at stake in the question of *métissage* is that of sense perception. Recognition of the *métis’s* mixed background is generally determined by the capacity to detect, on the surface of her/his body, visible traits that are interpreted as the emanation of hereditary characters. Yet the reason he and other explorers/anthropologists failed to incorporate *chabinité* into racial taxonomies owes to the ways in which it complicates the relationship between phenotype and heredity.

Definitions and descriptions of *chabins* unequivocally testify to this. They all sanction his face as a locus where his difference manifests in the most direct, yet perplexing way—a locus where his features are dramatically offered to perception, but cannot be read because their combination defies traditional expectations. As Raphaël Confiant wrote, “[le *chabin*] porte sur son visage […], et cela de manière spectaculaire, les marques des deux races qui lui ont donné naissance: peau généralement claire + traits généralement négroïdes; cheveux généralement clairs, voire parfois roux + grain de

cheveu généralement crépu; yeux souvent clairs parfois bleus ou verts.”\textsuperscript{197} In an investigation he conducted on behalf of UNESCO to examine dynamics of ethnic/racial integration in France, Michel Leiris similarly referred to the *chabin*'s face not as a harmonious blend of black and white features—a characteristic more commonly observed in *mulâtres*—but “une combinaison paradoxale de traits des races noire et blanche.”\textsuperscript{198} Valérie Loichot described him as the embodiment of “l’écriture même des lacs et entrelacs des cultures qui le forment et qui se disputent en lui. Leur dialogue n’a cependant ni la douceur du chant, ni la logique du débat, mais est plutôt cri violent, érayé, tout comme le visage est rayé de la différence.”\textsuperscript{199} echoing Chantal Maignan-Claverie for whom the *chabin*'s face is a visual enigma that undermines patterns of racial classification, a symbol of the “déconstruction analytique des codes et des classifications qui fondent la civilisation.”\textsuperscript{200}

In what follows, I examine how, by resisting the classificatory impulse of eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries anthropology, the *chabin* has interrogated the process through which facial difference is assigned. In the absence of a clear racial category to describe him, how has he been perceived? My first part focuses on representations of *chabinité* in a metropolitan French context and analyzes descriptions of Alexandre Privat d’Anglemont (1815-1859), a Guadeloupean writer and journalist who spent most of his adult life in Paris as a bohemian. Portraits of him appeared in

\textsuperscript{200} Maignan-Claverie, *op. cit.*, pp. 18-19.
newspapers, novels, essays, and diaries. Despite their variety, they all appealed to physiognomy by equating his appearance with a form of exoticism. My second part provides a counterpoint to the first one in its examination of two contemporary Martinican authors: Raphaël Confiant, both a theoretician of and writer on chabinité, and Max Élisée (1947-), who first started his artistic career in film as an assistant director (he collaborated on Jacques Deray’s Borsalino) before becoming a scriptwriter and a novelist. Drawing on a corpus that includes Eau de café, Ravines du devant-jour, Mémoires d’un chabin, and Le Cahier de romances, I argue that Confiant and Élisée attempt to reframe our perception of métissage and counter nineteenth-century discourses of exoticism by laying out the principles for a phenomenology of chabinité—one that simultaneously draws on, confronts, and rewrites Fanon’s phenomenology of blackness.

One might object that the scope of this chapter leaves aside female chabins, otherwise known as chabines. While chabins have clearly been differentiated from other “racial” groups, literary and iconographic representations of chabines tend to offer very little variation from other female métisses like câpresses or mulâtres in the sense that they are usually portrayed as sensual, if not sexual. This difference in treatment is certainly worth investigating. This chapter will, however, limit discussion to the chabin. In doing so, it is my hope to continue recent attempts to decolonize our global, mythologized imaginary of métissage.

203 Élisée, op. cit.
Chabinité Through the Prism of Nineteenth-Century Paris: The Example of
Alexandre Privat d’Anglemon

“It was not until the first half of the nineteenth century and Alexandre Privat
d’Anglemon’s introduction into the artistic circles of Paris that the first portrayals of
chabinité appeared. Little is known about his life and the bits of information that have
been collected over time should be looked at with great caution. Indeed, whenever he
shared personal details, Privat would always take pleasure in confusing his interlocutors,
which caused his close friend Théodore de Banville to call him a “menteur infatigable,
inouï, d’une invention prodigieuse. Pour menteur, il le fut, au moins autant que le
Dorante de Corneille.”207 Despite repeated attempts to inquire about his friend’s past,
Banville was never able to find out much: “Vingt fois, dans ses moments d’effusion, il
m’a dit qu’il obéissait à un besoin impérieux en me racontant son histoire, et il me la
racontait, en effet, avec les détails les plus précis, ayant le caractère d’une évidente
réalité; seulement, elle était chaque fois différente!”208 Any attempt to draw up his

208 Ibid., p. 64.
biography is likely to fail, at least in part, given the difficulty to separate fact from fiction, reality from fantasy when it comes to his life.

Although Privat’s date of birth remained unclear for a long time, we do know that he was born on August 21st, 1815, in the town of Sainte-Rose, Guadeloupe (and not in Martinique as journalist Charles Monselet claimed) from a well-off family. After the early death of his parents, he fell under the supervision of his older brother, Élie, and was sent to Paris to receive his education, first at the lycée Henri IV where he befriended Louis-Philippe’s son, the duke of Montpensier, then at the School of Medicine. However, he quickly gave up to embrace the bohemian lifestyle for which he became famous. A regular at the Procope café, the Grande-Chaumière and the Hôtel Corneille, he earned a sulfurous reputation among women who particularly enjoyed his elegance and atypical good looks. Privat gravitated toward different artistic milieus. As Jack Corzani wrote, “il s’en prit […] à tous les tenants du néo-classicisme, à toutes les ‘perruques,’ à tout ce qui touchait de près ou de loin à l’Académie. Il fréquenta la Bohème, se lia avec Murger, Vitre, Delvau, Schaune, Champfleury, se mêla aux artistes du quartier Notre-Dame de Lorette, fit un temps parti des jeunes romantiques de la rue Lepelletier.” Élie regularly sent him a pension that he would squander in no time. To survive, Privat published

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articles in *Le Corsaire*, *L’Artiste*, *Le Figaro*, Alexandre Dumas’s *Le Mousquetaire*, and *Le Siècle*. In 1843, he met Baudelaire with whom he formed a lasting friendship. The “Lion roux,” as he was called, also befriended Balzac, Musset, Méry and Sue of whom he was believed to be the ghost writer.\(^{212}\) While his two major works, *Paris anecdote* (1854) and *Paris inconnu* (1861), offer valuable insight into pre-Second Empire Paris, they never propelled him into the literary spotlight that his friends enjoyed. Yet Privat did have talent. In *La Lorgnette littéraire*, Monselet recounts how one evening, as he was playing whist at the British embassy, he impressed the Princess of Bogdanoff and the Duchess of B*** with his verses.\(^{213}\) While one of his contemporaries, Georges Dairnvaell, resented that he was too “lazy”—an impression shared by Firmin Maillard who described Privat as “mou, nonchalant”—this alone, if ever it was true, does not account for his lack of notoriety. On many occasions, Privat was denied authorship of his works and he never bothered to reclaim it.\(^{216}\) Perhaps more than his supposed laziness,

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\(^{212}\) Some, like Hildevert-Adolphe Lara, claimed that the real author of *Le Juif errant* was not Sue but Privat. See Lara, Hildevert-Adolphe. *Contribution de la Guadeloupe à la pensée française: 1635-1935*. Paris: Jean Crès, 1936.


the degree of detachment with which he considered his own work is a greater indication of his partial “failure” as a writer.

If Privat’s literary production remained scarce, a lot has been written about him, especially upon his death in 1859, including eulogies, newspapers articles, bibliographies, literary testimonies, and more recently, a few scholarly publications that have insisted on his affiliation with Parisian bohemia, often comparing him with Henry Murger (1822-1861) and other “Water Drinkers.” My objective is not to dismiss the relevance of such comparisons, but to suggest an alternate designation for Privat, one that will shed new light on his life, his work, and the way his métissage has been viewed—that of dandy.

Although dandyism originated in England in the late eighteenth century, it only gained momentum in France toward the end of the Napoleonic wars in 1815. What first characterized the movement was its sartorial dimension. French Aristocrats would don sophisticated outfits in order to stand out from the masses and reassert a sense of individuality. Doing so was also a way to deny the egalitarian values celebrated by the revolution of 1789. But as the Bourbon restoration came to an end, dandyism underwent a radical transformation. Nobility slowly eroded. Mundane careers were no longer limited to the aristocracy, but could be pursued by anyone who tried their luck—artists, politicians, journalists, etc.—and a new conception of sociality emerged as the “café” and the club began to replace the salon. As a consequence, dandyism began to make its way into bohemian circles. The aristocratic model that had prevailed had to make room for a literary dandyism that primarily drew members from Parisian bohemia where Privat had made a name for himself. This new model substituted a culture of materialism for one of the mind. Distinction was no longer determined by social rank, but by one’s intellect, wit,
and ability to manipulate language. This dandyism endowed the movement with a degree of recognition and legitimacy that aristocrats, in their celebration of the futile, were never able to achieve. More than a taste for material elegance, it became a moral philosophy, a metaphysical quest for meaning in a world dominated by bourgeois consumerism, and an aesthetic response to the “mal du siècle” that plagued the Romantics.217

In many respects, Privat fit the profile of the literary dandy. A regular at many Parisian “cafés” where he would meet his friends, some of the most famous dandies of the time like Eugène Sue and Théodore de Banville, Privat developed an aversion for any type of work, because he viewed labor as yet another avatar of bourgeois rationalism. Only when he was compelled by life circumstances and lack of money did he write. His articles and short novels, whose fate he completely disregarded, exhibit some of the most salient characteristics of “dandy prose”: a concern for the ephemeral, the circumstantial, and a propensity to aestheticize everyday life. Privat was also famous for his repartee as well as his tendency to distort the truth. Many stories and rumors have been circulated about him, most of them told by him; very few have been verified.

Although a literary dandy, he still maintained the elegance and grace that characterized aristocratic dandies. Practically every single allusion to Privat includes some sort of commentary on his physical appearance, almost as a passage obligé. If few were familiar with his work, many had an idea of what he looked like. In Les Poètes de la Guadeloupe, Dupland describes him as a “magnifique ‘chabin,’ au visage parsemé de

taches de rousseur, [...] aux yeux gris brillants d’intelligence, aux épais cheveux roux crépus, [...] connu de tous les étudiants et admiré de nombreuses étudiantes ou lorettes.”

His description echoes that of Victor Cochinat who wrote in a eulogy that was published the week after Privat’s death:

[D]es yeux gris et pleins de feu rayonnant sur son visage que des taches de rousseur ne déparaient même pas, attiraient sur lui l’attention même des indifférents; enfin, pour couronner cet ensemble peu commun, surmontez-le d’une chevelure plantureuse, crépue et tirant sur le roux, et vous n’auriez pas de peine à vous figurer quelle figure originale et fantasque avaient sous les yeux, en l’an de grace mil huit cent trente-quatre, les dames qui s’épanouissaient à la Chaumière et les jeunes hommes qui campaient au café Procope. Aussi Privat d’Anglemont était-il à cette époque le lion roux de ces deux établissements presqu’universitaires.

Privat displayed all the features typically attributed to chabins, from his light skin and eyes to his kinky red hair which earned him the famous nickname “lion roux.” His appearance made him an object of public attention and helped him win the favors of young ladies. The seductive power of his chabinité is also evoked in Martinican writer Cabort-Masson’s historical novel La Mangrove mulâtre. Privat is referred to as “le sacré Chabin,” “le Lion Roux,” and, perhaps more revealing, “[l]e plus grand baiseur de Paris.”

Other portraits insist on his uncanny resemblance to Alexandre Dumas. For example, Charles Monselet claimed that “[c]’était un grand diable de créole, la tête couverte d’une chevelure épaisse et laineuse à la façon d’Alexandre Dumas, avec lequel

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219 La Causerie. op. cit.
221 Ibid., p. 207.
les gens du peuple lui trouvaient une sorte de resemblance.”

Similarly, Jean-Léo remarked that “[b]ien qu’il eut du sang mêlé dans les veines, sa peau était blanche, mais sa chevelure était noire et laineuse comme celle d’Alexandre Dumas, […] il faisait figure de lion.”

Another example is found in Jules Renoult’s 1859 *Bulletin littéraire de la revue de Toulouse*. One day, during lunch with Balzac at the École de natation, Renoult recalls that Privat suddenly appeared in a bathrobe. Despite being very close to Privat, Balzac failed to recognize him, “trompé par le blanc linceul qui grandissait ce mulâtre et donnait une expression inusitée à cette tête bronzée et couronnée d’une laine noire, épaisse et crépue.”

He mistook Privat for Alexandre Dumas. Renoult reports that in a spirit of mischief, Privat never bothered to clear up this misunderstanding, preferring to go along with it.

Portraits of Privat are ambiguous, to say the least. On the one hand, most of them appeared in newspapers’ eulogies and posthumous literary tributes. The context in which such portraits were published testifies to Privat’s successful integration into Parisian society—only a Frenchman could be given such honors at the time. On the other hand, these descriptions tend to fetishize his appearance. The fascination for Privat’s métissage finds a stylistic echo in the metonymic focus on his face, which isolates it in a “close-up” and turns it into an object of curiosity to be examined and dissected. While the publication context of these descriptions suggests that Privat integrated into Parisian

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society, their content points to the irreducible distance that separated him from his friends.

Interestingly enough, the way Privat was compared to Dumas—a quadroon if one is to abide by eighteenth-century racial categories, although he has often been referred to as a mulâtre—reveals an incapacity to envision chabinité in and of itself. As mentioned earlier, the categories of mulâtre and chabin have often been confused with one another. It is very possible that the word chabin was unknown to Monselet, Cochinat, and perhaps Jean-Léo. It has only been applied to Privat retrospectively, by Dupland in 1978 and Cabort-Masson in 1986, but never in his lifetime. His closest friend, Banville, portrayed him thus: “Il avait du sang mêlé dans les veines; cependant ses mains et son visage, sur lequel courait une barbe légèbre, étaient extrêmement blancs, et ses yeux couleur d’or contrastaient bizarrement avec sa longue chevelure crépue, épaisse et noire. On a pris souvent Privat pour Alexandre Dumas père, auquel il ne ressemblait pas du tout.”

Traces of chabinité can be found in the adverb of degree “extrêmement” which denotes the violence of his métissage and in the “bizarre” contrast of his hair and eye color. While Banville did not believe that Privat looked like Dumas, one cannot help but see in his “yeux couleur d’or”—a topos of exotic portraiture—a resemblance with another literary figure: Paquita Valdes, the heroin of Balzac’s novella La Fille aux yeux d’or.

Privat never wrote about himself or his origins. This disinterest in anything remotely related to his native Caribbean is best exemplified by what Cochinat describes

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225 Banville, op. cit., p. 63.
as “une des plus grandes excentricités de [sa] vie.”

Compelled by his brother to return to Guadeloupe and sort out his family finances, Privat crossed the Atlantic, visited a clerk, signed a guardian’s account and, word has it, left the island the next morning after spending a total of twenty-three hours there. Another episode which testifies to his strong attachment to Paris and disregard for Guadeloupe occurred in the days preceding his death. Hospitalized for a bad case of tuberculosis, Privat was advised by his doctors to go back to Sainte-Rose in the hope that his health would improve. According to Jean-Léo, “un retour à son île natale l’aurait peut-être sauvé, mais Privat aimait mieux mourir à Paris que de vivre ailleurs.”

How are we, then, to understand Privat’s rejection of his Guadeloupean origins?
The notion of dandyism, which I have suggested as an alternate category to that of “bohemian,” provides part of the answer. When the movement reached Paris in the early nineteenth-century, it merged with Romanticism and became a pursuit of individuality or as Walter Benjamin put it, “[a] burning desire to create a personal form of originality.”

French dandies had a political agenda. In cultivating their artistic superiority, they sought to reject the kind of bourgeois utilitarianism and rationality brought about by the Revolution of 1830. Dandyism was a form of escapism, an aesthetic refuge from the alienation of industrial society, an antidote to “mal du siècle.” But, perhaps more than “mal du siècle,” what Privat sought to avoid was another evil, one that ran deep within Caribbean society: “le préjugé de couleur,” or the use of skin tone as the organizing

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227 La Causerie, op. cit.
228 Jean-Léo, op. cit., p. 21.
principle of social, political and economic life.\textsuperscript{230} Dandyism allowed Privat to reinvent himself as a Parisian. By settling there, he was not only able to escape the fate his status of \textit{métis} would have laid out for him overseas, but he worked his way into the most prestigious artistic circles of the capital. While he was able to turn his body—his face—into a badge of individuality, that same body would have exposed him to persecution in Guadeloupe where racial prejudice was commonplace. Although the role of dandy that he took on still confined him to a marginal position, it is a marginality that he chose, not one that was forced upon him. Privat’s story is that of an Antillean who transfigured his \textit{métissage} into a mark of distinction to become a nineteenth-century dandy. Ironically, while he sought to escape the consequences to which his \textit{chabinité} would have subjected him in Guadeloupe, it is the same \textit{chabinité} that propelled him to recognition in Paris. This recognition was, however, problematic. It is as an exotic other that Privat became famous. Most descriptions of the young man insist on his Creole charm and unusual features. They offer a significant number of variations (sometimes comparing him to Dumas, sometimes denying their resemblance; sometimes describing him as dark-haired, sometimes as red-haired) that ultimately sabotage their mimetic purpose. The \textit{chabin}’s face resists the codes of literary portraiture. Portraits of Privat paradoxically do not show much, except perhaps their own difficulty in conveying what he looked like. Malraux’s famous assertion that “[p]lus Balzac décrit un visage, moins je vois le visage qu’il décrit” could very well apply here.\textsuperscript{231} Despite, or precisely because of the numerous portraits it

\textsuperscript{230} For more information on the notion of “préjugé de couleur,” see Bonniol, Jean-Luc. \textit{La Couleur comme maléfice}. Paris: Albin Michel, 1992.

inspired, Privat’s face is difficult to “picture.” All the more so as it is caught in the lens of exoticism—a reading grid that obfuscates more than it reveals, that de-faces more than it represents.

**White Skin, Black Mask: Raphaël Confiant’s “Phenomenology of Chabinité”**

Few literary mentions of *chabins* are found in the century following Privat’s death. Published in 1918, Apollinaire’s “Les Fenêtres” is one notable exception. This poem can be read as a quick succession of tableaux respectively set in “Paris Vancouver Hyères Maintenon New-York et les Antilles.”²³² This last location conjures up a reference to “[l]es Chabins [qui] chantent des airs à mourir/Aux Chabines maronnes,” thereby allowing Apollinaire to offer a window onto the Caribbean, and giving his French readership an opportunity to catch a glimpse of what continues to remain an overlooked figure of *métissage* despite the level of attention Privat had garnered in the previous century.²³³ Even in French Caribbean literature, *chabins* remained very sporadic. Jean-Louis Baghio’o (1910-1994) was one of few authors to feature them as characters in his novels although they often occupied marginal positions. In *Issandre le mulâtre* (1949), all they do is stride across the Fort-de-France savane or dance the Caleinde.²³⁴ Their lack of psychological development underscores their basic narrative function, which is to provide “couleur locale.”

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²³³ Ibid., p. 169.
In its mission to celebrate the racial make-up of Caribbean societies, créolité brought *chabins* to the forefront of attention. Over the past three decades, French Caribbean literature has portrayed them in a variety of ways. For example, in his novel *Chemin de la mangrove* (1999), Martinican writer José Le Moigne (1944-) describes the character of Sonson as

> un petit homme sans âge, sec et ridé comme un maracudja. Son teint très clair, brûlé par le sel marin, ses yeux virant du gris au bleu au gré de la lumière, témoignaient, à tout jamais, de l’ordre ancien du viol colonial. [...] “Je suis chabin, mon bougre! Les chabins sont des êtres à part. Ils ont reçu en héritage la peau blanche, semée de son des anciens maîtres, toute leur violence, mais rien de leur puissance.”

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The violent contrasts in his face act as a metaphor for the brutality of the colonial rape that engendered him. Such contrasts are a recurrent trope of *chabin* portraiture. In *Solibo magnifique*, Chamoiseau evokes a “chabin rouge”236 and in *Texaco*, he insists on the “couleur pistache”237 of his skin. Gisèle Pineau’s novel *L’Espérance-Macadam* features a “chabin à tics,”238 and Paul Grasselli’s poem “Ba moin en tit l’argent” portrays an “étrange chabin, à barbe rousse et drue”239—physical traits that also characterize Derek Walcott’s narrator and main protagonist of “The Schooner Flight”:

> I know these islands from Monos to Nassau,  
a rusty head sailor with sea-green eyes  
that they nickname Shabine, the patois for  
any red nigger, and I, Shabine, saw  
when these slums of empire was paradise.  
I’m just a red nigger who love the sea,  
I had a sound colonial education,  
I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me,

and either I’m nobody, or I’m a nation,\textsuperscript{240}

Shabine’s mixed origins and appearance produce in him a sense of inadequacy dramatized by the syntactic hesitation (“either… or…”) in the last line. The violence of his métissage leads to a crisis of subjectivity. His chabinité is construed in absolute terms, both as a lack of being (denoted by the use of restrictive structures: “I’m just a red nigger,” and the word “nobody”) and an excess in which the self loses its autonomy (“a nation,” “these islands from Monos to Nassau”).

Not only did créolité contribute to the literary fame of chabins, but it also foregrounded new ways of looking at them. In their essay, \textit{Éloge de la créolité}, Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant state the need for a literature that should renounce Western regimes of representation, shatter the exotic frameworks that have informed portrayals of (post)colonial others, and account for the mechanisms of oppression that have impacted their lives. \textit{Éloge}'s approach may be best described as an archeology of the Caribbean subject, one geared toward recovering what has been buried under layers of “frenchification” to create the conditions for an authentic reassessment of “ce qu’est l’Antillais.”\textsuperscript{241} Doing so entails a perspectival shift. In reaction to the fact that Antilleans have always been fundamentally “frappés d'extériorité,” Bernabé, Confiant, and Chamoiseau advocate the development of an interior vision, whereby they mean a new, unmediated gaze, “[u]n regard neuf qui enlèverait notre naturel du secondaire ou de la périphérie afin de le replacer au centre de nous-mêmes. Un peu de ce regard d'enfance,


\textsuperscript{241} Bernabé, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 22.
questionneur de tout, qui n'a pas encore ses postulats et qui interroge même les évidences.”

As such, créolité belongs to a tradition of Pan-African thought that stretches back to W.E.B. Du Bois, the first to outline what critics have called “postcolonial phenomenology.” One could very well argue that all phenomenology is postcolonial in the sense that it begins with a bracketing of the natural attitude, that is, a suspension of judgement, whereby one momentarily puts aside her/his repertoires of knowledge, beliefs, and experiences, and casts on the world a questioning eye, one akin to Éloge's “regard neuf,” in order to strip phenomena of any symbolic meaning until they appear to consciousness in their “pure” form, ready for analysis.

Phenomenology can be postcolonial in a different way, not simply by virtue of its methodology but as a discipline based on “the self-reflective descriptions of the constituting activities of the consciousness of Africana peoples.”

In this sense, a major contributor to the discipline was Frantz Fanon, whose work engages, among other things, with issues of subject formation under colonialism and what it means to live as a “Negro.” The experience of blackness is one he explored at length in his 1952 essay Peau noire, masques blancs. Building on the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty and Sartre, Fanon described the role of the European white gaze in the construction of racialized identities and the ways in which such identities produce a psycho-existential trauma or

243 See in particular Du Bois, W.E.B. The Souls of Black Folk. New York: Bantam Classic, 1903. An important feature of Du Bois’s phenomenology is his notion of “double consciousness,” which he explores in this essay within the context of race relations in the United States to describe how African Americans are not only forced to view themselves from their own perspective but from that of the white majority, creating in the process a psychological split.
inferiority complex that precludes black men from the possibility of achieving true self-consciousness.

“L'Antillais est avant tout un Noir,” Fanon wrote.\(^\text{246}\) His work was largely based on the assumption that processes of racialization systematically mark the “Africana subject” as black and that black skin constitutes a metonymic quality of her/his body.

What I ask in response is: where does one position the *chabin*, for whom blackness is not always perceived as a given, within this economy of racial representation? And how far do the conceptual tools forged by Fanon account for the range of experiences to which his white skin has subjected him? I will now focus on the *chabin’s* physiognomy as a starting point to show how Confiant and Élisée sketch the contours of a phenomenology that breaks away from a double tradition. Not only does it address the shortcomings of eighteenth-century discourses on *métissage*, but it also rewrites Fanon’s account of racial embodiment in a way that foregrounds the lived experience of *chabinité*.

To be sure, Confiant’s experience of *chabinité* offers a number of parallels to Fanon’s account of black embodiment. The scrutiny and abuses to which the former’s body has been subjected recalls the latter’s confrontation with the colonial gaze. In one of *Peau noire’s* most emblematic scenes, Fanon describes his entrance into “the white world” in terms of an encounter with a child who repeatedly calls him a “nègre.” The violence of the word leads Fanon to rethink the constitution of his “corporeal schema”: “Ce jour-là, désorienté, incapable d’être dehors avec l’autre, le Blanc, qui, impitoyable, m’emprisonnait, je me portai loin de mon être-là, très loin, me constituant objet. Qu’était-

\(^{246}\) Ibid., p. 139.
ce pour moi, sinon un décollement, un arrachement, une hémorragie qui caillait du sang noir sur tout mon corps?”

The way he becomes aware of his body as that of another is described as a violent form of dispossession, “un décollement, un arrachement, une hémorragie” that I propose to read as an act of bracketing. Indeed, the stripping of black skin recalls phenomenology's *modus operandi*, which consists in peeling away the layers of meaning accreted onto phenomena to analyze them in an indiscriminate fashion. Fanon achieves a form of “double consciousness.” For the first time, he views himself through the eyes of his observer—as a cannibal, a slave, a savage—and in doing so, complies with the demand of having to exist not just for himself but for the white other. The imposition of this “epidermal racial schema” sheds light on the extent to which racialized subjects appear limited in their freedom by the conditions of their embodiment.

In *Ravines du devant-jour*, the young *chabin* becomes aware of his physical difference under similar circumstances, after his neighbor Man Cia hurls a series of insults at him: “Espèce de mauvaise race de chabin! Espèce de chabin aux poils suris! Chabin au visage tacheté comme un coq d'Inde! Chabin tiqueté comme une banane mûre!” These invectives trigger in him an epiphany that recalls Fanon's reaction upon being called a “nègre”:

Le mot te pétrifie pour la première fois de ton existence: chabin! D'ordinaire, il est prononcé avec gentillesse par ceux qui t'entourent encore qu'il t'est arrivé de t'étonner qu'on te désigne toujours par ce vocable tandis qu'on ne dit jamais 'noir' ou 'mulâtre' à tout propos aux gens de cette complexion. Tu sens confusément que le chabin est un être à part. Nègre et pas nègre, blanc et pas blanc à la fois.

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247 Ibid., p. 90.
249 Ibid., p. 42.
Man Cia's remarks lead to a series of linguistic revelations. For the first time, the word *chabin* appears in a variety of forms and uses that Confiant had never suspected before. First, as a contronym, a term with two opposite meanings that underscore the challenges of racial self-identification (to be a *chabin* is to be simultaneously black and white). Second, as a metonym, that is, a form of address that reduces, in essentialist fashion, Confiant's identity to his phenotype. Third, and perhaps most importantly, as an insult, the word acquiring in Man Cia's mouth an aggressive charge that leaves the young boy baffled. Similar insults appear throughout *Le Cahier de romances*. While Confiant's classmates at the lycée Schoelcher often call him a “Chaben! Chaben prel si! (Chabin! Chabin aux poils suris!),”250 his sworn enemy of Grande-Anse, Étienne, nicknamed him “Djôl zanndoli (Gueule de lézard-annolis)” due to the “rousseur crépue” of his hair, his “lèvres trop minces” and the “pâleur de christophine mûrie” of his complexion.251 These insults are symptomatic of how *chabins* have been perceived in the collective imaginary of the Caribbean. They are often referred to as evil and inauspicious, their whiteness is seen as disturbingly unnatural, and they are known for their raw sensitivity and bellicose disposition, which explains why Confiant's grandmother, Man Yise, is so disconcerted by her grandson's calm demeanor:

‘[U]n chabin mol? Mais c’est impossible! IMPOSSIBLE! Un chabin, ça crie, ça trépigne, ça frappe, ça injurie, ça menace. Jamais ça ne mollit, mon vieux!’

De ce jour naît ta féroceitt. […]

Tu te rassures en ton for intérieur dès que le plus petit doute menace de t’assaillir: ‘Je suis un chabin. Un chabin, c’est raide! C’est fort! C’est méchant! Le monde entier craint les chabins. Nous sommes une race de mâles-bougres.’

Mais, certains soirs, sur ton oreiller, quand il ne sert plus à rien de bravacher

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Man Yise acts as a physiognomist when she interprets Confiant’s métissage as the sign of his angry personality. According to her, there are expectations of how chabins should behave; her initial surprise originates from his failure to fulfil them (“Un chabin mol? Mais c’est impossible!”). In order for Confiant to find his place in society, he must comply with the injunction to aggressiveness that his difference entails (“De ce jour naît ta féroceité”), but doing so proves challenging because he does not feel a natural inclination to act that way. On the contrary, the young boy is often overwhelmed to the point of tears and wishes he were different. What Man Yise takes to be a natural disposition of chabins is disclosed as a performance, a social demand with which Confiant feels very much at odds. The persona he is compelled to adopt has, indeed, no common measure with what he believes himself to be. In front of the bathroom mirror, the young boy experiences his “tiquetage de coq d’Inde” as a stigma in the sense that Erving Goffman gave to the word, that is to say, a discrediting attribute or “language of relationships” which “constitutes a special discrepancy between virtual and actual social identity.”\footnote{Goffman, Erving. \textit{Stigma. Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity}. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963, p. 3.} By “virtual social identity,” Goffman means the set of expectations and anticipated attributes that we assign to strangers when we first come into their presence. Stigmatization originates when the attributes someone is “proved to possess” fail to

\footnote{Confiant 1993, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 42-43.}
conform to our notion of what they ought to be: “He is thus reduced in our minds from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one.” This definition implicitly builds on a model of intersubjective recognition that was already at work in Fanon's account of racialization. The psychological doubling he experiences on the train stems from a gap between his own perception of himself and the white boy's. It is the same gap that Confiant becomes aware of upon looking at himself—one that finds an echo in the use of the second-person narration. Indeed, the narrator of Ravines and Le Cahier, that is, the “I” that speaks—in other words, Raphaël Confiant in the present of writing—addresses his younger self, the “tu” that is spoken about—the Raphaël Confiant who has yet to come to terms with his chabinité.

Yet a crucial feature of Fanon's thought, namely his notion of “epidermal racial schema,” renders it inapt for explanation of Confiant's chabinité. One of the reasons is that unlike the black subject who becomes racialized upon entrance into the “white world,” it is in Caribbean society that the chabin is marginalized. One might object that color prejudice affects all segments of the population, with the exception of békés. While, indeed, the experience of discrimination is often a shared one, this is not to say that it plays out in the same way for those targeted. As we know, chabins have fallen victim to a number of specific myths and superstitions. Another reason that Fanon’s schema falls short of addressing the embodied experience of chabinité is that it posits

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254 Ibid., p. 3.
racialization as a process of categorization through which one is perceived as black. The consequence is to leave aside those who simultaneously identify as “nègre et pas nègre, blanc et pas blanc à la fois.” In *Le Cahier de romances*, Confiant underscores the limits of this “epidermal racial schema” in a way that rehabilitates his *métissage*. Reminiscing about his days as a student at the Lycée Schoelcher, he writes:

> Tu n’avais osé contredire ton professeur de français le jour où, dans une envelopée pleine d’indignation, il s’était insurgé contre le fait que l’Europe colonisatrice ait divisé le monde entre Blancs et gens de couleur. “Qu’est-ce qu’une telle dichotomie signifie? s’était-il exclamé. Que la couleur blanche n’est pas une couleur? Que le blanc est l’étalon de mesure de toutes les autres couleurs, hein? Pff! Quelle monstrueuse prétention!”

The teacher’s vision of a “monde entre Blancs et gens de couleur” implicitly draws on Fanon’s definition of the colonial world as a compartmentalized battleground opposing whites and blacks—a dichotomy that ignores Confiant’s positionality:

> Il [ton professeur de français] avait pourtant tort à tes yeux! Il ne pouvait plus, lui qui avait un teint de cacao mûr, comprendre que les gens qui avaient la peau blanche, ou presque blanche, s’imaginaient dur comme fer que, si on leur grattait la peau, on ne trouverait rien en dessous hormis des veines et de la chair. Absolument rien! Tandis que si l’on procédait à la même opération pour quelqu’un qui avait la peau noire, brune, jaune ou rouge, forcément on buterait sur de l’épiderme incolore.

Confiant challenges colonial epistemologies and the way they have forced bodies into systems of categorization that rely on black and white as two opposite markers of race. He does so by re-ordering the terms of this mapping. According to him, the difference between whiteness and blackness is not one of kind but of degree. If one were to scratch off black skin, “on buterait sur de l’épiderme incolore,” while one would only find veins

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258 *Loc. cit.*
and flesh when conducting the same experiment on white skin, which means that
“L’incolore, le pâle et donc le blanc étaient done premiers.”\textsuperscript{259} Positing the primacy of
whiteness without endorsing its superiority over other skin tones allows Confiant to
complicate the polarized understanding of race described in \textit{Peau noire} and problematize
what it means to be white, or rather to claim blackness when one has white skin—a
necessary step in initiating a discussion on \textit{chabinité} as a mode of subjectivity that cannot
be understood in the terms of Fanon’s Manichaean analysis. To be sure, \textit{Ravines} describes
epidermalization in terms similar to those used in \textit{Peau noire}, which is to say, as a
process of skinning. But unlike Fanon for whom this skinning or “arrachement” produced
a feeling of alienation, it is lived as form of empowerment by Confiant. His use of the
adjective “incolore” deploys a new understanding of whiteness. In redirecting attention to
the lack (“\textit{in}/colore”) at its core, he empties the word of all ideological connotations. This
operation speaks in significant ways to his literary project. It is as if Confiant’s whiteness
became a blank slate, a canvas for rethinking the materiality of the \textit{chabin’s} body once his
skin is no longer perceived as a signifier of colonial privilege. Or better yet, a white page
on which to write new narratives of embodiment.

I suggest calling such narratives, \textit{dermographies}. The term is not a new one.
Anyone with some level of expertise in the field of medicine probably knows that
\textit{dermographia}—from the Greek \textit{derma}, “skin,” and \textit{graphein}, “to write”—designates a
form of urticaria that causes the skin to be inflamed when touched, scratched, rubbed or
hit. In a 2001 collective volume entitled \textit{Thinking Through the Skin}, Sara Ahmed and

\textsuperscript{259} \textit{Loc. cit.}
Jackie Stacey took up the word to enrich it with cultural studies inflections. If they agree with the original definition that dermographia is a form of skin writing, they also suggest that “the substance of the skin is itself dependent on regimes of writing that mark the skin in different ways or that produce the skin as marked.”

In Barthesian terms, skin is “a writerly effect,” which means that to write is to skin because “what we write causes ripples and flows that 'skin us' into being.” Invoking Derrida's notion of writing as a repeatable process that can be “‘cut off’ from its context of utterance,” Ahmed and Stacey argue that skin is similarly versatile in the way it can be “cut off” and reshaped into new sets of meanings. I use the term as a tool of narrative analysis to show how, in Confiant, rewriting white skin provides an occasion for meta-literary commentary: 

*Ravines, Eau de café,* and *Le Cahier de romances* open up a textual space in which the *chabin* arrives at a form of self-reflective knowledge that allows him to distance himself from mythologies of *chabinité* and become a critical “I”—a process that requires him to gain authorship of his own life. Writing on the white page and rewriting white skin become part of a literary project of self-fashioning in which the *chabin's* agency is restored.

Among the plethora of works that Confiant has published, *Eau de café* is the one that best exemplifies the challenges of *dermographia.* The novel recounts the narrator's return to his native town of Grande-Anse shortly after the death of his godmother’s adoptive daughter, and his attempt to reintegrate into Martinican society with the help of

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261 *Loc. cit.*
262 *Loc. cit.*
his mentor, a communist carpenter named Thimoléon. As he launches his investigation, the young *chabin* documents his thoughts and experiences, interspersing them with local anecdotes, gossip, and legends told by family members, old friends, and acquaintances. Through a process of mise en abyme, the notebooks he uses to do so eventually become the very novel we are reading.263 One night, as he goes back to his room at the Oceanic-Hôtel, he notices that they are missing. The maid stole them on the ground that “Monsieur est un chabin. Tous les chabins sont mauvais. Tous les chabins sont méchants,” and that they all bring misfortune.264 The narrator ultimately retrieves his notebooks but decides to get rid of them in the final pages: “M'assurant de n'être épié par personne, je jette mes cahiers [...] dans un dalot où une eau nauséeuse s'écoule avec paresse.”265 Regretting his gesture, he immediately saves them. While no explanation is given for this volte-face, one could venture that the “eau nauséeuse” in which they are soaked acted as a reminder of the existential nausea that fills his account. Preserving his story, making it public, and thereby drawing attention to his experiences, affects, and emotions, is a therapeutic gesture that allows him to come to terms with his *métissage* and relieve the kind of nausea associated with it. The erratic circulation of the text, which was first stolen, then carelessly thrown away to be saved at the last minute does not simply serve to dramatize its conditions of possibility; it also brings to light, in meta-literary fashion, the challenges faced by Confiant himself in writing both about *chabinité* and as a *chabin*.

263 References to these notebooks are present throughout the text. They can be found on pages 23, 104, 176, 177, 270, 323, and 378.
Uprooting Chabinité: The Curse of Apollinaire

Aside from Confiant whose work has monopolized much of the critics' attention, Max Élisée is one of few other authors who have written about chabinité. Born in 1947, he left his hometown of Macouba at age thirteen to study in Paris where he pursued a career in film production. His first novel, Mémoires d'un chabin (1998), was initially written as a screenplay. Impressed with the overall quality of the piece, Claude Chabrol agreed to direct it but due to financial hardship the movie never saw the light of day. Published in 1998, seven years after Eau de café, Mémoires offers a glimpse into the life of Frédéric Edgar, a young teacher whose life circumstances strikingly recall Confiant's. Referred to as “nègre blanc,” “faux blanc,” “le blanc de sa race,” “bâtard,” “chabinos,” or quite simply “petit chabin,” Frédéric is faced with the challenge of navigating through Martinican society—a task that proves all the more difficult in a context where his appearance is viewed as peculiar at best and horrifying at worst:

J'étais chabin, et le seul chabin de cette bourgade. J'étais donc depuis ma naissance, un objet de curiosité, un fétiche: j'étais roux, j'avais les yeux marron et mon corps maculé d'éphélides aurait pu me loger dans la pléiade des roux qui peuplent la planète, si mes cheveux très crépus—“tête grin” comme on définissait en créole cette particularité—, mon nez très épaté et mes lèvres épaisses n'avaient pas trahi mon apparence à la race noire. Avoir tous les traits d'un Noir mais être blanc de peau, cela était encore inexplicable aux yeux des gens du début du siècle.

267 Elisée, op. cit., p. 27.
268 Ibid., p. 57.
269 Ibid., p. 63.
270 Ibid., p. 241.
272 Ibid., p. 82.
273 Ibid., p. 21.
The *chabin*'s face is introduced in terms of a visual enigma. Although Élisée strives to convey the contrasts that mar his appearance through the use of absolute superlatives (“très”) and dichotomies, his attempt issues in a confusion of categories. Frédéric is simultaneously black and white, ginger but not quite. This rhetoric of antithesis fails to provide the reader with an adequate visual model, resulting in a description that only underscores its own failure to represent. In a society ruled by rigid color hierarchies, Frédéric’s *métissage* is problematic. Tormented by his brother Jean for being white-skinned and despised by the local *békés* for having black blood, he experiences his condition as one of subjection, exclusion, and abuse. The constant flow of insults he endures from his father who once went as far as calling him “‘chabin pouèle s’”274 causes him to wonder: “Suis-je donc vraiment une erreur de la nature?”275 As a self-proclaimed “opprimé du destin,” he feels particular empathy for the marginalized, including “ceux qui sont nés pauvres, esclaves, ou infirmes.”276 An opportunity to take control of his destiny occurs when he finds out, through prophetic visions, that a curse was placed on his family generations ago and how to lift it off. In order to do so, he embarks on an eye-opening journey to Senegal, the land of his ancestors.

*Mémoires* owes much to the tradition of the Bildungsroman in the sense that it contains many of the themes and devices that the genre typically gravitates to: a conflict between the main protagonist and the values of a society in which s/he cannot function, a quest for self-development through which s/he gains experience of the world, and a

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274 Ibid., p. 75.  
275 Ibid., p. 83.  
276 Ibid., p. 55.
positive denouement occasionally tempered by the irruption of nostalgia or resignation. *Mémoires* is also—and this is where its distinctive contribution lies—one of few Caribbean novels to describe a physical return to Africa; an original approach that reframes the personal history of the *chabin* within a broader transatlantic context.

Frédéric's journey to Africa marks a pivotal moment in his quest to destroy the curse that has plagued his family. In the early nineteenth century, his great-great grandfather Apollinaire, the headman of a small village in Senegal, worked in close collaboration with European colonists, regularly providing them with Manding slaves until one day the supplies ran out. To overcome this human shortage, Apollinaire decided to hand over his own subjects but, in an act of rebellion, the village sorcerer killed him, buried his head under a tree, and cursed his descendants. As the novel unfolds, Frédéric learns that the only way to cancel this malediction is to make his way to Africa and uproot his ancestor's head.

Apollinaire's story offers striking resemblances to a widely commented, yet enigmatic episode of *Genesis* in which Noah's son, Ham, saw his father naked in his tent shortly after the flood. Following the incident, the latter broke into a series of imprecations: “Cursed be Canaan, a slave of slaves shall he be to his brothers. […] Blessed by the lord my god be Shem; and let Canaan be his slave. God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem; and let Canaan be his slave.”

What came to be known, albeit incorrectly, as the curse of Ham (in reality Canaan is the sole recipient of Noah's wrath) has sparked many a debate among biblical scholars and philologists. A

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number of incongruities have been pointed out, including the fact that Ham's son, Canaan, was punished for his father's behavior.\textsuperscript{278}

It is by way of the first missionaries that the myth of Ham infiltrated Caribbean lore. Du Tertre and Labat invoked it to explain the sinful nature of black Africans and justify their enslavement. Similarly, Maurile de Saint-Michel observed upon his arrival in the islands that “[c]ette nation porte \textit{sur le visage} une malédiction temporelle, et est héritière de Cham, dont elle est descendue; ainsi elle est née à l’esclavage de père en fils, et à la servitude éternelle.”\textsuperscript{279} Centuries later, Chamoiseau reclaimed this biblical ancestry by rebranding himself as “Oiseau de Cham” and “Ti-Cham.” He saw in the curse of Ham a way to understand his own status as a Caribbean writer, doomed to think and write in a language that was imposed by colonization. In \textit{Mémoires}, Élisée offers his own take on the matter, re-appropriating the myth as a heuristic device to equate \textit{chabinité} with a cursed form of embodiment.

Two mentions of Ham are found in his novel. The first one occurs as Frédéric is overcome by one of his visions and makes contact with what he believes to a sorcerer: “je t’aiderai à sortir de la malédiction de Cham...” he tells the young \textit{chabin}, “Tu ne devras plus être sous cette influence.”\textsuperscript{280} Like Canaan who is doomed to slavery because of his father's crime, Frédéric falls victim to a curse due to his ancestor's doing. Moreover, he

\textsuperscript{278} Also of contention is the way early and modern Christian theologians interpreted the curse as a justification for black slavery. As David Goldenberg points out, generations of scholars mistook the word Ham for a derivative of “the Hebrew root ħamm 'to be hot' (ḥōm 'heat', ḥām 'hot'); or from the Hebrew ħwmm (ḥūm) 'black, dark'; or from the Egyptian name for 'Egypt,' kmt,” thus collapsing blackness and slavery in a way that the Bible does not. Goldenberg, David. \textit{The Curse of Ham. Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam}. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003, p. 145.

\textsuperscript{279} Quoted in Maignan-Claverie, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 191.

\textsuperscript{280} Élisée, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 62.
repeatedly describes his existence as that of a slave. His phenotype makes him the target of constant attack, persecution, stereotyping, and degrading treatment, and he believes that putting an end to his family's curse will allow him to disrupt the forces that have brought his life to misery. In doing so, he hopes to initiate a process of reinvention, a shift in self-image from passive victim to active protagonist. The second occurrence is found four pages later. As Frédéric engages in conversation with his sister Marthe, asking her how familiar she is with the curse of Ham, he is met with silence and confusion:

“Comment pouvait-elle comprendre que ce chabin qu'elle avait pour frère et qui n'avait souvent été qu'une descente de lit pouvait à tout moment prendre les rênes.”

As he makes his way to Senegal in search of Apollinaire's head, Frédéric's hope is to finally free himself from the curse of his ancestor and become, like Confiant, the author of his own life.

While it might be tempting to end the comparison here, something else hints at a deeper kinship between the two curses. Both may deal with slavery but what they are primarily concerned with is “originary anxieties and racial (il)legitimacy.” At stake in the myth of Ham is the thorny question of where black people came from. Many commentators have used Noah’s story as an attempt to explain the origin of human races, arguing that his eldest son Shem was the father of the ancient Near East nations (Asia); Japheth, the founder of Caucasian nations (Europe); and Ham, the primal black man based on the (false) assumption that his name meant “dark,” “blackened,” or “sunburnt.”

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281 Ibid., p. 66.
Yet his racial affiliation is perhaps less obvious than what critics would have us believe. The eighth-century Muslim Wahb Ibn Munabbih claimed that Ham was originally white but that he became black as a result of Noah's curse. This opinion was not isolated; in the seventh-century, someone like Ka'b Al-Ahbar had already ventured a similar hypothesis. It is also found in Tanhuma, a medieval collection of homilies and rabbinic exegeses which describes Ham's transformation as a result of Noah's curse: “[His] eyes turned red, since he looked at his father's nakedness; his lips became crooked, since he spoke with his mouth; the hair of his head and beard became singed, since he turned his face around; and since he did not cover [his father's] nakedness, he went naked and his foreskin was extended.” Although no mention is made of any change in skin color, features such as curled hair, pursed lips, and red eyes were traditionally associated with the African physiognomy in medieval rabbinic literature, thus suggesting it is indeed into a black man that Ham turned. Yet, in 1867, American clergyman Buckner Payne argued in his essay The Negro: What is His Ethnological Status? that Ham and his offspring “were at [the time of the flood], and after the flood, and continue to be, to this day, of the white race,” a race which he believed to include the following traits: “long, straight hair, high foreheads, high noses and thin lips.”

Spanning over centuries of exegetical dispute, the discussion of Ham's appearance foregrounds a kind of ontological trouble with which Élisée's reader is all too familiar. The question of what Ham looked like remains unanswered despite the corpus of

284 Quoted in Goldenberg, Ibid., p. 187.
hermeneutical works it has generated. Commentators alternatively referred to his lips as thick and thin, to his hair as curly and straight, and to his complexion as white and dark. The impossibility to map racial difference onto his face recalls Frédéric's perception of his own body. While Élisée believes his race to be “la noire, bien sûr,” the chabin's trials and tribulations suggest that the question of affiliation is more complex.286 When asked to identify as black or white, he answers with a hint of uncertainty, “Je suis noir...”287 This brief hesitation is immediately broken by his interlocutor who retorts in a tone of reproach: “Tu viens de me mentir [...] ! Tu n'as jamais su de quel côté te ranger !”

Shortly after this exchange, Frédéric erupts in self-deprecatory ruminations: “Je n'étais rien. Je n'avais jamais rien été. Ni Blanc, ni Noir, rien !”288 The sense of despair and self-hatred that permeates these lines is echoed in the repetition of negative terms (“n'[...] rien,” “n'[...] jamais,” “rien,” “Ni[...], ni [...]”, “rien”), as if to highlight the lack of stable referents when it comes to describing Frédéric's body. Élisée's rhetoric is governed by a neither/nor logic that exceeds the predicative function of language. Under his pen, the opposition of black and white breaks down, leading the discussion of Frédéric's identity into contradiction and aporia. His face becomes a liminal site where the parameters of racial discourse are systematically blurred. Ultimately one could see in the chabin, “partagé entre [s]a moitié noire et l'autre, la blanche,” a modern avatar of Ham, the primal “negro” that some believed was white.289 If Élisée’s appropriation of the biblical figure makes it possible to frame Frédéric’s condition as a curse—one in which he cannot

286 Élisée, op. cit., p. 11.
287 Ibid., p. 200.
288 Ibid., p. 200.
289 Ibid., p. 45.
reconcile being white and black—it is also an antidote to it. Indeed, the chabin is perhaps more of a nègre than anyone else given that his physiognomy straddles the color line in the same way that Ham’s—the “primal negro”—does.

Interestingly enough, it is in Africa that Frédéric overcomes the challenges posed by his métissage. As the story develops, his quest to cast off the curse of Apollinaire turns into an investigation of “les causes de son malheur dans [s]on passé ancestral.”290 His decision to leave Martinique addresses a need to free himself from a double alienation. The course of his life has been determined both by his ancestor's misdeeds and by cultural attitudes towards his chabinité. His journey to Africa is thus framed as a project of introspection and self-knowledge. Lifting the curse is not merely about preserving his lineage from extinction, it is also an opportunity for personal growth. What Frédéric uncovers there is a new sense of self, freed from the burden of cultural assumptions. Indeed, the notion of chabinité, which holds a singular place in the Caribbean imaginary, bears little significance in Africa where the history of colonization has produced a different ideology of race and skin color. Because Frédéric is no longer profiled as a chabin, that is to say, forced into the role of “être faible,”291 “agneau fragile,”292 “porte-drapeau du Malheur,”293 or “demon,”294 he can finally become the “homme fort, de décision”295 he has always aspired to be—a first step in his mission to find Apollinaire’s head, uproot it, and confound the forces of destiny. The second requirement is that he

290 Ibid., p. 143.
291 Ibid., p. 52.
292 Ibid., p. 96.
293 Ibid., p. 125.
294 Ibid., p. 172.
295 Ibid., p. 229.
must remain in Senegal until his death. Ironically enough, for Apollinaire's uprooting to occur Frédéric must not simply migrate to a new country but take root in it, so to speak; which he does by settling down in “La Ruche,” the plantation where his ancestors lived, with Rosy, a Senegalese woman with whom he falls in love and ends up spending the rest of his life.

His itinerary offers a counterpoint to the many “retours au pays natal” that have become commonplace in Caribbean literature since the publication of Césaire's Cahier. By reframing his personal trajectory within the larger context of African history, Élisée rewrites a hackneyed narrative, that of the chabin as an emblem of Caribbean métissage. In this respect, the most striking example of uprooting found in Mémoires is the one performed by the novel itself. Unlike Confiant who has worked toward “caribbeanizing” chabinité, Élisée extracts it from its embeddedness in the social and cultural fabric of Martinique. This removal allows Frédéric to cast off the existential burden of having to articulate his subjectivity within the framework of specific racial constructs. As his story shows, identifying as black in Senegal becomes less of a conundrum than in Martinique where the system of ethno-class hierarchies produced in him a crisis of identification.

Evidence of his successful transformation occurs in the closing chapter where the last of his portraits reads as follows: “chacun voyait mon visage actuel, un visage marqué par l'âge, bien sûr, mais reposé, paisible et très différent de ce qu'il avait pu être auparavant.”

As the novel draws to an end, his face is no longer reduced to a mosaic of traits that language would fail to express. Emphasis is redirected to the nuances of his

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296 Ibid., p. 315.
expression. Élisée shows him in a different light, relaxed and at peace. In doing so, he stages a new gaze, in which the *chabin* appears liberated from all the mystifications and cultural assignations that previously marked his body as “freakish.” It is the same face that Élisée had described in a proleptic passage: “Pataugeant dans l'eau, je pus traîner mes pas jusqu'au vieux miroir fêlé qui couvrait depuis des années la porte de l'armoire. Mon image encore disloquée apparut comme les éléments désordonnés d'un puzzle que mon imagination avait tant de fois reconstitué à sa guise.”

Confronted with his reflection, Frédéric momentarily assumes the position of reader. In Latin, the verb *legere* originally meant “to pick up,” “to collect,” “to gather.” By metaphorical extension, it came to designate a process of reviewing, that is, of picking up with one’s eyes. The way Frédéric strives to pick up and arrange the fragments of his face echoes our own efforts to collect, review, and put together the textual pieces provided by Élisée in an attempt to visualize his character’s appearance and solve the puzzle of his face. Yet, the aforementioned passage is voluntarily ambiguous. Is Frédéric’s shattered reflection the result of his cracked mirror or of *chabinité* itself—an uprooted signifier, whose meaning is determined in relation to other signifiers (“black,” “white,” “ginger,” etc.) and thus endlessly delayed in a free play of associations?

Efforts to establish his visual identity might after all be useless. In what sense is his “visage actuel,” “marqué par l'âge,” “reposé,” and “paisible” that of a *chabin*? Élisée's description could very well apply to anyone. And what to make of this “image [...] disloquée”? In other words, how to interpret the *chabin's* appearance when race no longer

provides the template to read it? In this sense Mémoires hints at a peculiar paradox. While chabinité is a form of métissage that precludes any racial identification, it cannot be understood without reference to race. As a phenotype that challenges the notion of “racial grouping,” it also relies on this notion, if only to position itself as a rejection of it. In other words, chabinité can only become operative as a concept if it acknowledges the validity of the very racial divisions that it calls into question. Dismissing race as a biological construct might be experienced as a liberation in both Confiant and Élisée, yet it runs the risk of relegating the chabin's idiosyncrasies to a dangerous form of anonymity—the same one that both authors precisely wrote against.

**Conclusion**

This chapter focused on the figure of the chabin as a means to nuance the postmodern understanding of métissage. I used his face—a metonym for his physical difference—as a point of departure to analyze the way he has been perceived both in nineteenth-century Paris and more recently in Martinique and Senegal. The first popular chabin was Alexandre Privat d’Anglemont. I argued that framing him as a dandy rather than a bohemian helps to account for the way he self-consciously turned his chabinité into a mark of distinction. While Parisian society perceived his appearance as a sign of exotic beauty and even unbridled sexual energy, chabinité has been considered as both ugly and indicative of a bellicose personality in Martinique.

I examined how Confiant and Élisée set out to debunk these physiognomic discourses. What I proposed is a perspective that views their discussion of chabinité as a phenomenology of facial difference. In a world where métis have been considered
“poster-faces for a harmonious multicultural society,”298 the chabin's physiognomy tells a different story, one in which métissage is experienced as existential angst. Confiant and Elisée’s texts cultivate, with varying degrees of self-awareness, a “poeticist style of self-reflection.”299 Through engagement not just with the literary form but with the act of writing itself, they open a discursive space for the chabin to negotiate the challenges of being both white and nègre. The former’s solution to this drama of identification is to replace Fanon's “epidermal racial schema” with what I called a “dermographic schema” in order to articulate narratives of embodiment that divorce race from skin color and rehabilitate the chabin’s own brand of métissage. Élisée’s approach is similar in the way he uses narrative to interrogate chabinité and, conversely, exploits chabinité to interrogate narrative as a mode of self-representation. Where Mémoires d’un chabin breaks new ground, however, is in the way it draws attention to some of the limitations inherent in Confiant’s discourse, questioning for example the extent to which race and chabinité can be dissociated. Élisée’s use of Africa as an alternative space from which to see through and question perceptions of the chabin in Caribbean societies also forces us to reconsider the ways in which Confiant re-appropriated the figure. To some extent, Élisée invites his reader to emulate Frédéric’s posture and “uproot” the discourses responsible for reifying the chabin’s subjectivity—not only those that describe him as a pariah but perhaps, and most importantly, those that consecrate him as an icon of Caribbean métissage.

299 Henry, op. cit., p. 9.
The next and last chapter is a move away from this chapter’s exclusive focus on a male figure—the *chabin*—as I turn to recent debates on Islamic full-face veils in France and the ways they have impacted the perception of Muslim women. It is also a move away from physiognomy as a pseudo-science toward a broader understanding of physiognomy as one’s general appearance. I will analyze acts of public unveiling, of showing one’s face as a “ressac” of colonial memory. France’s recent ban on the niqab and the burqa reactivates the discourse of surveillance in which nineteenth-century physiognomy was embedded. Yet, this last chapter identifies a continuation between how Privat was racialized as an exotic, sexual other and France’s politics of unveiling as a form of neo-orientalism that eroticizes women under the pretence of liberating them.

CHAPTER FOUR
From Colonial-Era *Évoluées* to Contemporary Secular Muslims: Uncovering France's Politics of the “Open Face”

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“Hugo disait: 'La France, la nation, c'est un passé pour se tourner vers l'avenir.' L'identité nationale, c'est exactement la même chose.”

Such are the words in which Éric Besson, former Minister of Immigration, justified his decision to launch, in October 2009, a national debate on French identity. Numerous discussions followed, punctuated with disputes and controversies of all kinds. What was to be a three-month series of state-sponsored talks and seminars became for many a political embarrassment. The debate served as an occasion to unleash a barrage of xenophobic abuse, often equating France's Muslim community with a horde of welfare-hungry immigrant “thugs.” This was perhaps most obvious in many of the comments left on the website debatidentitenationale.fr.

Launched by the government in November 2009, its role was to provide a public forum for the exchange of ideas, but in the context of high tension that surrounded the debate, it quickly turned into an outlet for the expression of white racist anxieties.

Hugo, as it turns out, never uttered those words. While critics like Claude Millet and Guy Rosa were unable to locate the quote in their perusal of his political writings, they suggest that if he ever said something similar, it was with a different intention in mind. Indeed, Hugo very much believed that France's national destiny was to found a universal community in which borders and nation-states would become increasingly irrelevant until disappearing—a stance contrary to Besson's nationalistic agenda as he launched the 2009 debate. The misappropriation of Hugo's name and legacy was

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representative of the whole debate, which emerged and took place under the banner of usurpation. That it was supervised by the Ministry of Immigration as opposed to, say, the Ministry of Culture, caused the conversation to shift away from a consideration of what Frenchness meant to a discussion of what it was not. Questions were raised about the role of French Muslims within the framework of secularism and how to make Islam compatible with the values of French Republicanism.\(^{303}\) The assumption was that in a nation with a long tradition of Christian faith, Islam was an imported religion and, as such, naturally suspect in its intent and practices.

The conflation of national identity and immigration made veiled Muslim women targets of public concern. As weeks went by, Besson’s debate shifted to a reflection on their place in French society. More and more perceived them as a threat to the nation's endorsement of secularism—a fundamental pillar of French Republicanism. The veil in its various forms—*hijab, niqab, burqa, chadri, haïk*, etc.—turned into a locus for the struggle between Islam and the West. As discussions drew to a close in January 2010, many were left with the feeling that wearing a face veil should be banned, and indeed, nine months later, in October 2010, a law making it illegal to conceal one's face in public was voted upon. It came into effect six months later, in April 2011. During this transitional period, the French government, under the supervision of then-Prime Minister François Fillon, launched a pedagogical campaign to provide an overview of what the law concretely entailed. Informational brochures were handed out and ads were released,

explaining that “la République se vit à visage découvert” (the Republic must be lived with an open face).  

In what follows, I interrogate this notion of “open face,” meaning an unveiled face that is completely exposed and visible to anyone. I wonder what the political unveiling of French Muslims owes to the discourse of surveillance in which nineteenth-century physiognomy was embedded (see Chapter one). Based on the assumption that the human gaze, that we often take for granted as universal, is in fact historically variant, I argue that “facial nudity” does not constitute a degree zero of perception, but an ideal that is always already coded, clothed in layers of cultural and political meaning, covered in symbolic veils.

Besson's debate was not the first of its kind to imbricate Islam, secularism, immigration and the role of women in French society. A series of previous “headscarf affairs” had already set the tone, starting with the 1989 Creil incident. From 1989 to 2010, the terms of the debate on veil-wearing have considerably evolved. The succession of affairs that have arisen over this time span have never just been about the veil, but intertwined with larger social and political agendas. In 1989, French law addressed the question in a way that avoided partisan politics. The main preoccupation was not so much the veil itself as how to best deal with case-by-case scenarios in which its wearing was deemed contentious. This casuistic approach acknowledged the variety of meanings that

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the veil had crystallized for Muslim women. Indeed, a whole range of situational factors were taken into account before rulings were made. As philosopher Sidi Mohammed Barkat has argued, this interpretive dimension is what allowed the veil to penetrate “le champ de l'expérience humaine, [l'arrachant] à la conception qui l'investit d'une signification absolue ou essentielle, toujours unilatéralement établie.” This situation changed in 2004 when a more systematic, rigid approach to law was adopted in addressing headscarves incidents. The question of Islamic veiling became a catalyst for feminist organizing. While some like Christine Delphy, Rokhaya Diallo, founder of Les Indivisibles, and Houria Bouteldja, spokesperson of Les Indigènes de la République, saw support for unveiling as a denial of women's right to self-determination, the majority of French feminists viewed the veil as a tool of patriarchal domination—a narrative that was largely taken up by public media and emulated by mainstream politicians. In the name of women's rights, they felt compelled to liberate veiled Muslims from the shackles of Islamic oppression. Those include politicians, historians, philosophers, and intellectuals such as Elisabeth Badinter, Anne Zelensky, Caroline Fourest, and Chahdorrt Djavann who explains in Bas les voiles! (2003) that “[le] hijabe, c’est le dogme islamique le plus barbare qui s’inscrit sur le corps féminin et s’en empare.”

The polarization between tolérants and intransigeants often ignores more nuanced positions, including those of Muslim feminists like Fatima Mernissi (1940-2015), a Moroccan writer and sociologist who earned a reputation as an Islamic feminist

upon the publication of her first essay, *Sexe, idéologie, Islam*.\(^{308}\) In it, she argues, against a tradition of Judeo-Christian thought, that the concept of civilization in Muslim culture entails the fulfilment of female sexuality, which she describes as an active one. *Le Harem politique: Le Prophète et les femmes* takes an even more radical turn by portraying the prophet Muhammad as a proto-feminist figure.\(^{309}\) Drawing on hadiths, the Sunnah, and the Sira—a collection of documents that narrate the prophet's life—Mernissi explains that Muhammad established the constitution of Medina to protect women from the dangers of living under pre-Islamic Arabian rule. She blames some of his closest acquaintances like Abu Bakra, Abu Huraira, and Umar I for distorting his teachings.

Most importantly, *Le Harem politique* includes an original discussion of the veil. The *hijab*, she notes, was initially used to separate two men, Muhammad who had just gotten married to his cousin Zynab, and Anas, an unexpected visitor. The decision to have women wear it as an instrument of sexual control was made by Umar I, “porte-parole de la résistance masculine aux revendications des femmes.”\(^{310}\) According to Mernissi, this decision undermines Muhammad's true conception of Islam, one that sought to enforce an egalitarian system in which women's agency played a major role. This version of Islam is based on an understanding of the individual as the “siège d'une volonté sacrée, qui [rend] illégitime la violence et superflue la surveillance.”\(^{311}\) In other words, construing the *hijab* as means of protection against sexual attacks denies faith in the self-regulating capacities of human reason—a pillar of Muhammad's Islam. Mernissi's feminist approach reframes


\(^{310}\) Ibid., p. 144.

\(^{311}\) Ibid., p. 234.
debates on the veil in a way that expands the alternative between intransigeants and tolerants. While she refuses to demonize Islam, a religion that she believes to be one of fundamental respect and care for women, she also objects to the ways in which the hijab has been manipulated and refashioned into a tool of oppression in the service of male dominance.

Bruno Nassim Aboudrar’s essay *Comment le voile est devenu musulman* offers a new perspective on the question. Refusing to see in the endorsement/rejection of the Islamic veil only a feminist issue, he argues that the reason the veil has crystallized public anxieties and triggered so many conversations may owe less to the restrictions it places on women than to the way it undermines the visual regime upon which Western culture was founded. According to him, this regime is one that celebrates clarity, brightness, and perceptibility, and considers the act of gazing as the most noble in the hierarchy of senses. By contrast, Islam traditionally rejects these values in favor of a visual economy that privileges opacity and secrecy. In the *Quran*, gazing is dismissed on two accounts, because it may lead to idolatry—hence Islam’s suspicion of images—and because it may arouse sexual desire when directed at the female body. The veil directly participates in this economy by concealing women to preserve their awra—their modesty—and protect men from their concupiscent appetites. In doing so, it negates a core principle of Western thought and practice: “[R]ien ne doit résister à la vue. On prête aux qualités physiques qui la servent des vertus morales parmi celles que nous estimons le plus: cette fameuse clarté où Boileau reconnaît déjà une expression de l’intelligence et, plus récemment, la

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transparence, érigée en exigence politique.” Aboudrar suggests that at the center of this visual system lies the human face due to its central role as both object and subject of the gaze. In the West, the veiled face has been perceived as a threat because it marks a blind spot in a system that has elevated the act of gazing to an organizing principle of social life.

In this chapter, I want to put into dialogue Mernissi’s postcolonial/feminist approach and Aboudrar’s perspective as an art historian and visual studies scholar. I start by examining Marc Garanger’s portraits of unveiled Algerian women in his monograph *Femmes algériennes 1960* in relation to Leïla Sebbar’s novel *Shérazade: 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts* and her short story “La Photo d'identité,” both of which contain metafictional references to Garanger’s work. I continue with a discussion of Assia Djebar’s *Ombre sultane,* an autobiographical novel in which the narrator Isma tells of Hajila's attempt to unveil and escape from the constraints of a violent husband that was once her own. Finally, I move on to an analysis of the photographic exhibit “Mariannes d'aujourd'hui,” which I view as a prefiguration of the 2010 French ban on face-covering. This corpus of texts and pictures provides three instances of what Aboudrar has called “dramaturgies du dévoilement”—in colonial Algeria (Garanger), in post-colonial Algeria (Djebar), and in post-colonial France (“Mariannes d'aujourd'hui”).

The word “dramaturgie” encompasses a variety of definitions. From the ancient

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313 Ibid., p. 17.
314 Garanger, *op. cit.*
317 Djebar 1987, *op. cit.*
318 “‘Mariannes D'aujourd'hui,’ hommage des femmes des cités à la République,” *op. cit.*
Greek *dramatourgos*, which is itself made up of the root *drama*, “a play,” and ourgia, “work,” it first designates the art of dramatic composition, that is, the set of rules and principles needed to write a play. More broadly, dramaturgy refers to the act of adapting a particular work, story, or narrative into a form that can be performed on stage. By metonymic extension, it has become synonymous with the representation itself. These definitions have in common to conjure up notions of manipulation, re-construction, distortion, theatricality, and spectacle, all of which have been instrumental in (re)shaping perceptions of the veil in the Franco-Algerian context that interests us here.

I would particularly like to uncover the ways in which the *haïk*, the *niqab* and the *burqa* have been fashioned into one-dimensional screens in the service of female oppression. This narrative finds its roots in colonial history and was instrumental in establishing “facial nudity” as a core principle of French Republicanism. Ironically enough, Besson was probably right in saying that “La France, la nation, c'est un passé pour se tourner vers l'avenir.” The 2010 nation-wide ban on *niqabs* and *burqas* underscores the persistence of a colonial logic in the way it re-activates memories of the 1958 ceremonies of unveiling that took place in Algiers. I do not mean to suggest that the secular Muslims of today are the *évoluées* of yesterday, that the “Mariannes d'aujourd'hui” are all deep down “Femmes algériennes,” but rather that they epitomize two figures whose bodies, whose faces, have been instrumentalized to tell a story—of modern liberation, political integration—for a dramaturgy that unfolds in ways often beyond their control.

Numerous critics and historians have grappled with the tensions between Islam,
French secularism, and the hijab/burqa. Yet, for all their insistence on the instrumentalization of veils (and their removal) very few have drawn attention to what lies underneath, that is, the face. To put it somewhat ironically perhaps, it is as if postcolonial and feminist criticisms had served as a veil in the way they have disregarded the importance that a notion like the body, and a fortiori the face, plays in any discussion of unveiling in a French context. What is this face that needs to be shown? What happens when, hidden out of modesty, it suddenly enters the realm of the visible? And what does it mean for a nation to impose an ideal of facial legibility that runs counter to its Constitution's guarantee of religious freedom? What about those who cannot comply with this demand? This chapter reframes the debate on Islam, national identity, and secularism within a framework that emphasizes the modalities of their inscription on the female body.

As the recent proliferation of debates and controversies have shown, the veil is a ubiquitous concept that cannot be limited to its sartorial aesthetics; many critics have discussed its polysemy. Jennifer Heath has perhaps best summarized the range of meanings it has been come to encapsulate over time:

As much as the veil is fabric or an article of clothing, it is also a concept. It can be illusion, vanity, artifice, deception, liberation, imprisonment, euphemism, divination, concealment, hallucination, depression, eloquent silence, holiness, the ethers beyond consciousness, the hidden hundredth name of God, the final passage into death, even the biblical apocalypse, the lifting of God's veil, signaling so-called end times. When veiling is forced—then enforced—it is repression. Yet, as we see increasingly today, the veil is also a symbol of

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resistance—against ethnic and religious discrimination. When the veil is forcibly stripped from its wearer, that too, is subjugation, not emancipation.\textsuperscript{322}

The veil has something quite sacred about it and wearing one usually implies a religious mystique. It is also somewhat profane in the way it emphasizes what it intends to keep hidden: the body's carnality. Would Salomé be the erotic figure that we know today if it were not for her seven veils? Fanon showed in his essay \textit{L'An V de la révolution algérienne} that the veil was also a powerful instrument of camouflage in the service of urban guerilla.\textsuperscript{323} In our post 9/11 context of pervasive Islamophobia, many see in it a tool of cultural backwardness, if not an instrument of terrorism. Some critics, like Aboudrar and Mernissi, have argued that before being a mechanism of sexual regulation meant to protect women from male harassment, the veil denoted social rank and upward class mobility in Arabic cultures. Others like Winter have remarked that it can also be a means of empowerment granting women greater freedom of movement by allowing them to circulate in public space and see without being seen. These various conceptions ultimately show that the veil might very well be in the eye of the beholder.

The unveiled face has been invested with a similar range of significations. In contrast to critics' emphasis on the recent politicization of the veil in France, this chapter is concerned with what we could call a French “politics of the face.” We will examine representations of colonial-era \textit{évoluées} and contemporary secular Muslims—two figures that have permeated France's collective imaginary—and pay particular attention to the visual regimes at work in colonial and postcolonial “dramaturgies” of unveiling in order


\textsuperscript{323} Fanon, Frantz. \textit{Sociologie d'une révolution (l'an V de la révolution algérienne)}. Paris: Maspero, 1959.
to explain 1) the emergence of “facial nudity” as a cultural and political norm of Frenchness, and 2) how this ideal served to recast veiled women as unassimilable bodies and relegate them to the margins of state citizenship. Despite the political nature of this discussion, I am not interested in arguing whether wearing an Islamic veil, regardless of its shape or form, should be banned. What I am concerned with is how the recent discourse promoted to legalize unveiling posits a notion of faciality that remains haunted by the specter of colonial history.

Marc Garanger's *Femmes algériennes 1960* through the lens of Sebbar's fiction

Hardly anywhere was women's participation in a conflict as crucial as in the Algerian war of independence (1954-1962). Whether they operated as nurses, cooks, or fighters among the FLN troops, they embodied a threat to colonial power that the Islamic veil only amplified. Indeed, the war quickly turned into what Fanon called a “bataille du voile” and the *haïk* became a tool of gender oppression that needed to be removed. An unveiling ceremony was organized on May 13th, 1958 in Algiers by the wives of generals Massu and Salan in order to promote Franco-Algerian fraternization and civilize “indigenous” women, that is, transform them into *évoluées*. Assembled in the forum of Algiers, a group of veiled women were encouraged by a cohort of European “sisters” to take off their veils and burn them in dramatic fashion. In the following days, similar ceremonies were held in Oran and Philippeville but they produced little impact overall. A

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325 Fanon 1959, *op. cit.*
second unveiling campaign was launched two years later, but by this time the haïk had acquired a new dimension. It had become a tool of resistance preventing easy identification and thus undermining the regime of visual transparency imposed by the French authorities. Unveiling was no longer a social question but a military one. It is in this context that French photographer Garanger shot what remains to date his most famous collection of portraits, *Femmes algériennes 1960*.

In March 1960, as the Algerian war drew to an end, Garanger, then a 25-year-old draftee, left his native Normandy for the small village of Aïn Terzine in Kabylia. First enlisted as an administrative coordinator, he gradually worked his way into becoming a regiment photographer—a position he occupied until his return to France in February 1962. Out of all the pictures that were produced over the course of his appointment (about 20,000), Garanger's portraits of Algerian women, which he was commissioned to photograph following a decree that all local civilians must carry proof of identity, remain the most memorable to date:

> When I arrived for the sittings, there would be a detachment of armed men with machine guns across their shoulders, an interpreter, and the commander. The women would be lining up. Each in turn would sit on a stool outdoors, in front of the whitewashed wall of the house—the *mechta*. I would come to within three feet of them. They would be unveiled. [...] They had no choice in the matter. Their only way of protesting was through their look.\(^{326}\)

These pictures were produced for policing purposes at a rate of two hundred a day, for ten days. Six of them were immediately published in *L'Illustré suisse*. In 1982, fifty others were compiled in *Femmes Algériennes 1960*—a monograph that received such critical

acclaim it was reedited in 1989 and 2002. Since then, Garanger's portraits have been exhibited all over France and abroad. In 2012, *Femmes Algériennes 1960* received further media attention. Interviews of Garanger appeared on several websites and newspapers as Algeria commemorated the 50th anniversary of its independence.

His portraits have also generated a vast body of scholarship. In *Images of the World and the Inscription of War*,327 German filmmaker Harun Farocki uses Garanger's identity photographs as a springboard for articulating a reflection on the representational logic of the camera and the way it relates to our field of vision, insisting on the disjunction of gaze and eye/look—a reflection further developed by Kaja Silverman in her essay *The Threshold of the Visible World*.328 More recently, Francophone critics have dwelt at length on the relationship between *Femmes Algériennes 1960* and French Orientalism with a view to interrogating the sexual and racial politics that inform colonial iconographies of the (un)veiled woman.329

Twenty-two years later, Garanger’s portraits also served as inspiration for Franco-Algerian writer Leïla Sebbar. Born in 1941 from a French mother and an Algerian father, Sebbar left her Algerian hometown at nineteen to study in Paris. After defending her dissertation, she became a professor of French literature and started a career as a writer. Her oeuvre, which includes novels, short stories, essays, travelogues, epistolary exchanges, and photographic albums, focuses on the experience of migration, exile, and

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her own status as a Franco-Algerian métisse. It is also concerned with visual arts and provides a feminist critique of the male gaze through an examination of what it means to look at women, “especially women of non-French extraction.”

Such concerns profoundly affected her reception of Femmes Algériennes 1960.

Sebbar’s re-appropriation of Garanger’s work is very reminiscent of the way Assia Djebar engaged with Delacroix’s paintings. In her famous short story Femmes d’Alger dans leur appartement,331 she entered into a dialogue with his homonymous painting (1834) which stages a familiar Western fantasy by portraying three unveiled women on the floor of a lavishly decorated room. By giving a voice to these women, Djebar’s story offered a counterpoint to Delacroix’s depiction of “the colonial harem” as a space of desire and sexual depravity intended for a white male audience. The way she revised Delacroix’s perspective offers an example of intertextual relationship in which the Algerian woman, long represented as voiceless, finally responds to the French man.

Sebbar adopts a similar approach in her novel Shérazade, 17 ans, brune, frisée, les yeux verts and her short story “La Photo d'identité,” both of which include explicit references to Garanger’s Femmes algériennes 1960. Shérazade is the first in a series of three novels to chronicle the life of a seventeen-year-old “beurette” who left her family home to set out for Algeria, and wanders the streets of Paris with her new friends, a group

of outcasts, as she waits for her forged papers to be completed. While in the capital, she
develops a romance with Julien Desrosiers, a “pied noir” dilettante with an interest in
Orientalist painting who becomes obsessed with filming and photographing her body. “La
Photo d'identité” is also set in Paris; it follows Yacine, a French boy of Algerian descent,
as he stumbles upon one of Garanger's portraits in a bookstore. This discovery allows him
to piece together a Franco-Algerian past that his parents have always been secretive
about. In front of the bookstore, he meets a stranger who, we find out, plans to kill
Garanger on the ground that his mother, the subject of the photograph that grabbed
Yacine's attention, went mad after she had her portrait taken.

Both Shérazade and “La Photo d'identité” tell stories about pictures. To be more
specific, not only are they conditioned by pictures, they also address a range of questions
about the relationship between literature and visual culture. Examining the incorporation
of references to Garanger's portraits within these narratives is interesting. On the one
hand, Sebbar uses photography as a means to elaborate on Marianne Hirsch’s notion of
“postmemory.”333 The act of looking at Garanger’s photographs is described as a violent
and undesirable, yet necessary experience because it marks the first step in re-membering
a colonial past to which post-colonial generations have only had partial access. On the
other hand, Sebbar's reading of Femmes algériennes 1960 initiated a trend of anti-
pictorialism that has largely and uncritically been taken up by much of recent
postcolonial and feminist discourse, regardless of the problematic implications it poses.

As Jarrod Hayes explains, Shérazade embodies female resistance to the

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“ethnographic gaze that tries to bind her to the idées reçues of Oriental femininity.”

Her refusal to cater to male scopophilia is a recurring motif of the novel. Attending a chic Parisian party with her friends France and Zouzou, she is photographed without her consent. Her reaction is immediate: “Elle lança l'appareil au sol à plusieurs mètres d'elle et partit avec Zouzou sans prendre garde à la crise qu'elle allait provoquer.”

This impulsive gesture conveys the rage with which she rebels against the way her “exotic” beauty has made her the target of constant scrutiny. On multiple occasions, she refuses to comply with Julien's directions as he attempts to fix her into a cliché of the Oriental harem, objecting: “Je ne suis pas une odalisque.”

This violent mise-en-scène of the photographic image reaches its most powerful expression when Shérazade is confronted with a volume of Femmes algériennes: “[Elle] feuilletait l'album photographique et les larmes coulaient, malgré elle.”

In describing Garanger's subjects as women who “subissent l'arbitraire,” yet who find the strength to resist in front of the “objectif-mitrailleur,” Sebbar invites us to consider the fetishistic appropriation of Sherazade's image as a (neo)colonial politics of representation, one that symbolically binds her to Garanger's subjects.

A similar fascination with and distrust of pictures permeates “La Photo d'identité.” While Shérazade affiliates Femmes algériennes with a tradition of colonial imagery, one that includes the likes of Delacroix, Matisse, and Loti; “La Photo d'identité”

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only deals with Garanger. The way his work is introduced within the narrative could be described as a kind of literary close-up in at least three respects. First, the constraints of the short story, a genre that entails a great economy of means, allows for an exclusive and narrow focus on *Femmes algériennes*. Second, it is through a complex process of mise-en-abyme that the famous “photo d'identité” is disclosed to the reader. Yacine looks at it through a small hole created by the mist that has gathered on the bookstore window, a hole that the narrator describes as “l'oeil d'une caméra.” It is as if Yacine temporarily replaced Garanger—a position that makes him aware of the violence inherent in the photographic act. Third, the whole scene is told using internal focalization despite the heterodiegetic narration. The scope of perception is entirely defined by Yacine's eye even though the story is told in the third person.

The 1960’s photographs emanate an unsettling aura. Yacine initially finds one of the portraits, to be “étrange” and much more poignant than the flow of graphic war images he usually sees on television. His surprise turns into great discomfort as he walks into the bookstore: “Vous êtes malade? Vous avez un malaise? Vous êtes tout pâle…,” the employee asks. The stranger experiences a similar sense of discomfort. The prospect of holding Garanger's book in his hands fills him with a fear that borders on panic: “Il est peut-être fou,” the narrator suggests. This madness recalls Shérazade's paroxysm of crying as she leafs through *Femmes algériennes* for the first time. In front of

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340 Ibid., p. 60.
341 Ibid., pp. 59, 60, 63, 64.
342 Ibid., p. 67.
343 Ibid., p. 67.
Julien and his friend, she weeps “comme une femme folle, doucement, sans bruit et sans interruption.”

In staging these affective responses, Sebbar throws new light on the reception of *Femmes algériennes* 1960. Garanger has always insisted that his portraits should be read as a testimony to the violence of a colonial war in which he reluctantly participated: “One day, the camp major decreed that the inhabitants of the villages must all have identity cards. Either I refused and went to prison, or I accepted. I understood my luck: it was to be a witness, to make pictures of what I saw that mirrored my opposition to the war” — a stance re-iterated in his foreword to *Femmes Algériennes*: “j'ai reçu leur regard à bout portant, premier témoin de leur protestation muette, violente. Je veux leur rendre témoignage.” *Shérazade* and “La Photo d'identité” provide a counter-narrative to Garanger's account of photography as a redemptive testimonial practice. Sebbar's treatment of post-war trauma and her insistence on the experience of looking at *Femmes algériennes*, which she describes as a fundamentally painful one, offer a new lens through which to consider his ID pictures. Like Garanger, Sebbar denounces a politics of representation that required women to remove their haïks. Like Garanger, she portrays these women as embodying resistance to the conventions of colonial picture-making in the way they display on their bared faces open disapproval. However, Sebbar's fiction operates a paradigmatic shift in terms of how the photographic act takes place. Unlike Garanger, she does not stage a male gaze (Garanger looking at his models) but the

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346 Garanger, *op. cit.*, foreword.
(ex-)colonized male gaze (Yacine and the stranger looking at Garanger's models). The French photographer described women's gaze as “à bout portant,” an expression that yields a variety of meanings. On the one hand, “à bout portant” signals the close proximity between he and his sitters. On the other hand, it denotes the violence of the photographic act. If Garanger used the expression to insist on the intensity with which his sitters looked at him, as if “at pointblank,” Sebbar uses it differently. In “La Photo d'identité,” she describes his camera as an “objectif mitrailleur,” thus comparing the process of picture-making with a form of murder. It is no longer the women's gaze that is “à bout portant” but Garanger's. To take a close-up required him to shoot at pointblank. This comparison is further hinted at by the way Sebbar repeatedly calls him a “soldat-photographe.”

In his reading of the short story, Andy Stafford argues that “The photograph always invites another discourse, is never pure, is constantly surrounded by language (narrative, commentary, caption).” Sebbar's Shérazade and “La Photo d'identité” are attempts to construct a story around Garanger's photographs that integrates the (post-colonial) perspective of the descendants in any appreciation of the Algerian conflict—a

347 Loc. cit.
348 Garanger recalls, “I would come within three feet of them.” Naggar, op. cit., p. 424.
349 In doing so, Sebbar draws attention to Garanger’s ambivalent position. Although Garanger said he wanted to use photography as a means to testify, he also claimed Edward Curtis’s pictures of Indian Americans as his main source of inspiration. In his postface to Femmes algériennes 1960, Garanger explains that he was already familiar with Edward Curtis’s portraits when asked to shoot his identity photographs. In a recent interview for photographie.com, Garanger elaborates on this reference: “J’ai immédiatement pensé à Edward Curtis, qui avait photographié les Indiens au début du siècle. Curtis avait photographié un peuple opprimé par les Américains. J’allais rendre compte du peuple algérien opprimé par la France.” Garanger, op. cit., postface. What Garanger failed to notice was that Curtis’s photographs participated in a racial discourse that fetishized American Indians's culture and lore. To what degree did Garanger reproduce a similar discourse in colonial Algeria? To the best of my knowledge no study has focused on Garanger’s reference to Curtis.
gesture that is all the more crucial as “La Photo d’identité” insists on the silence that surrounds it. Photography is used as a “vector of memorial transmission”351 whereby Sebbar does not just interrogate what is to be remembered or forgotten but how it should be remembered. In doing so, she fosters a memory of the war that acknowledges, in inaugural fashion, the experience of France's post-colonial populations. I suggest considering Shérazade and “La Photo d'identité” as a series of captions that rewrite Garanger's preface to Femmes algériennes 1960 by inviting us to consider the violence it depicts from a different standpoint.

Ironically perhaps, Sebbar's attempt to break away from Garanger's narrative of redemption effects a fundamental violence. In order to articulate a new discourse on Femmes algériennes, she needs to “kill” him. As Barthes famously argued, “la naissance du lecteur doit se payer de la mort de l'auteur.”352 In “La Mort de l’auteur,” he argues against a Lansonian approach to literature that derives a text's meaning from its author's intentions, opinions, experiences or life circumstances. As the “destruction de toute voix,”353 writing cannot be limited to a single interpretive grid. Rather, it allows for a constellation of readings that destabilize univocal modes of narration. This death of the author is evoked in “La Photo d'identité” by the stranger who seeks to avenge his mother; she became mad as a result of having her picture taken by Garanger: “Ce photographe français, je le cherche depuis des années. […] Cet homme, s'il n'est pas mort, je le tue. Je

353 Ibid., p. 61.
le cherche pour le tuer...”354 The violence of this act is somewhat assuaged by the fact that it ends up falling back on the portrait of his mother. Indeed, the short story ends with the protagonist destroying the famous “photo d'identité” as he was not able to locate Garanger: “Il arrache la page soigneusement. Il regarde la femme une dernière fois, il plie la page en deux, quatre, seize... et déchire le portrait, suivant les pliures jusqu'au plus petit carré. [...] 'Voilà, c'est fini. J'ai tué le soldat photographe et ma mère me reconnaîtra quand j'arriverai chez elle, au village.”355 While this last gesture literally fails, photography being, as Walter Benjamin taught us, a means of technology that has the potential to be infinitely reproduced, it symbolically succeeds as it provides the conditions for a new narrative on Garanger's work to arise, one that questions his account of photography as a redemptive practice. While Sebbar condemns the violence that his portraits depict, she also insists that we should make a point of remembering it to articulate a post-colonial memory of the Algerian war. Her short story opens up a space in which two narratives on Femmes algériennes confront each other: Garanger's account of photography as testimonial and Sebbar's as inherently violent. The unveiled face becomes a ubiquitous site where diverging interpretations of the photographic act converge, where two sides meet—the colonial and the post-colonial, Sebbar and Garanger, the photograph as indexical and affective, as cold document and emotional vehicle; it should not surprise anyone that the library where Yacine sees the portrait should be named “Les deux rives.”

In short, Shérazade and “La Photo d'identité” are iconoclastic texts. Both vilify the image in a variety of ways. While Shérazade breaks a camera—in a symbolic gesture

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355 Ibid., pp. 82-83.
to destruct the Orientalist clichés that sexualize her body—, Yacine's companion tears up his mother's portrait in an attempt to wreak his revenge against Garanger. Even Sebbar's decision to name her short story “La Photo d'identité” as opposed to, say, “Le Portrait” suggests that she denies Garanger's work any aesthetic value. I argue that this sometimes subtle, sometimes overt, but always pervading iconophobia has informed subsequent postcolonial and feminist criticism of Femmes algériennes 1960.

That Marc Garanger's portraits stage female rebellion against the violence of French occupation has been aptly argued by scholars. In her essay Picturing the Maghreb: Literature, Photography, (Re)Presentation, scholar Mary Vogl insists that “[t]he returned gaze of these women work against any nostalgic or complacent view of colonialism in Algeria,” and that their revolt precludes any possibility of viewing them as weak victims. Carole Naggar further elaborates on the type of violence they were subjected to, calling it “a kind of rape” for two reasons. The first one, according to her, has to do with the act of unveiling. While the veil is most often worn by Muslim women as a symbol of modesty, French colonial authorities saw it as an instrument of oppression that had to be removed to emancipate Algerian women, that is, to have them abide by Western standards of femininity: “For an Algerian woman, the veil is inseparable from the face. It may be taken off within the secrecy of the walls among women or between husband and wife, but never publicly in front of a stranger […]. The veil is like a second skin, and the unveiling does more than lay the face bare: it flays it.”

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357 Naggar, op. cit., p. 424.
358 Ibid., p. 425.
practices of surveillance that sought to make female bodies more legible. Garanger's identity photographs thus marked an attempt to inscribe such bodies into an economy of visibility—a process that Fanon denounced as feeding the systemic violence of French Imperialism. The second type of rape, Naggar claims, is photography's. Islam is generally understood to be an iconophobic religion that forbids representation: “A portrait is hasuma, shameful,”359 which Sebbar confirms in “La Photo d'identité”: “L'image, le prophète a interdit l'image, il faut aimer Dieu, pas son image, tu comprends. Si on veut te photographier, tu dis non.[...] Si tu voles l'image, tu détruis la personne, ils te tueront, pas avec le fusil, avec la caméra.”360 To photograph is to break Islam's taboo on pictorial representation.

It is reasonable to assume that Garanger's subjects had never shown their faces to complete strangers until they had their pictures taken. The moment of unveiling was most likely experienced as a traumatic humiliation. In the face of such violence, these women reacted in a variety of ways. In an attempt to preserve some semblance of modesty, many of them used their clothing to cover their bosom while others simply placed their arms on their thighs. The vast majority of them confronted the camera, looking at it either upward or downward from an elevated position. A few of them avoided eye contact, directing their gaze outside of the photographic frame, as if to signal their refusal to collaborate. While many critics, like Karine Eileraas, agree that “[t]he women in Garanger's images […] communicate a mix of indifference, curiosity, indictment, and hostility with their eyes,”361

359 Loc. cit.
361 Eileraas, op. cit., p. 817.
they remain largely concerned with those pictures in which expressions of hostility, contempt and resistance prevail. Similarly, Carole Naggar writes that “the women's faces tell us about the difficulties of their lives, but they also tell us that they will not yield. Their angry look is the 'evil eye' that they cast to protect themselves and to curse their enemies. These defiant looks tell us of France's coming defeat and shame”\textsuperscript{362}—a sentiment shared by Eileraas who claims that “[t]he women photographed by Garanger most strikingly communicate resistance with their eyes and facial expressions,”\textsuperscript{363} and that “[c]ollectively, [their] looks assume an aggressive, hostile, even scathing quality [...]. Especially, they destabilize colonial positions of mastery and domination \textit{vis-à-vis} the image. [...] The defiant postures and expressions that haunt Garanger's imagery locate possibilities for subversive rupture within the processes of photographic composition and interpretation.”\textsuperscript{364} In her novel \textit{Shérazade}, Sebbar also singles out the most angry-looking portraits:

These faces had the hardness and the violence of those who are subject to despotic rule, knowing that they will find in themselves the force of resistance. These Algerian women all faced the machine gun of the lens, with the same intense, savage stare, a fierceness that the picture could only file for posterity without ever mastering or dominating.\textsuperscript{365}

Likewise, “La Photo d'identité” chooses as its central theme the portrait of a woman whose aggressive gaze intrigues Yacine and the stranger. Focusing exclusively on these defiant faces has allowed critics to argue that Garanger's portraits open up a space in which female agency is reclaimed. What these women show, beyond angry looks, is a refusal to

\textsuperscript{362} Naggar, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 426.
\textsuperscript{363} Eileeras, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 817.
\textsuperscript{364} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 827.
\textsuperscript{365} Sebbar 1982, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 220.
participate in a colonial regime of representation—a posture that Shérazade emulates in her own way—, a willingness to resist the objectifying gaze of the camera and to authorize Garanger's pictures on their own terms.

One could invoke Deleuze's and Guattari's notion of “faciality” (visagéité) to support this reading of *Femmes algériennes*. In their 1980 essay *Mille plateaux*, they formulate an anti-levinassian stance that posits the face as a site of fundamental misrecognition: “C'est une erreur de faire comme si le visage ne devenait inhumain qu'à partir d'un certain seuil: gros plan, grossissement exagéré, expression insolite, etc. Inhumain dans l'homme, le visage l'est dès le début, il est par nature gros plan, avec ses surfaces blanches inanimées, ses trous noirs brillants, son vide et son ennui.”

As discussed in Chapter One, Levinas described our sense of the face as a pre-discursive, universal given and a token of our humanity. Unlike him, Deleuze and Guattari consider it a historical by-product. Equating the birth of Western imperialism with that of Christianity, they argue that Jesus—the archetypal white male—became the ontological norm of faciality. In other words, the injunction to assume a face, while historically dated, was imposed as a universal one by white Europeans who used Christ's appearance as their exemplar: “Le visage est donc une idée tout à fait particulière dans sa nature, ce qui ne l'empêche pas d'avoir acquis et d'exercer la fonction la plus générale.”

Deleuze and Guattari go on to argue that faces are created after this original by an abstract machine, a white wall/black hole system set in motion by certain assemblages of power or social formations that determine the relationship of hole (subjectivity) to wall (significance):

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visages concrets individués,” they contend, “se produisent et se transforment autour de ces unités, de ces combinaisons d'unités.”

Although their demonstration is couched in metaphorical language, it adds a productive angle of interpretation to previous discussions of *Femmes algériennes*. The process of facialization described by Deleuze and Guattari is both staged and problematized in Garanger's portraits. In Sebbar, ekphrastic accounts of *Femmes algériennes* all insist on the white wall/black hole complex that underpins the production of faces. For example, in “La Photo d'identité,” the portrait that piqued Yacine's curiosity depicts “une femme [...] assise contre un mur blanc, elle regarde le photographe par en dessous, un oeil noir, méchant.” One page later, the narrator mentions the same portrait, calling it “la photographie de la femme berbère assise devant un mur blanc” — a woman who, we later find out, happens to be the stranger's mother. She told him that on the day the picture was taken, “les soldats l'ont trouvée, ils ne l'ont pas battue, mais ils l'ont traînée jusqu'au banc contre le mur blanc.”

It is the same white wall that attracts Yacine's attention as he leafs through Garanger's collection: “il voit une autre femme, plus jeune, assise contre le mur blanc.”

In his postface to *Femmes algériennes 1960*, Garanger claimed that his friend Pierre Gassman offered to help him put together a portfolio to be submitted as part of his application for the Niépce prize, convincing him to scale up the portraits and increase the

368 Ibid., p. 217.
370 Ibid., p. 71.
371 Ibid., p. 80.
372 Ibid., p. 72.
whiteness of the background to enhance the dramatic aura of the scene. Applying a Deleuzian framework, one could argue that this “white wall of significance” is part of a photographic apparatus that was meant to facialize Garanger's sitters, that is, to turn them into Western-like colonial-era évolutées.

As an adjective, “évolué” designates the state of having undergone a gradual change. This transformation is usually defined as a positive one. To evolve is, as the CNRTL website suggests, to reach “un certain degré de développement, de perfectionnement.” As a noun, it refers to any individual free from “notions traditionnelles religieuses ou morales.” In colonial times, the “évolué” became an avatar of the civilized other. However, the word did not simply denote an enlightened mind; it also implied a certain mise-en-scène of the body, a way of presenting oneself to the world. For men, this meant wearing Western-style dress, exchanging their pagnes for trousers, or as Fanon wrote, donning metaphorical “white masks.” For some women, this meant removing the veils that concealed them from sight in order to look presentable. This disciplining of the body is emblematic of the Western visual economy of transparency, one in which facial nudity occupies a central role.

However, Garanger’s photographs suggest that facial nudity is not a pre-condition of visibility but a product of it. In other words, the bare face is not a blank canvas; it is not what makes it possible to see/read someone, but that which is always already seen/read through the lens of French imperialism. Indeed, the faces of Garanger’s sitters serve as symbols of Western progress. Despite their wishes, these women became emblems of a

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new, modern femininity whose standards were fundamentally incompatible with the imposition of the veil.

As discussed, critics have consensually insisted on the defiant looks that these women cast in a gesture of resistance. This “œil noir” that strikes Yacine is also one that grabs Shérazade’s attention: “Ces Algériennes avaient toutes devant l'objectif-mitrailleur, le même regard intense, farouche, d'une sauvagerie que l'image ne saurait qu'archiver, sans jamais la maîtriser ni la dominer.”374 What their expressions make explicit is a refusal to partake in an enterprise of colonial subjugation. Photography captures the powerful threat that their gaze metonymizes. As Deleuze and Guattari argue:

Si le visage est bien le Christ, c'est-à-dire l'Homme blanc moyen quelconque, les premières déviances, les premiers écarts-types sont raciaux: homme jaune, homme noir, hommes de deuxième ou troisième catégorie. […] Ils doivent être christianisés, c'est-a-dire visagéifiés. […] Le racisme procède par détermination des écarts de déviance, en fonction du visage Homme blanc qui prétend intégrer dans des ondes de plus en plus excentriques et retardées les traits qui ne sont pas conformes, tantôt pour les tolérer à telle place et dans telles conditions, dans tel ghetto, tantôt pour les effacer sur le mur qui ne supporte jamais l'altérité.375

One could analyze Garanger's portraits as instances in which the black holes of subjectivity (represented by the sitters' gaze) rebel against the white wall of significance (that of the mechta, and the conventional white background of ID pictures) that was meant to neutralize them. The purpose of this wall is to re-facialize Algerian women by integrating their features into a visual economy that is supposed to bring them closer to the facial standard of “l'Homme blanc.” Their subjectivity radiates through their gaze, pierces the white surface of the wall and jams the imperial machine of faciality that coordinates how holes

375 Deleuze & Guattari, op. cit., p. 218. My emphasis.
and wall should interact. In Garanger's portraits, faces become not just sites of articulation upon and through which female subjectivity is negotiated; they are not just the sites of an excess that the camera cannot quite capture but an occasion for meta-critical commentary on the origin of authorship and the process of authorizing a picture. Through a series of interventions—sorting, editing, emphasizing details, enlarging, and paratextual glossing—Garanger asserts his agency as a war photographer; yet this process is contested by the visual rhetoric that his portraits deploy since his sitters reject the codes of colonial portraiture and attempt to authorize the pictures on their own terms.

Encouraged by Sebbar, the narrative of resistance that has prevailed in discussions of *Femmes algériennes 1960* is one that needs nuancing. Many of the portraits that Garanger compiled have been overlooked by critics. Those generally represent vulnerable women. Probably impressed by the detachment of armed men supervising the scene, or perhaps scared by the ritual of the camera that they do not understand, they protect themselves, covering their chest in an attempt to maintain some semblance of dignity. They are docile bodies—bodies subjected to power, enclosed, classified, controlled with the sole purpose of law enforcement. Far from resisting the camera, these faces show fear, compliance and submission to the violence perpetrated upon them.

Garanger's portraits stage a variety of affects that prevent us from privileging a specific reading of *Femmes Algériennes 1960*. This is perhaps best illustrated by Harun Farocki in his 1988 film *Images of the World and the Inscription of War*. In one of the final sequences, Farocki uses his hand to partially re-veil the face of one sitter, first concealing her chin, mouth and nose, then her eyes and forehead. As he does so, the voice over comments, “The eyes must be accustomed to meet a strange gaze. The mouth cannot
be accustomed to being looked at.”\textsuperscript{376} In partially hiding her face the way he does, Farocki draws attention to the facial micro-movements that criticism has often neglected to take into account. Indeed, while her eyes display a rather neutral expression, a pout of discomfort slightly alters her mouth, thus offering a counterpoint to analyses that systematically insist on the prevalence of defiant gazes. In this pout lies an expression of pure corporeality, an instinctive response to the photographer’s gaze, an impulse that escapes the control of reason. The sitter is not just making a face (“une grimace”); she is making a new face—a face that does not comply with the conventions of Western photographs, in which smiling is traditionally used to denote the tacit agreement that binds the photographer to her/his subject. The woman’s distorted mouth is a re-assertion of her subjectivity in the face of a colonial initiative meant to produce standardized faces for the purpose of identification and surveillance.

Karina Eileraas wrote that “none of these women opt to smile for the camera. This is important to note in a cross-cultural encounter in which the smile would typically serve a mitigating function to mute the potentially disruptive or confrontational role of the other's gaze.”\textsuperscript{377} While this statement applies to many photographs, including the one on which Farocki focused, it is not entirely true. As surprising as it may seem, \textit{Femmes Algériennes 1960} includes at least two photographs of smiling women. If we accept Eileraas's assumption that smiling is an act of collaboration, then such photographs compel us to reconsider the feminist discourse that has elevated Garanger’s sitters to a position of resistance and authority. Is it really so, however? Does the smile always signal a desire to

\textsuperscript{376} Farocki, \textit{op. cit.}
\textsuperscript{377} Eileeras, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 817.
negotiate or compromise? Could it not also be interpreted as an ironic sign of mockery, in which case it would still preserve its disruptive potential? Far from being complicit in the violence imposed on them, these two women would be laughing at it.

Much of postcolonial/feminist criticism on Femmes algériennes has portrayed Garanger's sitters as rebellious subjects with defiant gazes. This reading was encouraged by Sebbar's own take on the volume. In “La Photo d'identité,” she posits Garanger's (symbolic) death—a postcolonial re-enactment of Roland Barthes's “la mort de l'auteur”—as the pre-condition for a new narrative that rehabilitates female agency. While this reading has largely prevailed, I argue that it is entangled in two contradictions. First, in producing her counter-narrative, Sebbar dismisses Garanger's intentions as irrelevant. The women's aggressive looks, she claims, constitute an attempt to resist the objectifying power of the camera—a problematic position given how much effort Garanger focused on post-treating such photographs. Yet, as Andy Stafford showed, portraying these women as defiant-looking precisely suggests that Garanger “had intended things in this way”;378 he wanted to testify and convey the violence done to these women. In other words, while Sebbar's reading of Garanger is predicated upon the notion that his motives should play no role in defining the meaning of his work, her very interpretation of it subtly reintegrates him as author, if we follow Stafford’s argument. Second, and perhaps most importantly, her reading of Femmes algériennes is problematic in the way it overlooks a range of ambiguous portraits that seem to call into question the narrative of resistance she articulates in her fiction. The way Garanger's pictures have been read as solely staging revolt has contributed

378 Stafford, op. cit., p. 162.
to the reification of the sitters’ subjectivity—a posture that they precisely sought to avoid.

More broadly, Garanger’s collection of portraits and their treatment in Sebbar’s fiction underscore the tensions at work in the notion of “facial nudity.” In the context of the Algerian war, the naked face was never a pure potentiality, a blank slate waiting to be given meaning or value, but an ideological construct. Indeed, baring one’s face became a sign of female emancipation, an embrace of Western rules of conduct, a symbol of social progress and civilization. If Sebbar has drawn attention to these tensions, her re-appropriation of *Femmes Algériennes 1960* appears just as problematic. In describing Garanger’s sitters as figures of colonial resistance, she paradoxically gives in to a similar kind of objectification.

**Metonymy or Hypallage? Assia Djebar's Poetics of the Face**

*Femmes algériennes 1960* and the corpus of literary/critical texts it has generated has drawn attention to the face as a locus where the parameters of female subjectivity are endlessly negotiated. In what follows, I examine Djebar's novel *Ombre sultane* as a corrective to Sebbar's fiction, which played a crucial role in reifying unveiled women. To what extent does Djebar's novel re-configures the relationship between female interiority and its inscription on the body—the face—in ways that avoid reducing the unveiled woman to a monolithic figure?

Assia Djebar's work is concerned with the various forms of oppression that Algerian women have had to endure at different stages in their nation’s history. As a
woman-writer,” a label that always made her uncomfortable,\(^\text{379}\) she drew attention to the plight of her silenced, disenfranchised “sisters” during French colonization, the war of independence, and in post-colonial Algeria where patriarchy has remained prevalent. Very much like Sebbar, her project is “to set free the ’odalisques.’”\(^\text{380}\) Such preoccupations permeate her “Algerian Quartet,” an autobiographical project that was left unfinished after her passing in February 2015. Out of the four projected volumes, three were published before her death: *L'Amour, la fantasia* (1985), *Ombre sultane* (1987), and *Vaste est la prison* (1995). Combining personal experience with collective memory, colonial archives, and myth, these texts perform what Mortimer has called a “narrative ’unveiling.’”\(^\text{381}\) “Dans mes premiers livres,” Djebar explained, “j’avançais voilée. Dans le quatuor, je me montre.”\(^\text{382}\)

*Ombre sultane* takes up this notion of “unveiling” to treat it both literally and in figurative fashion. Isma, a learned, emancipated woman and fictional avatar of Djebar, tells the story of the young, uneducated Hajila, chronicling her effort to escape from a violent husband that was once her own. The two women are indeed co-wives, yet they are not rivals. They develop a strong feminine bond that ultimately allows Hajila to throw off the shackles of her unhappy marriage. This process of liberation is a gradual one. Hajila

\(^{379}\) “J’écris, comme tant d’autres femmes écrivains algériennes avec un sentiment d’urgence, contre la régression et la misogynie. Je me présente à vous comme écrivain; un point, c’est tout. Je n’ai pas besoin—je suppose—de dire ’femme-écrivain.’ Quelle importance? Dans certains pays, on dit ’écrivaine’ et, en langue française, c’est étrange, vaine se perçoit davantage au féminin qu’au masculin.” See “Google Rend Hommage à Assia Djebar.” *La Voix d’Algérie*, 30 June 2017, lavoixdalgerie.com/google-rend-hommage-a-assia-djebar/.


starts by taking advantage of her husband's repeated absences to leave the confines of her apartment and venture into the streets of Algiers where she discards her veil and enjoys “les frémissements du dehors.” A further step is taken when Isma provides her with a key to the apartment, a symbolic act of transmission whereby Hajila becomes free to move as she pleases and take control of her destiny. Unlike the kind of unveiling that the Femmes Algériennes 1960 collection depicts, the one Djebar describes is voluntary and actively pursued. It does not take place in colonial Kabylia but post-colonial Algiers. It might be tempting to consider Hajila as a figure of resistance similar to Sebbar's interpretation of Garanger's sitters. Yet, as I will argue, Djebar's portrayal of Hajila avoids reproducing the pitfalls of reification that have plagued appreciation of Garanger's portraits.

Ombre sultane was published in 1987, two years prior to the first French “headscarf affair” in which unveiling became a major point of contention, and three years after the enactment of the Algerian Family code—a set of conservative laws based on the Sharia which profoundly re-defined marriage, imposing more restrictions on women. Djebar's narrative of emancipation offers a timely critique of this code and the brand of Islamic revivalism that made it possible. Hajila's unveiling, the disclosure of her “naked” face to unknown passers-by and readers transgresses men's right to control her body. This celebration of female “nudity” is all the more subversive as it takes place in a typically masculine space—that of the street.

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383 Djebar 1987, op. cit., p. 94.
The experience of female embodiment has largely been commented upon. Critics have drawn attention to Ombre sultane's scenes of unveiling, explaining the ways in which Hajila re-discovers her body upon discarding her haïk. In what follows, I argue that Hajila's empowerment is a function of removing her veil. Only when she is “naked” and fully exposed to the gaze of others does she develop a sense of the face—a process that ultimately allows her to enter the realm of subjectivity.

A brief lexical inventory suffices to show the importance of faciality in the novel. Out of the 173 pages that my edition comprises, the French word “face” appears eighteen times, the word “tête” thirty-eight times, and the word “visage” sixty-five times, not to mention compounds like “dévisager,” or “envisager.” Faces are omnipresent, whether they look impenetrable or lifeless, pale or covered in make-up, worried or joyful, tense or calm, expressionless or in tears. They can also give rise to autoscopic experiences: I can see my face in someone else's, but I can also not recognize my own face when I see it, or worse, feel like I do not possess one at all.

The variety of ways in which faces are described in Ombre sultane seems to

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386 Ibid., p. 34.
387 Ibid., p. 168.
388 Ibid., pp. 41, 58, 88, 95.
389 Ibid., p. 134.
390 Ibid., pp. 38, 60.
391 Ibid., pp. 42, 92, 134.
392 Ibid., pp. 46, 76, 155.
393 Ibid., p. 143.
394 Ibid., pp. 53, 61, 76, 92, 132.
395 Ibid., p. 168.
396 Ibid., p. 15.
397 Ibid., pp. 20, 106, 111, 113.
emphasize their role as natural markers of subjectivity. Yet Hajila's experience tells a different story. From the moment she struggles to recognize her reflection in the mirror at the beginning of the novel until her features blend into Isma's in the final pages, she goes through a series of transformations that establish her face as a locus where female subjectivity is never taken for granted. The inscription of Hajila's body—of her face—not just in the narrative economy of *Ombre Sultane* but in Djebar's own language offers a form of feminine self-expression that challenges any specific notion of “womanhood”, presenting the female experience as endlessly changing and difficult to pin down.

Djebar’s attempt to develop a voice that successfully accounts for the range of positions from which women articulate their own visions and sensibilities is echoed in her prose style which celebrates female solidarity while emphasizing individuality, variability, and freedom of self-determination. In *Ombre sultane*, portraits of Hajila alternate between hypallage and metonymy, and in doing so, lay the basis for a poetics of the face that precludes any essentializing mode of identification. This poetics, I argue, can be read as a response and corrective to Sebbar's objectifying account of Garanger's portraits.

Hypallage is commonly understood as a figure of speech in which the syntactic relation between two words, usually a noun and an adjective, is reversed and each of them assumes the construction which would have been assigned to the other. In *De Arte Dicendi* (1556) Sanctius, who was the first to consider hypallage a proper trope, claims that it consists in “remplacer un accident par un autre accident, et cela de diverses manières: parfois deux épithètes sont reliées à deux sujets, improprement toutefois, si l'on
ne restitue pas chaque épithète à son sujet.” While grammatically sound, this replacement or substitution creates semantic confusion. When Djebar describes the effects of aging on Isma's face, she explains that her “visage anxieusement se mire par secondes griffées.” While following the rules of agreement, the final combination of “secondes” and “griffées” undermines traditional expectations. One would presume the adjective “griffées” to qualify “visage,” as a “scratched face” is more apt to convey the passing of time and its consequences on Isma than the more poetic but certainly less logical “scratched seconds.” This “accident,” to borrow Sanctius's terminology, defies common linguistic practices and cultural assumptions. Likewise, when Hajila's husband is described as having a “face à la paleur de cire, qui s'effrite dans un brouillard,” one cannot say with absolute certainty whether the wax (literal interpretation) or the face itself (figurative interpretation) is crumbling.

By bringing together two seemingly unrelated realities, hypallage creates a sense of undecidability that unhinges discourse and resists conceptual resolution. The most emblematic example is perhaps to be found in the opening pages of *Ombre sultane*. Hajila is absorbed in domestic chores, clearing the table after breakfast and doing dishes, when she is suddenly overcome with distress and sorrow: “Une tasse, sous tes doigts soudain fébriles, se fêle contre la faïence de l'évier.” Confined within the limits of her apartment by her husband, she daydreams of the outdoors and what city life must be like.

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Her inability to venture into the world results in a fit of crying: “Des larmes coulent sur
 ton visage fin et brun; […] Tes larmes reprennent, s'égouttent sur l'évier, sur le sol
 étincelant. Tu te penches (‘ramasser mon visage en miettes, vomir mon âme!.. O Sidi
 Abderahmane aux deux tombeaux!’)"\textsuperscript{402} Hajila's nervous breakdown finds a striking
 parallel in the way her body disintegrates. Her physical dislocation is further hinted at as
 she goes on to make the bed: “Mouvement cassé de tes bras.”\textsuperscript{403} The ambiguity of
 “cassé,” which qualifies “mouvement,” could also and perhaps more logically apply to
 “bras.” Indeed in French, the phrase “bras cassé” does not simply denote a broken arm; it
 also designates in slang someone who is unable to perform even the slightest task
 properly, a good-for-nothing. Hajila's tired movements and the sense of extreme
 weariness she feels are reinforced by the \textit{broken} syntax of the sentence (“Mouvement
 cassé de tes bras”) whose verb has been amputated. Hajila's body functions as if it were
 as a continuation of her environment. Djebar's use of hypallage establishes a relation of
 contiguity between her character and the milieu she inhabits. Indeed Hajila becomes so
 absorbed in her daily duties that her very body starts to blend into her surroundings: Like
 the cup she breaks against the sink, her face is “en miettes” and her gestures “cassés.”

 Djebar employs another rhetorical figure of substitution—metonymy—to
 represent Hajila. As a result of her nervous breakdown, her “visage en miettes” becomes
 a “‘Face de la douleur.’”\textsuperscript{404} This is immediately followed by a portrait that provides the
 first visual description of her appearance: “Tu palpes tes traits, tes pommettes saillantes,

\textsuperscript{402} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 16.
\textsuperscript{403} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{404} \textit{Loc. cit.}
tes yeux enfoncés, ton front un peu bombé qui atténue ton regard—quel regard de quelle inconnue?”

Hajila’s face is broken down into a series of individual features that undermine its overall integrity, recalling what Isma had described one page earlier as a “visage en miettes.”

Metonymy has often been compared to, and sometimes confused with, hypallage. Both are figures of substitution, but while metonymy depends on the substitution of one thing by another one that is either part of it or closely associated with it, hypallage consists in replacing one thing with an unfamiliar or foreign one. As a result, they usually fulfill different, if not opposite, aesthetic functions: where metonymy figures, hypallage disfigures; where metonymy juxtaposes, hypallage destroys; where the former reveals, the latter negates.

This tension structures Ombre sultane’s scenes of unveiling. In one such scene, Hajila discards her haïk and realizes that she will be seen by strangers for the first time in her adult life—a prospect that fills her with a combination of dread and excitement. One day, she is approached in a square: “Quelqu'un que tu n'as pas vu venir s'est penché pour te parler. Un vieux ou un jeune, un étranger, tu ne sais: un effroi t'a saisie, tu n'as rien entendu! Tu as compris qu'une question t'était posée par ce visage aux yeux verdâtres. Une verrue avec un poil est posée au bout du sourcil de l'homme.”

This scene is ambiguous for it reads, on the one hand, as a failed face-to-face encounter. The unveiled

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405 Ibid., pp. 17-18.
woman struggles to identify her interlocutor's age but notices two distinctive traits, his
green eyes and a wart on his eyebrow, thus recalling Levinas’s famous claim: “C’est 
lorsque vous voyez un nez, des yeux un front, un menton, et que vous pouvez les décrire,
que vous tournez vers autrui comme vers un objet. La meilleure façon de rencontrer
autrui, c’est de ne pas même remarquer la couleur de ses yeux!” Yet the mere fact that
this man addresses and expects a response from Hajila underscores how the process of
unveiling affords her public visibility. The level of anonymity provided by her veil gives
way to exposure and vulnerability. She can be seen by strangers; her body has become a
target for the other’s gaze—giving her the novel and still uncomfortable sense of having a
face.

Unveiling oneself, here, does not merely attract gazes; it grants the right to see. As
Hajila gains confidence strolling around the streets of Algiers, she becomes an active
observer. By recasting the act of gazing in public as one that is not solely performed by
men, Hajila challenges patriarchal norms. Nancy Arenberg has seen in her an avatar of
the postcolonial flâneuse. Unlike the nineteenth-century Baudelairian flâneur, Djebar's
flâneuse is “constructed on a broader postmodern identification of the urban female
stroller which manifests itself in the twentieth century, a time when women were more
likely to explore public spaces.” Quoting Sarah Clement, Arenberg adds that Hajila's
transformation from submissive wife to independent stroller requires her to “change roles

408 Levinas 1982, op. cit., p. 79.
409 This exposure recalls the latin etymology of visage, from the past participle visus, which literally means
“that which is seen.” See Chapter one, p. 9.
410 Arenberg, op. cit., p. 356.
411 Loc. cit.
from the observed to the observer. In doing this she rejects certain gender roles and makes herself into the other.”\textsuperscript{412} As Hajila discards her veil, her sole preoccupation is to take in all the sights that the outdoors has to offer, to the point that her face is reduced to “un regard qui dévore.”\textsuperscript{413} Her exploration of the world takes the form of a symbolic rebirth, in which she sees through new eyes and emerges as a free woman: “Une fois dehors, l'après-midi, tu découvres d'autres façades, d'autres visages,”\textsuperscript{414} Isma explains. “Tandis que tu marches au hasard, hésitante, enfin les yeux libres, tu regardes.”\textsuperscript{415} Her “free eyes” function as a metonymy for her whole body. Once her haïk is removed, Hajila navigates the urban space in a state of heightened awareness, abandoning herself to the flow of light and sensations that pass through her: “Yeux ouverts, corps à la dérive.”\textsuperscript{416} Yet the euphoric rush of gazing is dismissed by her husband as a “distraction vorace.”\textsuperscript{417} Interestingly enough, his first reaction upon finding out that Hajila has been sneaking out of the apartment without her veil is a desire to blind her with a broken bottle, as if to revoke her privilege and re-inscribe her in a patriarchal economy where visual transgression is no longer possible.

Numerous women writers who traveled to the French Maghreb during colonization, or lived there—Hubertine Auclert, Isabelle Eberhardt, Raymonde Machard, Henriette Célarié, Marie Bugéja, etc.—provided very similar accounts of their “sisters.” The way Djebar reduces Hajila's face to a pair of scrutinizing eyes is perhaps best

\textsuperscript{412} Loc. cit.
\textsuperscript{413} Djebar 1987, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 83.
\textsuperscript{414} Ibid., p. 82.
\textsuperscript{415} Ibid., p. 99.
\textsuperscript{416} Ibid., p. 28.
\textsuperscript{417} Ibid., p. 95.
understood as an attempt to rewrite a topos of early twentieth-century travel literature: that of the veiled body. “Qu'avons-nous vu des femmes musulmanes? Un oeil,” Raymonde Machard wrote.⁴¹⁸ Her portrayal of “fantômes aux voix furibondes mais assourdies qui brillent de colère par un oeil”⁴¹⁹ echoes Marie Bugéja's description: “un paquet blanc déambule sous les voiles serrés. Un oeil, un petit bout d'œil, inquisiteur et curieux, nous lorgne.”⁴²⁰ Fascinated with this “voile [qui] s'écarte à peine sur un œil,”⁴²¹ Bugéja noted that “De nombreuses 'adéptes de Moïse' sortent voilées. Un oeil, seul, est visible, et si peu!”⁴²² Unsurprisingly, she also called them “gros ballots ou un petit trou, à la place d'un oeil, est le seul moyen d'y voir pour se conduire.”⁴²³ In Ombre sultane Djebbar re-defines this prying eye, once a vector of exotic fascination, into an organ of female empowerment that breaks the circuit of male gazing. It is no longer an eye seen by (white) women writers but one that sees and, in this very seeing, threatens male hegemony.

Djebbar's novel presents us with a tension. While unveiling gives the new sensation of having a face, it is one to which the reader is never completely granted access. Indeed, her face is caught up in two conflicting regimes of representation—metonymy and hypallage—which conceal as much as they reveal. This oscillation opens a liminal space for the inscription of female subjectivity while avoiding any risk of reification; it allows women to speak without requiring them to adopt a fixed subject position.

⁴¹⁹ Ibid., p. 78.
⁴²¹ Ibid., p. 55.
⁴²² Ibid., p. 129.
⁴²³ Ibid., p. 117.
Recalling that metonymy provides shape and visual cues, while hypallage distorts and undermines them, the latter is used to express how Hajila's face initially crumbles and is defaced through a form of domestic alienation, while the former is employed to describe her subsequent re-appropriation of her body and affirmation of her subjectivity, as she becomes both a subject and object of gaze—of representation—upon discarding her veil. However, this distinction is not as clear-cut as one might think. The use of metonymy often reduces Hajila's face to a collection of atomized parts, making it difficult to visualize what she looks like. It breaks down the whole of the face, turning it into a strange, unfamiliar object that the gaze cannot grasp or envisage in its entirety.

The alternating use of metonymy and hypallage preserves the enigma of Hajila's face, or in Isma's words, its “secret.”\footnote{Djebar 1987, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 164.} In one of the final scenes of the novel, the two women meet at a local hammam where Hajila receives a key to her own apartment, allowing her to circulate as she pleases. Many critics have described this hammam as a space of nurturing, a “lieu de renaissance”\footnote{Ibid., pp. 158-159.} reminiscent of a “maternal cocoon, an image reinforced by the continuous flow of water gently cleansing the nude bodies of the bathers.”\footnote{Arenberg, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 362.} It is also a space of solidarity where women can share their stories, take care of each other, and create bonds that transcend class differences; a space where “la fluidité de toute reconnaissance”\footnote{Djebar 1987, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 158.} prevails, thus allowing the poor and uneducated Hajila to see in the successful, learned Isma a powerful ally; a space where “ne plus dire 'tu,' ni
'moi'\textsuperscript{428} becomes the only possible form of relationship.

And indeed, as the two women meet, an instinctive connection is formed between them: “Dans cette pose de baigneuse un peu gauche,” Isma notes, “ton visage habité d'une hésitation enfantine, je perçois enfin ta grâce de femme; ton secret. (Et je me rappelle que, dans mon dialecte arabe, au-dessus de la beauté qu'on peut célébrer chez une femme, c'est le 'secret' qu'on loue, la trace insaisissable qu'il laisse transparaître sur une face.)”\textsuperscript{429} Hajila is desexualized; as a clumsy “baigneuse,” she departs from the canons of Orientalist figuration. Her body is not a vector of eroticism, but the locus of an ethical encounter. Her relationship with Isma reaches a new level when the latter is able to decipher the almost oxymoric “trace insaisissable” on her face. In the intimate space of the hammam, the two women stand together, bound by a spirit of complicity and solidarity that reappears in the final pages.

Overwhelmed by a pregnancy that she did not want after being raped by her husband, Hajila throws herself in front of a car in the hope of aborting. As she is lying on the ground, Isma remarks: “Moi, j'ai regardé ton visage pâle. J'ai vu le mien, que je n'avais jamais pu voir, à ce même instant où l'aile de la mort vous caresse, ou son sourire imperceptible semble vous dire 'pas maintenant, ce n'est point l'heure!' Mon visage que je n'ai pas trouvé.”\textsuperscript{430} While Isma is usually portrayed in the role of an auxiliary, this scene brings her relationship with Hajila to a new, more egalitarian level. As she contemplated Hajila’s face at the hammam, Isma noticed her secret grace (“je perçois enfin ta grace de

\textsuperscript{428} Ibid., p. 158.
\textsuperscript{429} Ibid., pp. 163-164.
\textsuperscript{430} Ibid., pp. 168-169.
femme; ton secret”) in this final scene, she also recognizes in it a reflection of her own subjectivity (“j'ai regardé ton visage pâle. J'ai vu le mien”). In other words, not only does Hajila's face show the impact of Isma's mentorship, it works as a mirror reflecting Isma's own continuing struggle for emancipation against systems of oppression. As Mortimer argues, “in the process of speaking for Hajila, Isma articulates her own story. As she recalls memories of her own struggle against social proscriptions that confine woman's body, restrict her physical presence in public space, and support the patriarch's refusal of any other masculine gaze, she now identifies with her traditional sister.”

The only other mirror scene of the novel occurs in the opening pages where Hajila, beaten down by her life of drudgery and abuse, fails to recognize her reflection: “tu te tapotes les joues; ton visage serait-il celui d'une autre?” Her sense of estrangement is reinforced by the use of second-person narration. Indeed, her body is seen through the eyes of Isma, who, at this point in the story, is still a complete stranger to her. The answer to her question (“ton visage serait-il celui d’une autre?”) is found in the final scene that we discussed, where Isma sees her own face in her co-wife’s.

Djebars novel is framed by two mirror scenes that emblematize Hajila’s trajectory from alienation to independence. She becomes empowered through her relationship with Isma who models an attitude of care and support. Her transformation into an emancipated woman is reflected in the physical resemblance that she symbolically shares with Isma at the end of the novel.

Djebars writing embraces the multiple, inchoate states of female embodiment

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432 Djebar 1987, op. cit., p. 15.
and, in so doing, allows for the play of identification and distanciation on which *Ombre sultane* is based. Hajila's face is embroiled in a regime of representation that alternates between metonymy and hypallage in order to account for the range of experiences her body goes through (alienation/liberation, solitude/togetherness, numbness/euphoria, etc.) while undermining claims for any *specific* notion of what it means to live as a woman. Djebar's feminism is one that encourages female solidarity, yet also questions whether “woman” is a meaningful position from which to speak. This tension is encapsulated by the way she portrays Hajila's relationship to her body in terms that simultaneously allow her to relate to Isma's plight and retain her individuality. To a larger extent, one could argue that Djebar's autobiographical novel provides a counterpoint to Sebbar's description of Garanger's portraits. Where Sebbar assumed all of Garanger's sitters to be defiant women, Djebar suggests that female subjectivity is not monolithic and should never be taken for granted. Her novel lays the basis for a poetics of the face that opens up a liminal space for oppressed women to articulate a broad range of lived experiences.

**Figuring (Out) French Citizenship: “Mariannes d'aujourd'hui”**

“Le niqab ou la burqa […] est un crime qui assassine la face”

—Abdelwahab Meddeb

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*Ombre sultane* was initially published to address the rise of fundamentalism in Algerian society, but by an ironic twist of fate the novel also came out at a time of growing concern over the veil and its relation to secularism in French society. Originally meant as a critique of Algerian Islamism, Djebar's novel became a spearhead of French secularism when in 1989 what came to be known as the first “headscarf affair” erupted. The story of Hajila met with critical acclaim among the supporters of *laïcité* and became part of a literary corpus that participated in the redefinition of the veil as a tool of female oppression fundamentally at odds with the values of French republicanism. In this last part, I focus on one last “dramaturgy” of unveiling, this time in France: the 2003 photographic exhibition “Mariannes d’aujourd’hui.” I show how the elevation of “facial nudity” to a Republican value relies on a discourse that simultaneously borrows from and re-works the tropes of racial/sexual difference at work in colonial representations of unveiled Muslims, including Garanger’s portraits.

The 2010 ban on face-covering was enforced after months of public discussions in which the main point of contention was not so much whether full-face veils should be forbidden in public spaces as which reasons could be invoked to do so legally. Secularism, which came up frequently in the debates that preceded France's criminalization of the veil, was not deemed a valid reason to prevent Muslim practitioners from wearing it. Indeed, secularism is by no means anti-religious; on the contrary, it guarantees freedom of thought and religion by making sure that the State does not get involved in religious affairs and conversely, that religious authorities do not meddle in political decision-making—a *status quo* defined by the 1905 law on the separation of
Church and State. In addition, the notion of secularism applies to the Republic and its institutions, but does not extend to French citizens. As legal expert Guy Carcassonne explains in a government report from January 2010:

La laïcité n'est pas un fondement imaginable: [...] La République peut se fixer des règles, procédant de la notion de neutralité, mais elle ne peut y soumettre les consciences. Sur le plan pratique, une loi d'interdiction fondée sur la laïcité ouvrirait une brèche: tous les signes extérieurs d'appartenance religieuse seraient prohibés, sauf à introduire des discriminations injustifiables.\footnote{Ibid.}

Equally surprising is the dismissal of women's rights advocacy as a justification for the ban given how full-face veils have been accused of hindering female dignity. The current Constitution does not make it possible to frame the wearing of a niqab or a burqa as a misogynist act. Indeed legal expert Bertrand Mathieu notes in the same report that “Au sens de 1946, la dignité associe égalité et liberté, et attribue le plus grand rôle au libre arbitre: chacun a le même libre arbitre, le même droit que son voisin de gouverner son propre corps et son comportement dans la cité.”\footnote{Ibid.} Dignity as it is conceived of within the framework of French law gives individuals the freedom to behave as they choose so long as they do not interfere with the freedom of others or cause them harm. Prohibiting full-face veils would therefore require proving that donning them constitutes a threat to social order.

This argument was ultimately the one lawmakers retained to justify the ban. According to Guy Carcassonne, one of the legacies of the 1789 French Revolution was to establish a social consensus or “code social”\footnote{Ibid.} comprised of implicit values, one of
which is to bare one's face as a sign of civility when addressing someone. In line with Carcassonne, philosopher Abdennour Bidar and public intellectual Abdelwahab Meddeb conjured up Levinas's thought on ethics to demonstrate that the other's face is first and foremost one that speaks to me and hiding it negates the demand for communication that the very nature of public space entails. According to them, the veil functions as a Machiavellian mask that creates duplicity, insincerity, and deprives the human of its infinite openness to others:

Le voilement du visage [...] dessaisit l’humain de la franchise qu’exigent aussi bien le politique que l’esthétique, l’éthique ou la métaphysique. C’est un masque qui annule le visage, qui l’abolit, nous cachant les intensités témoignant de l’altérité qu’Emmanuel Levinas a saisie et dont nous recueillons les précoces rudiments chez de nombreux penseurs de la millénaire tradition islamique, qui ont médité le franc face-à-face entre eux et leur Seigneur éprouvant leur singularité dans l’essoeulemment du retrait.437

Coming to the conclusion that the full-face veil constitutes a refusal to engage with others or to acknowledge their existence, as well as a blatant form of rejection and withdrawal that contradicts the oldest Islamic tradition, it was decided that the wearing of *nigabs* and *burqas* constituted a violation of the implicit “social code” to which Carcassonne referred. Banning them became a crucial step in the promotion of a Republican “vivre-ensemble” (living-together) that ensured national cohesion in the face of “communautarisme.”438

Yet, this ban ushers in a number of tensions and contradictions. Section four addresses situations in which face-covering is forced and as such “le fait pour toute

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personne d'imposer à une ou plusieurs autres personnes de dissimuler leur visage par menace, violence, contrainte, abus d'autorité ou abus de pouvoir, en raison de leur sexe, est puni d'un an d'emprisonnement et de 30 000 € d'amende. Sanctions increase when minors are targeted and can reach up to two years' imprisonment and a 60,000 euro fine. While this section, like the six others that make up the law, is couched in vague rhetoric, it constitutes a clear indictment of Islamic full-face veils. Overall the ban produces a narrative that insists on the government's "mission" to save Muslim women from the oppression that binds them to don full-face veils. Yet, according to Section One of the ban, they can also be fined for covering their faces. One might, therefore, wonder: what to make of a law thatcriminalizes the very individuals it also defines as victims? Why punish veiled Muslims when public discourse has kept defining them as helpless, docile, and vulnerable?

The 2010 ban re-cast the female body as a site where the limits of French law are interrogated, and conversely, it re-defined French law as a site for questioning the boundaries of female corporeality. Its goal is to make explicit a tacit value of French Republicanism: "facial nudity" and the notion of sociality that it entails. First, legislating on the *niqab* and the *burqa* reintroduces specific moral and cultural values into the canon of French law, thus betraying its primary mission to promote universal rights. Second, to what extent does the ban constitute an attempt to clarify unstated values, like "facial nudity," as opposed to creating them? The line between the two is a tenuous one and the

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extremely vague, roundabout language in which the law was drafted does little to
dissipate this ambiguity. To the point where one can legitimately wonder: does the
conflation of “facial nudity” with Republican civility not serve as an ideological cover to
pursue a veiled anti-Islamic agenda?

Even more problematic is the way Levinas was used to provide a theoretical
justification for the ban. Some like Abdennour Bidar and Abdelwahab Meddeb saw in the
Islamic veil a threat that undermines the experience of face-to-face interaction, so central
to France’s conception of sociality in public—and therefore secular—spaces. Yet “Dans
l'accès au visage,” Levinas argued, “il y a certainement aussi un accès à l'idée de
Dieu.” According to him, the idea of God is revealed as a trace through the face of the
human other, calling me to responsibility. This experience brings me in contact with a
transcendent form of alterity, one that I cannot fully apprehend and to which I can only
surrender. It puts me under a moral necessity, an obligation to take care of it. Quoting
Levinas to argue in favor of the 2010 ban is somewhat surprising. His work on ethics and
communication relies heavily on scriptural references, and has often been described as a
call for a biblical theology. Using a thinker whose whole oeuvre is rooted in Judeo-
Christian morality to justify a law that promotes secular “vivre-ensemble” and equality of
all citizens, whatever their religion, highlights the contradictions of French
Republicanism.

The 2010 ban also interrogates the perception of the female body. While this ban
was among the first to define and problematize the concept of “public space,” it also

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introduced a notion that has largely been ignored by commentators: facial recognizability. Section one of the law states that “nul ne peut, dans l'espace public, porter une tenue destinée à dissimuler son visage.”

In a subsequent circular dated March 2nd, 2011, this section was developed: “Les tenues destinées à dissimuler le visage sont celles qui rendent impossible l'identification de la personne. Il n'est pas nécessaire, à cet effet, que le visage soit intégralement dissimulé.” This clarification might come as a surprise given the way debates have systematically targeted full-face veils. It is not necessary that one's face be completely hidden to fall under the law so long as it cannot be identified. Thus, the issue at stake is to determine when a face can be recognized and when it cannot. At what point does it become discernible? Past what threshold? Recognizability depends for the most part on the degree of familiarity that binds me to someone. Even when partially concealed, a face might be recognized by close relatives but not by distant ones, let alone complete strangers. In addition, it is not required that one's face be hidden to be unidentifiable. I might, for example, fail to recognize a close friend from a distance or even up close because they are wearing sunglasses, hats, or make-up. As it turns out, unveiling does not necessarily make one's body less opaque.

This discussion of the 2010 ban is crucial to fully understand the stakes of the 2003 photographic exhibition “Mariannes d’aujourd’hui”—an exhibition that anticipated recent concerns with deciphering the opaque, menacing body of veiled Muslims, and re-

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inscribing it within the visual economy of French Republicanism. Inaugurated by Jean-Louis Debré, then right-wing president of the Assembly, on July 14th, “Mariannes d’aujourd’hui” marked the culmination of a five-week march—“la marche des femmes des quartiers contre les ghettos et pour l’égalité”—across hexagonal France to protest the conditions to which women of immigrant-origin were subjected in the banlieues following the murder of Sohane Benziane, a young woman who was burned alive in Vitry-sur-Seine. Hanging in somewhat grandiloquent fashion over the facade of the Palais Bourbon, fourteen color photographs of young women who participated in the march were displayed to the general public. Each one of them is proudly wearing symbols of the French Republic: a Phrygian cap or Marianne's emblematic cocarde. One is even holding a rooster.

The exhibition opened at a time when the national debate on headscarves in public schools resurfaced. Participants in the march, under the guidance of the newly created feminist organization “Ni Putes Ni Soumises,” took advantage of the momentum to advocate for a ban—a solution that its founder Fadela Amara had already suggested in her autobiography the same year. In covering a key site of French political life with large portraits of unveiled “immigrant-origin” women posing as Mariannes, the government sought to reconquer the “banlieues,” stigmatized by mainstream media as no-go zones where women are set on fire when they are not forced to don the veil. Saving these “lost territories of the Republic” meant liberating the women who lived there by showing them what they were to gain if they embraced the secular values that make up

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French citizenship. It is this transformative, paternalistic logic that “Mariannes d’aujourd’hui” celebrates.

The fourteen portraits deploy a visual rhetoric that transfigures the “femmes des quartiers” into icons of the good Republican. What does this rhetoric owe to the tradition of colonial picture-making to which Garanger’s work belongs? The “Mariannes d’aujourd’hui” exhibition performs a third type of “dramaturgy,” in which the concept of “facial nudity,” long a mantra of colonial progress, is reworked into a symbol of Republican integration. Using Ariella Azoulay’s concept of “the citizenry of photography” and her assumption that photography cannot achieve semantic authority due to its multivalent nature, I propose to view “Mariannes d’aujourd’hui” as the opposite of what it claims to be, namely a celebration of the impaired citizenship of “immigrant-origin” women and, by extension, that of all French individuals.

The exhibition is an exercise in clarification. The photographed women assume an exemplary posture that is meant to be emulated by all. As such, it anticipates the 2010 ban—and its famous slogan that “the Republic must be lived with an open face”—in its attempt to make “facial nudity” explicit as a Republican value. Each photograph is a close-up portrait of a young woman who is either facing the camera directly, in a three-quarter profile or profile position. On the bottom is a caption in which the sitter shares

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445 Ibid.


447 “La République Se Vit à Visage Découvert,” op. cit.
her vision of the modern “Marianne.” According to Samira, “c'est une insoumise ouvrant le chemin,” while for Sihem she expresses “l'alliance du courage, de l'énergie et de la volonté.”

Dressed in “cocardes,” caps, and clothes in the colors of the French flag, each of these fourteen women appears as a modern allegory of the nation; they are the new faces of French Republicanism.

The emancipatory discourse that surrounds “Mariannes d'aujourd'hui” shares a number of commonalities with Garanger's description of his experience in Algeria. To be sure, some differences distinguish his 1960 collection from the 2003 exhibition, starting with the general context in which the women were photographed. Yet in both cases, the photographic act was framed by a similar politics of unveiling in which baring one's face represents a symbolic gesture through which “emancipation” is effected and allegiance to the French Republic declared. While Garanger's photographs were originally intended as ID pictures, the “Mariannes d'aujourd'hui” portraits are not. However, they model what exemplary Frenchness ought to look like. In other words, Garanger's photographs are merely indexical or descriptive—they record facial features for the purpose of identification—whereas the “Mariannes d'aujourd'hui” portraits are prescriptive; they mobilize a visual discourse that marks the “Arab” or the “black” female body as Republican and, in the process, sets up the norms of what viable citizenship looks like. As such, the 2003 exhibition fulfils a clear pedagogical purpose. It teaches us how to become perfect subjects of the nation: “Français, encore un effort si vous voulez être

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448 “Mariannes D'aujourd'hui,’ hommage des femmes des cités à la République,” *op. cit.*
The type of unveiling that “Mariannes d'aujourd'hui” portrays is nothing short of spectacular. The exhibition is a dramatic mise-en-scène of the symbols that conventionally define Frenchness, from the day and location chosen for the opening (July, 14th at the French assembly), to the number of portraits (fourteen), the props (Phrygian caps, “cocardes,” rooster), and the dominant colors (blue, white, and red). As mentioned, each portrait is accompanied by a small caption that lists the sitter’s name, her age and place of residence, thus offering an alternative take on Garanger’s ID pictures. The implicit message is one that the 2010 ban took up years later: we know who these women are because we can see their faces. In other words, wearing a veil prevents easy identification in a way that Republican attire does not. This discourse of transparency frames “Mariannes d'aujourd'hui” as a postcolonial parade in which “immigrant-origin” women are ostensibly emancipated by state secularism.

Unlike veiled Muslims who have often been described as oppressed and voiceless, the “Mariannes d'aujourd'hui” speak. Under each portrait, a caption allows them to explain who they think the modern “Marianne” is. According to Gladys from Montreuil, she is “rassurante et douce,” and not “dans le rapport de force” (fig. 10), while Alice believes her to be “une mère protectrice tournée vers l'avenir.” Linda describes her as “Une femme de coeur qui regarde l'autre avec un a priori positif et chaleureux.”

“Marianne”’s characterization as a caring, pleasant, welcoming, and protective mother

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450 “‘Mariannes D'aujourd'hui,’ hommage des femmes des cités à la République,” op. cit.
underscores the paradox of women’s integration in France. This series of adjectives
deploys an understanding of womanhood inspired by a corpus of representations in which
France is traditionally personified as the “mère-patrie.” This understanding draws upon
and reinforces a socio-cultural order in which gender differences are considered natural.
Paradoxically enough, the “Mariannes d’aujourd’hui” must abide by the very clichés of
femininity that encourage gender discrimination in order to become emancipated women
in the eyes of the Republic. Becoming an exemplary citizen imposes on the female body
a set of hetero-normative demands that historian Joan Scott subsumed under the
neologism “sexularism.”451 While “facial nudity” has been introduced as a cornerstone of
female liberation and empowerment, it creates a form of embodiment that reproduces
gender discrimination—a phenomenon that women's unveiling was paradoxically meant
to prevent in the first place.

“Mariannes d'aujourd'hui” shows how ordinary “femmes des cités” can become
exemplary Republicans by saturating our visual field. However, this hyperbolic regime of
representation is highly problematic. The way each of the sitters is made to perform her
Frenchness is almost too conspicuous and theatrical to be taken seriously at all. In
attending to this parodic dimension, I will examine how each portrait can be framed as
the opposite of what it claims to be. Indeed, the act of claiming Republican citizenship in
such bombastic fashion is highly suspicious and counter-productive as it suggests that
this was not self-evident in the first place. If the sitters’ Frenchness were so obvious, no
one would feel the need to flaunt it the way the exhibition does. Unlike the official

characterization of the exhibition as a celebration of Republican integration, I propose to view “Mariannes d’aujourd’hui” as a dismissal of these women’s status as full-fledged citizens of the Republic.

In her essay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, Ariella Azoulay suggests a new approach to examining photography, one that elaborates on Sontag's theorization of the medium in the way it rehabilitates the gaze of the photographed subject, which is completely absent from an essay like *Regarding the Pain of Others*. Azoulay's is an attempt to move beyond the “psychological framework of empathy” that informs Sontag's reflection by viewing photography through the lens of civic duty. Every photograph opens up a space of political relations in which none of its participants—photographers, photographed subjects, and spectators—can claim ownership or monopoly of what it shows. In other words, the photograph is a locus of unpredictability where meaning of what appears is constantly negotiated because it can never be entirely imposed by any of the participants. Photographs leave “involuntary traces,” they are “products of the multiplicity of elements that enter into the frame, whether in keeping with the photographer's intentions, or despite these intentions, or unrelated to them.” From this ensues the impossibility to establish and impose a single meaning of photography.

As such, photography provides the model for a political community in which egalitarian partnership and solidarity lay the basis for a civil contract of photography. This contract assumes that “the governed possess a certain power to suspend the gesture

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452 Azoulay, *op. cit.*, p. 88.
of the sovereign power seeking to totally dominate the relations between us, dividing us as governed into citizens and non-citizens thus making disappear the violation of our citizenship. Because photography does not privilege one actor over another, it creates a platform through which civilian grievances can be heard and acknowledged, and a new form of citizenship—open, borderless, non-discriminatory, not limited to national status, and non-mediated by the ruling power of the State—can be enacted.

Since it partakes in “the right to enact photography free of governmental power and even against it,” critical commentary appears as a direct means to participate in the civil contract of photography. By adding my own voice to the relatively small cohort of critics who have discussed “Mariannes d'aujourd'hui,” I am positioning myself as a member in the “citizenry of photography” that Azoulay's contract enables. All the more so that my discussion of the exhibit as a parodic re-telling of Frenchness challenges the way “the sovereign power”—French authorities—has celebrated “Mariannes”’s portraits as emblematic of “la force et la pérennité de la devise de la République: 'Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité.’” In underscoring the gap between the stated aims of “Mariannes d'aujourd'hui” and what seems to actually be happening in the encounter between photographer, photographed and camera, I momentarily assume the role of what Azoulay calls “the ethical spectator.” This role requires not to take for granted photography's classic definition as a referential representation of what “was there”, “a closed unit of

454 Ibid., p. 23.
455 Ibid., p. 105.
456 Debré, op. cit.
457 Azoulay, op. cit., p. 133.
visual information,” but to assume that what appears in the photograph may also not be immediately manifest. Framing the exhibition in terms of how it speaks to the citizenship of those it portrays allows to see how each of the fourteen portraits inflicts an “injury” on these women, that is, how they hint at their status as flawed subjects and, by the same token, ours. As Azoulay contends, “being governed along with and beside individuals who are not citizens causes damage to the seemingly whole, unimpaired citizenship of the citizens who are recognized as such.”

Azoulay’s contention that photography is not a mere index of reality but the product of an intersubjective encounter between photographer, photographed subject, camera, and spectator makes it possible to requalify the exhibition as a parodic mise-en-scène of French Republicanism. The French model of citizenship is predicated on the idea that individuals cannot live free and equal lives unless they bracket off their racial, ethnic, and gender differences. In order to become full-fledged citizens of the Republic, they must overlook their particularisms and disregard their lived experiences. Yet, some of the fourteen Mariannes were never given the opportunity to do so. After the opening of the exhibition in July 2003, media coverage consensually described them as representatives of a black-blanc-beur France all the while insisting on their status as “filles des cités.” This persistent racialization, while already problematic in itself, becomes even more so when one realizes that it occurred at the same time as they were celebrated as abstract citizens of the nation. This points to a conundrum of Republican integration for immigrant-origin populations, torn between particular and universal

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458 Ibid., p. 168.
modes of identification. Despite their efforts to comply with the demands of Republican
citizenship, the “Mariannes d’aujourd’hui” are systematically reduced to their
racial/ethnic background, as if it were a non-erasable difference. They must integrate, yet
they are never completely allowed to do so.

All things considered, the visual rhetoric of “Mariannes d’aujourd’hui” is not so
much hyperbolic as paraleptic. While each portrait can be seen as an exaggerated
performance of Frenchness, they can also be read as a proclamation of the sitters’
impaired citizenship. From the ancient Greek para-, “beside,” and leipein, “to leave,”
paralepsis is the rhetorical strategy of bringing up or emphasizing a point by seeming to
pass over it or take no notice of it. One of the most famous examples of paralepsis can be
found in the first book of Notre-Dame de Paris, where Victor Hugo describes Quasimodo
as follows: “Nous n’essaierons pas de donner au lecteur une idée de ce nez tétraèdre, de
cette bouche en fer à cheval, de ce petit œil gauche obstrué, d’un sourcil roux en
broussailles, tandis que l’œil droit disparaissait entièrement sous une énorme verrue...”

This list of facial features and adjectives give a vivid description of Quasimodo’s
appearance, bringing the reader’s attention to every detail of his physiognomy, and
therefore defeating the original purpose of the sentence which was to spare us the sight of
his face.

“Mariannes d’aujourd’hui” operates on a similar logic. Portraying the sitters’
transformation into exemplary Republicans requires the knowledge of what has been
changed; otherwise one would be hard-pressed to grasp the full scope of their

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transformation. Paradoxically enough, representing this transformation means showing remnants of what has been erased—remnants which should not be there to begin with had the transformation been successful. In other words, the process of erasing particularisms must leave a trace in order to prove that it did occur, and to suggest that the transformation was successful. According to Fernando, “the universal citizenship that [the Mariannes d'aujourd'hui] represent depends on the concurrent production, erasure, and reproduction of commensurable forms of difference, since it is precisely the existence of such a difference that makes its erasure meaningful.”461 From this, she concludes that the “Mariannes d'aujourd'hui” are both “full of promise but also of menace”462 because the reproduction of their Muslim immigrant/racial difference and the impossibility to erase it reveals the contingent nature of France's Republican model and its claim to universality. By showing the traces of what successful integration is supposed to erase, yet by passing over them, the exhibition paradoxically draws attention to their presence and suggests that full integration can never be achieved. In other words, downplaying the importance of such traces only highlights their irreducibility and, by extension, the impossibility of embodying the ideal citizenship that each woman is meant to exemplify.

Conclusion

2016 witnessed a number of controversies that revived previous debates on the veil not just in France but across Europe. In January of that year, Italian fashion house Dolce and Gabbana launched its “Abaya Collection,” a line of hijabs and loose over-

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461 Fernando, op. cit., p. 217.
462 Ibid., p. 218.
garments that contributed to the popularization of Islamic fashion. Reactions were mixed and many, like Pierre Bergé, resented the collusion of the fashion industry with “cette dictature qui impose cette chose abominable qui fait qu'on cache les femmes, qu'on leur fait vivre une vie dissimulée.” Similar reactions were observed seven months later, in August, in support of a decree issued by the Mayor of Nice to ban the wearing of burkinis. That same year, French Prime Minister Manuel Valls suggested creating a law that would extend the 2004 ban on Islamic veils in public primary and secondary schools to public universities—yet another political strategy to stop the rise of Islamism in the wake of the 2015 Paris terror attacks and after the Senate failed to agree on a bill that would strip French citizenship from convicted terrorists. These recent controversies underscore the existence of a collective fixation on the veil that France's repressive legislation has failed to dissipate. They also continue to highlight France’s inability to address its colonial heritage as well as the flaws inherent in its model of integration.

As this chapter underscored, the veil has been instrumentalized to bolster the construction of a multifaceted other, both threatening and vulnerable—the veiled Muslim—and implement a “politics of facial nudity” to neutralize her presence in public spaces. This politics imposes a normative visibility and seeks to do away with the threat of facelessness embodied by veiled women. Unveiling the Muslim woman has been described as a liberation ritual, a spectacular transition from the “république des cousins”

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to the “république des citoyens,” or as Nassim Aboudrar has claimed, a “dramaturgie” that mobilizes a variety of visual discourses, from Sebbar’s description of Algerian women as symbols of resistance to Djebar’s use of metonymy and hypallage to portray Hajila’s face, and “Mariannes d’aujourd’hui”’s rhetoric of hyperbole/paralepsis. Diverse in its scope and register, this corpus highlights the role of French authorities in assuming the production and regulation of acceptable forms of Muslim subjectivity/corporeality. The 2010 ban was the result of a slow process to unveil Muslim women that started in colonial Algeria where baring one’s face in public became a symbol of civilization and progress. Focusing on the history of this process allowed me to highlight the tensions and contradictions at work in France’s recent promotion of “facial nudity.”

While “face” is commonly understood as an individual body part that reflects one’s subjectivity, feelings, and thoughts, this chapter showed that it is above all a product of governing practices. “Facial nudity” is not a kind of “zeroness” of perception; it is not the precondition for perception to take place, but its overturning. Treatments of the veil debate since 1958 show that having a face is not a universal given, but a politically coded mode of embodiment meant to make women’s bodies legible. Indeed the regime of visibility that has informed France’s socio-cultural practices is one that celebrates transparency, clarity, and the omnipotence of gazing. In this scopic regime, the “open face” is semiotically marked as a staple of laïcité, Republicanism, and viable citizenship. The series of laws and bans to regulate the wearing of face veils is part of a politics to establish the face as a known and governed space. Ultimately, this politics does

not just problematize how the female Muslim body is or should be seen in public spaces; it also draws attention to the inherent contradictions of French Republicanism and its claim to universalism.

CONCLUSION

This study took as its starting point the ubiquitous presence of faces in Francophone literature and visual culture, and as its guiding thread an analysis of the discursive frameworks through which these faces have appeared, or rather, through which they have been made visible. The idea of pure, untainted perception is a naïve one, for the
human gaze is always embedded in experience, mediated by a range of social and cultural “screens.” In chapter one, I showed that one such screen, and arguably the most influential one when it comes to facial perception, was physiognomy. Lavater intended the discipline as a promotion of knowledge and love of mankind, but the rise of the second French colonial empire and progress in physical anthropology transformed it into just the opposite: a tool for classifying racial types on a scale of differential worth.

Nineteenth-century physiognomy played such a major role in the intellectual debate on race that subsequent discourses on the face mainly focused on endorsing or rejecting its claims. It is in the latter that Levinas engaged. His essay *Totalité et Infini* provides an alternative model for thinking about the face—one that dismisses racialization and, by extension, any form of portraiture as an act of caricature, if not disfigurement. As a living presence that encapsulates the idea of infinity, the face cannot be reduced to its perceivable traits, its phenomenality. While it has become common to frame Levinas’s abstract metaphorization of the face as a direct critique of physiognomy, I argued that the drive to scientize physiognomy was also characterized by a tendency to treat the face as a decontextualized entity, theorized apart from its lived experience, from its “flesh.” In this way, I produced a reading of Levinas that does not frame his thought as a refuge against physiognomy but as its unsuspected ally.

Chapters two, three, and four examined the various ways in which Francophone authors and artists have positioned themselves within this legacy and complicated the seeming—but not inherent—opposition between physiognomic discourse and Levinas’s ethical response to it. I examined the way these francophone authors have “looked back” at the controlling, alienating images they inspired in the West, with the goal of re-
constructing humanity and reenchanting the face. Is there a way to represent faces that acknowledges their embodied finitude without reducing them to it?

Throughout this dissertation, we looked at popular ads and caricatures, and like Sebbar’s Shérazade, we leafed through Garanger’s photographs. We made our way to Rwanda where we noticed, beyond calls for national unity, the lingering presence of ethnic divisions. We strolled through the Camp Saint-Maur in Vincennes before making our way to the National Assembly where larger than life portraits of “Mariannes” greeted us. Finally, we visited the Martinican countryside and strolled through the streets of Algiers. Over the course of these peregrinations, we encountered Tutsis, *chabins*, and unveiled Muslims. We looked at them and we listened to their stories.

In the works of Mukagasana and Diop, the face is described as a site of opacity that straddles the racial divide between Hutu and Tutsi, thus shattering the physiognomic grids created by European explorers and re-appropriated by Hutu propaganda. Djebar adopts a similar posture to describe the unveiled Muslim. Her alternate use of hypallage and metonymy preserves the enigmatic aura of the face and prevents its reification into a political symbol of emancipation. By contrast, Révérien Rurangwa sought to make it legible after it was disfigured by his Hutu neighbor. His testimony is best understood as a text about his face that tells us how to read his face as a text. The scars inscribed in his flesh provide a metafictional analogy and a justification for the act of writing. Ultimately, I showed how describing the details of his appearance becomes a way to bear witness to the violence of genocide. The same metafictional musings are found in Confiant’s works. Like Rurangwa, he is concerned with trying to make sense of the face—in his case, the *chabin*’s face whose peculiar combination of black and white features has been a source
of confusion. I read Ravines du devant-jour, Eau de café, and Le Cahier de romances as dermographies or attempts to rewrite and rehabilitate the chabin’s white skin, traditionally perceived as a sign of his evil nature—a process that made possible Confiant’s emergence as a chabin writer.

Despite their variety, these tactics and strategies have in common to complicate the decontextualized environment in which most discussions of the face tend to take place. Mukagasana, Diop, and Djebar disrupt the language of physiognomy by turning the face into a locus of hermeneutic instability—one might say, to quote Deleuze and Guattari, by “deterritorializing” it. On the contrary, Confiant, Rurangwa, and the “Marianes d’aujourd’hui” exhibition establish a new system of physiognomic equivalences. While Confiant celebrates the chabin’s face as an emblem of Caribbean hybridity, Rurangwa invites his reader to see in his disfigured appearance a symbol of Tutsi resilience, and “Marianes d’aujourd’hui” portrays unveiled Muslims as examples of perfect Republicans. In doing so, all argue against Levinas that the act of representation can be a redemptive practice.

One might see in the web of Western discourses on the face and in the range of Afro-Caribbean responses to them a Manichaean opposition. This is not entirely true. While physiognomy played a major role in the construction of race and racism as scientific categories, it was never inherently racist. Second, racist physiognomy, while it originated in Europe, was not an exclusively Western prerogative. As Chapter two and three underscored, its discourses and methods were taken up by Hutu extremists to legitimize the Tutsi genocide and by Martinicans to discriminate against chabins. But more importantly, attempts to undermine physiognomy come with their own share of
challenges. For example, Chapter three showed how Max Élisée’s novel underscores the paradox inherent in Conflant’s rehabilitation of the chabin. Praising his métissage as a Caribbean by-product reified his subjectivity the same way physiognomic discourse did when portraying him as angry and untrustworthy. Similarly, Chapter four laid out some of the contradictions that emerged from Sebbar’s reading of Garanger’s Femmes Algériennes 1960. In describing unveiled women as figures of resistance, she trapped them into a restricted mode of being—a posture they precisely sought to avoid. Ironically, these authors engaged in the same practice of physiognomic typification that they set out to subvert in the first place.

Their “failures” have us wonder: was Levinas right after all? Are faces inherently ungraspable? Are they meant to escape the representational realm? Or can they truly be portrayed in a way that acknowledges their radiating openness? In a way that does not shape them into frozen, lifeless images, but that embraces them as panim? A way that can account for their plasticity without reducing them to it? This dissertation has suggested two answers to these questions. Description, or descriptive writing, has been commonly defined as “the depiction of objects or people in stasis” (whereas narration is “the depiction of objects and people in movement.”) As such, it is concerned with the representation of fixed forms; it suspends time. Yet, when we use words to depict a face, we organize them in a sequential order. First comes a description of the hair, then the forehead, possibly followed by a comment on the eyes, the nose and the chin. Because language is linear, every written portrait necessarily breaks down the face into its

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different parts. One solution has been to find in this process of “metonymization” a source of empowerment. Confiant and Rurangwa’s detailed self-portraits are perfect illustrations. Another solution has been to deploy rhetorical strategies that partially interrupt this process. For example, Assia Djebar’s description of the unveiled face, while still relying on metonymy, also involves the use of hypallage as a counterbalancing device. The combination of the two opens up a liminal space in which the unveiled face can be glimpsed at without being petrifying into an atomized mess.

This research does not claim to be exhaustive or definitive. My hope is that it will open new avenues of inquiry. Indeed, other faces would deserve just as much “scrutiny.” For example, more needs to be said about the use of blackface. Many studies have been conducted on the subject in American film, but surprisingly enough, none in French cinema. Yet movies that feature white actors in the role of black characters are numerous. Among them are Arletty in Les Perles de la couronne (1937), Fernandel in Monsieur Hector (1940), Pierre Brasseur in Les Enfants du paradis (1945), and more recently, Valérie Lemercier in Agathe Cléry (2008). A comparative study of the ways in which blackface movies have been received in both countries would be interesting. For example, how has the Republican ideology of color-blindedness informed viewers’ experience of and response to these films in a way that the U.S. model of the “melting pot” has not? Likewise, the use of digital blackface in reaction GIFs has recently given rise to passionate debates about the use of racial images to perform the emotional labor of

white social media users or simply to entertain them.\textsuperscript{468} Also worthy of consideration is the issue of “délit de faciès.” The reason physiognomy gained so much currency in the nineteenth century was its capacity to adapt to a variety of uses and contexts. With this in mind, could we not see in modern techniques of profiling the latest avatar of physiognomic practice? Or, on the contrary, did the discredit into which physiognomy fell at the close of the nineteenth century not cause the means of bodily control and authentification to shift from the face to other parts, like fingerprints? In other words, have faces become obsolete?

A series of recent controversies seem to testify to the opposite. In October 2016, the U.S. equivalent of an Amber Alert was issued in France after four-month-old Djenah was abducted by her father, Steeve Beni Y. Saad, who was described as an “individu de race noire.”\textsuperscript{469} Above the description was a picture of him and his daughter. In a tweet following the incident, the spokesperson for the Ministry of Justice tried to defuse the situation by blaming what he described as a poor choice of words on the necessity to act quickly. This controversy took place a few months after the French government was condemned by the regional court of Paris for racial profiling. In March 2016, Mediapart published an official memo in which the state judicial officer justified “contrôles au faciès” on the ground that Blacks and Arabs are more likely to be foreigners and therefore undocumented.\textsuperscript{470}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{468} See, for example, Jackson, Lauren Michele. “We Need to Talk About Digital Blackface in Reaction GIFs.” \textit{Teen Vogue}, 2 Aug. 2017, http://www.teenvogue.com/story/digital-blackface-reaction-gifs
Algeria in May 2017, several parties, such as the “Parti de l’équité de la proclamation,” the “Front des forces socialistes,” and the “Parti algérien vert pour le développement” put up campaign posters in which female candidates appeared faceless, unlike their male counterparts. Some parties apologized in the wake of the incident, but others like the “Parti de l’équité de la proclamation” justified this erasure as an attempt to preserve the stability of these women’s families.

While seemingly different, these controversies suggest the enduring force of physiognomy as a technology of state surveillance and marginalization. The perpetuation of a physiognomic mentality more than a century after its methods were dismissed seems quite surprising, unless we forget that the disappearance of the discipline did not necessarily entail the end of the facial imaginaries that underpinned its practice. These controversies also encapsulate, each in its own way, the overarching issues that this dissertation has sought to unpack: the modalities through which racial and gender differences are assigned and inscribed on the face, the construction and dissemination of “black” or “brown” images as stock visuals and their role in redefining the boundaries of human subjectivity, and more generally, the conditions under which faces become (in)visible and (il)legible. This question of readability gestures toward the face not just as a literary or visual trope but as a heuristic device to encourage investigation and questioning of francophone literature and visual culture. By appearing, as I have showed throughout these pages, as self-conscious sites of rewriting, refashioning, and re-creation,

sites that endlessly problematize their own deciphering, faces compel us to interrogate, in meta-critical fashion, our own practices and assumptions as literary critics—as “decipherers” of literature.

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